

**THE 33RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF
THE SOCIETY FOR CRYPTO-JUDAIC STUDIES
EL-PASO, TX AUGUST 13-15, 2023**

Conference Program, Abstracts and Brief Bios

This document is available at <https://cryptojews.com/2023Abstracts/> *Abstracts start page 7.*



PRECONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

SATURDAY, AUGUST 12, 2023

**“A MINYAN TO A MILLION” THE WORK OF ARTIST PETER SVARZBEIN AND
THE STORY OF THE RETURNING ANUSIM**

El Paso Museum of History, 510 N. Santa Fe Street, El Paso.

Wednesday through Saturday 10 AM- 6 PM, Closed Sunday. *Free of charge*

Early conference check-in for badges and info available at Paso del Norte Hotel Saturday afternoon, Aug. 12.

DOUBLE-FEATURE FILM FEST

Temple Mount Sinai, 4408 N. Stanton Street, El Paso

Light Refreshments available, compliments of Temple Sinai Synagogue. \$20.

Transportation on your own; Conference may attempt to facilitate shared rides from Paso del Norte Hotel starting 6:15.

- 6:30 PM *For those who wish to participate: Rabbi Leon leads Havdalah and chanting the Prayer for the State of Israel.*
- 7:00 PM **Remember My Soul**, Jillian Glantz (2019)
- 8:50 **A Long Journey: The Hidden Jews of the Southwest**, Isaac Artenstein (2020)

SUNDAY, AUGUST 13

Registration and check-in at Paso del Norte Hotel 9 AM-2 PM Vendor Tables Open at Noon at the Convention Center.

8:00 AM-12:30 PM GUIDED BUS TOUR

Camino Real Mission Trail with lunch included at Los Portales Museum in San Elizario.

\$45 registration fee. Please register by August 10. Meet in the lobby of Paso Del Norte Hotel at 7:30. Bus leaves from Santa Fe St., next to the Convention Center.

1:00-2:45 GENEALOGY WORKSHOP (El Paso Room, Convention Center)

Included in full conference registrations, otherwise \$55.

Convener and Chair, Corinne Brown and Isaac Amon

Arturo Cuellar discusses records in Mexico, showing workshop participants how to access these vital records to trace their ancestors with a focus in migration patterns.

Genie Milgrom examines the meeting of technology and the digitization of archival Inquisition records as well as other unusual archives making crypto-Jewish research more accessible.

**THE 33RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF
THE SOCIETY FOR CRYPTO-JUDAIC STUDIES**

**EL PASO CONVENTION CENTER
1 Civic, C Street, El Paso TX
Sunday-Tuesday, August 13-15, 2023**

SUNDAY, AUGUST 13

Vendor Tables open at Noon. Registration continues at Convention Center 2:45 PM

WELCOME AND ALL PANELS: EL PASO ROOM. MEALS: JUAREZ ROOM

3:00-3:15 PM **WELCOME AND CONFERENCE OPENING**

**Blanca Carrasco, Rosa Marina Siegel, Welcome
Isaac Amon, Emcee**

3:30-5:00 **PANEL 1: THE EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE**

Chair: Shai Zamir

Abraham Gross, A Spotlight on the 1720s Persecution of Crypto-Judaism in Spain

Yda Schreuder, Portuguese and Amsterdam's Sephardic Merchants and the Tobacco Trade

Carla Sciaky, Discovering and Tracing the Sephardic Roots of Jewish Baroque Composers

5:15-6:15 **COCKTAIL RECEPTION AND MARIACHI FIESTA** (*Entry Foyer*)

Mariachi Los Pasajeros and Ballet Folklorico Orgullo de Mi Tierra de Elena Vargas

6:15-6:45 break before dinner

6:15 PM Minyan for those who wish to attend (El Paso Room)

*Note: One of our members is saying Kaddish (the memorial prayer) tonight and tomorrow in memory of a parent. We have facilitated arrangements for the required minyan and asked several individuals to make a commitment to attend. These services will be Traditional. **All are welcome.** The first of these is at 6:15 pm.*

6:45-7:45 **BANQUET DINNER**

Welcoming Honored Guests and Comments: **Rosa Marina Siegel, President**

Mauricio Ibarra Ponce de Leon, Consul General of Mexico, and

Martha Vera, Honorary Consul of Spain

Introduction: **Corinne Brown**

Sneak Preview! Catch a first glimpse of Genie Milgrom's new documentary film.

7:45-8:45 **STANLEY M. HORDES DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR LECTURE**
Moderator: **Seth Ward**

Silvia Hamui Sutton, Rafael Gil Rodríguez and the Decline of The Inquisition: New Spain, 18th Century

MONDAY, AUGUST 14

7:10 AM *Minyan available (Juarez Room)*

8:00-9:30 **PANEL 2: ISSUES IN ANCESTRY**
Chairs: Jay and Daphnah Sage

Nancy Katz, Identity and Culture of Sephardic Jews in the New World

César David Ciriano Vela and Magda Ciriano Moreno, Problems and Perspectives in Sephardic Spanish Heritage Citizenship

Genie Milgrom, Certificate of Sephardic Ancestry: From Dream to Reality

9:45-11:45 **PANEL 3: NEW SPAIN—MEXICO AND NEW MEXICO**
Chair: Marla A. Cohen, Executive Director, Jewish Federation of El Paso and Las Cruces

Amy I. Aronson, The New Mexico Frontier: A Crypto-Jewish Haven or New World Hell?

Seth Ward, *Gitlitz* and *Silverado*: A review and discussion of David M. Gitlitz's last book.

Daria Berman, Escaping Rumor in the Mexican Inquisition

Mark Schneegurt, Discovering the Poetry in Mexican Inquisition Trial Transcripts

11:45-12:45 PM **BUFFET LUNCH**

12:45-1:45 **MARTIN SOSIN-PETIT ADDRESS TO ADVANCE SCHOLARSHIP IN THE CRYPTO-JUDAIC ARTS**
Moderator: Corinne Brown

Jillian Glantz, *Remember My Soul*: Exploring the Jewish History of the Texas Borderlands Through Film

1:45-3:15 **Panel 4: THE CONVERSA EXPERIENCE THROUGH A GENDERED LENS**
Chair: Marcia Fine

Rebecca Wartell (*Panel Organizer*), Mary, Esther, Deborah, Judith: Veneration of the Divine Feminine in Crypto-Judaism

Teresita Lozano, *Hija querida, la guardadora de secretos*: Inherited Cultural Memory and Conversa Identity on the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands

Ronit Treatman, Queen Esther: A Model of Resistance for Crypto-Jews

3:15 *Minyan available (Juarez Room)*

3:45-5:45 **PANEL 5: EL PASO HERITAGE**

Chair: Alia Garcia-Ureste

Peter Svarzbein, A Minyan to a Million: The work of artist Peter Svarzbein and the story of the returning *Anusim*

Blanca Garza Enriquez Carrasco, An Incredible Family History Unearthed: How A Search for the Past Can Redefine the Present and Future

David Mariscal Varela, Capital of the Cryptos

Rabbi Stephen Leon, The Past, Present and Future of the Crypto-Jewish Influence in the El Paso, Sunland Park, and Juarez Communities

5:45-6:30 Break

6:30-7:30 **BUFFET DINNER**

7:30-8:30 **JUDY FRANKEL MEMORIAL CONCERT**

HAL AQUA AND THE LOST TRIBE

Hal Aqua, guitar, mandolin

Carla Sciaky, violin, guitar, concertina recorder

Miriam Rosenblum, clarinet, tin whistle, recorder

TUESDAY AUG 15

7:30-8:00 *SCJS Board Meeting (Juarez Room)*

8:15-8:45 AM **GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING** (*El Paso Room*)

Rosa Marina Siegel, SCJS President

Agenda: President's Greetings, Proposal for next Conference, Election of Board and Officers.

8:45-10:15 **PANEL 6: FREEDOM, HISTORY, AND THE MODERN WORLD**

Chair: César David Ciriano Vela

Corinne Joy Brown, In the Crosshairs: How HaLapid Preserves Crypto-Judaic History

Isaac Amon "Almighty God Hath Created the Mind Free:" Religious Freedom, the Inquisition, and the USA

Reid Heller, The Sephardi Political Tradition and Converso Politics on the Frontiers of the Modern World

10:30 *Silent Auction closes. Results announced at lunch.*

10:30-12:00 ***PANEL 7: THE WIDE WORLD: CRYPTO-JEWISH PHENOMENA IN UNEXPECTED PLACES***

Chair: Elisheva Irma Diaz

Rabbi David A. Kunin, *Anusim* in the Spice Islands

Stav Appel, The Torah in the Tarot de Marseille

Lillian Jacumin Modak, The Jewish Waldensian Connection Continued

12:00-12:45 **BOX LUNCH**

12:45-2:15 ***PANEL 8: THE CRYPTO-JEWISH EXPERIENCE: UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL***

Chair: Art Benveniste

Ricardo Villarreal De Silva, Stories From My Mother's Childhood: Am I Seeing Things That Aren't Actually There?

Maria-Luisa Ornelas-June, Flamenco: Flamboyant Vestiges of our Spanish Converso Past

Rosa Marina Siegel, DNA Test – Tracing Sephardic ancestry from a user experience

2:15-3:00 CONFERENCE CLOSE

Socialize with your friends, make new connections, celebrate, and have fun at the end of the conference. *Light refreshments and entertainment.*

Rabbi Stephen Leon, Larry Lesser and Bill Radcliffe, Musical Program

Isaac Amon, Summary and Conclusion

SEE YOU in LOS ANGELES in 2025!

THE SOCIETY FOR CRYPTO-JUDAIC STUDIES THANKS OUR SUPPORTERS AND SPONSORS

**The Anusim Center and
Synagogue of El Paso**

Rabbi Stephen A. Leon
Bill Radcliffe

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and Las Cruces**

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University of Texas at El Paso

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Heyman and Mark Jurado

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Sally Parke
Mindy Escobar-Leanse
Emy Laats
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Rabbi Scott Rosenberg
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Emanuel Velez

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Hal Aqua

Robyn Helzner

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Blanca and Cesar Carrasco

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PRE-CONFERENCE

SATURDAY AUGUST 12, 2023

7:30-9:45 PM DOUBLE FEATURE FILM FEST

Remember My Soul. Jillian Glantz (2019), Exploring crypto-Judaic roots in the Borderlands by Jillian Glantz, our 2023 Martin Sosin-Stratton-Petit Address to Advance Scholarship in the Crypto-Judaic Arts.

A Long Journey: The Hidden Jews of the Southwest. Isaac Artenstein (2020) San Diego-based filmmaker Isaac Artenstein filmed this documentary in El Paso, Phoenix AZ, New Mexico, Ciudad Juarez, Mexico City, Zacatecas, and Nuevo Leon, telling the story of crypto-Jews in these areas.

SUNDAY AUGUST 13, 2023

1:00 PM-2:45 GENEALOGY WORKSHOP

Records in Mexico: Collections and Repositories

Arturo Cuellar

cuellararturo7@gmail.com

Abstract: The goal of this conference workshop will be to know and identify the major genealogical collections and repositories in Mexico. The primary collections to look for in Mexico are the civil registration and Catholic Church records. Additionally, I will recommend two significant other collections, depending on the place and date we are looking for, as well as knowing if your ancestor traveled to the United States. Significant other resources include university archives and censuses, court records, military records, emigration lists and land ownership records. A handout with sources and contact information will be included for starting a person's own search.

Bio: Arturo Cuellar is a genealogical researcher and lecturer with 30+ years of research experience. He works in the Family Search History Library as a Latin America research specialist. He is an accredited genealogist specializing in Argentina, Mexico, Colombia-Panama, Peru, and Venezuela. Also, he has a bachelor's degree in Family History. Currently, he is working towards an MA in Latin American Studies. He has researched over 20 Latin America and Spain archives and record repositories.

Rare finds in Archival Material

Genie Milgrom
Hatul72@aol.com

Abstract: Having spent the greater part of the last 15 years searching for my own crypto-Jewish genealogy in the archives of Spain and Portugal, most of the documentation located was expected. Birth, marriage and death Church records up to 1545, then farther back notarial deeds, land sales, last wills and testaments and finally, the *procesos* or Inquisition Judgements. I was finally able to find not only an unbroken lineage to 22 grandmothers and 1405 pre-Inquisition Spain and Portugal, but I was able to prove, with primary sources, that 28 of the 32 lines of my ascendants were crypto-Jews.

This was a cut-and-dried type of research once you let the systematic research take over, yet I was always looking, yearning, and determined to find the Jewish surname of any branch of my family, as all I had in those thousands of relatives were *converso* names as New Christians.

I was finally ready to give up and move on when I came upon several documents written in Hebrew hidden inside an Inquisition judgement from Portugal, plus a 19th maternal grandfather. Never had any archivist I consulted seen anything like it and had probably been placed there to further prove that the ancestor was a Jew.

The writing was Hebrew but the language wasn't. This fascinating find led me back to three rabbis on my tree and their original Jewish names in 1400. The historical significance of those documents will be showcased in this talk.

Bio: Genie Milgrom is an author and crypto-Jewish researcher. Having descended from a long ancestry of hidden Jews from Spain and Portugal, she was able to document an unbroken maternal lineage going back to 1405 and 22 grandmothers in a row. She was honored by Netanya Academic College for her work and has received numerous other recognitions. A documentary on her work and life will be released in early 2024.

THE 33RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE SOCIETY FOR CRYPTO-JUDAIC STUDIES

SUNDAY, AUGUST 13

3:00-3:15 PM **CONFERENCE OPENING**

Blanca Carrasco, Chair, Rosa Marina Siegel, President: Welcome
Isaac Amon, Emcee

3:15-5:15 **PANEL 1: THE EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE**

Chair: **Shai Zamir**

A Spotlight on the 1720s Persecution of Crypto-Judaism in Spain

Professor (Emeritus) Abraham Gross
agross@bgu.ac.il

Abstract: The frantic activity of the Spanish Inquisition 1720s, directed primarily against New Christians, constitutes, possibly the fiercest attack against individuals and enclaves of Judaizing since its first decade of activity in the 1480s. Ordered and orchestrated by the Suprema in Madrid, it involved all of the tribunals in Spain. Historians have termed it “The Final Suppression of Crypto-Judaism in Spain” (Jonathan Israel); “*La*

ultima ofensiva contra los Judios” (Egido); “*La ultima gran persecucion inquisitorial contra criptojudaismo*” (Rafael de Lera García).

Unlike the Portuguese Inquisitorial archives, most of the *procesos* of the Spanish Tribunals did not survive. However, there remained short *relaciones* and *alegaciones fiscales* which hold basic information about the *autos de fé* and the victims. I have been working in collaboration with Prof. Michael Alpert of London on a database which will be easy to use for scholars and for laymen alike, allowing searches and statistics of all kinds. This lecture will show the possibilities that such a database will enable, namely, more specific and more precise results, comparative possibilities, as well as going beyond previous scholarship on a wide range of issues.

Bio: Professor Gross earned his Ph.D. at Harvard University, and is Emeritus at the Dept. of Jewish History in the Ben Gurion University of the Negev. His research fields include the Cultural history of Iberian Jewry and its diaspora, history of New Christians, and the history of Jewish Martyrdom.

Portuguese and Amsterdam’s Sephardic Merchants and the Tobacco Trade

Yda Schreuder
ydas@udel.edu

Abstract: In the seventeenth century, Amsterdam became one of the world’s chief tobacco markets. In her latest book, *Portuguese and Amsterdam’s Sephardic Merchants in the Tobacco Trade*, Yda Schreuder reveals the key role played in this development by Portuguese Jews. These recent immigrants, who collaborated with fellow merchants in the Iberian Peninsula, obtained much of their tobacco through smuggling in Spanish America.

Little known materials from the Engel Sluiter Historical Documents Collection at UC Berkeley, Bancroft Library, allowed her to shed new light on the early seventeenth century development and expansion of the tobacco trade from Tierra Firme and Hispaniola through contraband, smuggling, bribery, and fraud, in which the trade in the “Devils Weed” flourished.

The deep involvement of Portuguese New Christians (*Conversos* and/or crypto Jews) and Sephardic Jews in the Transatlantic tobacco trade illustrate the entangled nature of trade relationships that brought together diverse groups in illicit trade networks with merchants of the Portuguese Nation with merchants from Amsterdam.

Bio: Yda Schreuder is Professor Emerita of Geography at the University of Delaware and Research Associate at the Hagley Museum and Library, USA. She previously published a monograph on Amsterdam’s Sephardic merchants and the Atlantic sugar trade in the seventeenth century.

Discovering and Tracing the Sephardic Roots of Jewish Baroque Composers

Carla Sciaky
cpsciaky@gmail.com

Abstract: As a baroque violinist preparing a program of 16th-18th century European composers who had Jewish heritage or connections, the research journey took me to surprising places. I stumbled on stories that sound more like a mystery novel than history, revealing new evidence that is still being researched and theories being explored even today. Once I compiled the complete repertoire for our 2016 concert, which we performed again in 2019, I came to realize that all but one of the composers were Sephardic, though they had lived and worked in Italy, England, the Netherlands, and Belgium. This was not the first time that putting a musical program together had given me an intimate glance into an era or a culture, but it was the first time that it was

actually interconnected with my own heritage. I will describe the stories of the composers, illustrate the magnitude and richness of their contributions to European music history, and share how this deepened my own family story for me. I can also share samples of a few of the beautiful melodies my quartet performed in those two concerts.

Bio: Carla Sciaky is a multi-instrumentalist based in Lakewood, Colorado. She plays baroque violin with the Baroque Chamber Orchestra of Colorado (www.bcocolorado.org) and with her quartet Semplice (www.semplicebaroque.com). She is also known for her concurrent five-decade career as a folksinger/songwriter, including a recent induction into the Colorado Music Hall of Fame with the group the Mother Folkers. She has won awards and accolades for her songwriting and performances on stages throughout the US and Europe that range from elementary school classrooms to folk clubs to churches and synagogues to Carnegie Recital Hall, and has an extensive discography of solo and ensemble albums. Outside of music, Carla is deeply committed to the world of alternative medicine, is certified in several energy and holistic health modalities, and has a coaching and healing practice called Doorway to Healing. She is presently writing a book based on her musical journey and the healing it has brought into her life. (www.carlasciaky.com)

5:15-6:15 **COCKTAIL RECEPTION AND MARIACHI FIESTA**

Mariachi Los Pasajeros and Ballet Folklorico Orgullo de Mi Tierra de Elena Vargas

6:15-6:45 break before dinner

6:15 PM Minyan for those who wish to attend

*Note: One of our members is saying Kaddish (the memorial prayer) tonight and tomorrow in memory of a parent. We have facilitated arrangements for the required minyan and asked several individuals to make a commitment to attend. These services will be Traditional. **All are welcome.** The first of these is at 6:15 pm.*

6:45-7:45 **BANQUET DINNER**

Welcoming Honored Guests and Comments: **Rosa Marina Siegel**, President
Mauricio Ibarra Ponce de Leon, Consul General of Mexico, and
Martha Vera, Honorary Consul of Spain
Sneak Preview! Catch a first glimpse of Genie Milgrom's new documentary film!

7:45-8:45 **STANLEY M. HORDES DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR LECTURE**

Moderator: Seth Ward

Rafael Gil Rodríguez and the Decline of The Inquisition: New Spain, 18th Century

Silvia Hamui Sutton
Silviahamui@hotmail.com

Abstract: To talk about the concept of identity, one must enter a diffuse and sometimes contradictory feeling that accesses the imaginary, both regarding the subject and the society. By studying the actors represented in the inquisitorial testimonies of the 18th century, we observe how their mentality was marked not only by paradigms imposed by the Crown and the Church, but also by references to beauty, ingenuity, courage, knowledge, honor, chivalry, and lineage that promoted the Creole community. The ideas of the Enlightenment and the decadence of the Inquisition influenced the attitudes of this elitist group to which Rafael Gil Rodríguez belonged.

We know that the Tribunal of the Holy Office was in charge of prosecuting heretics, among whom were crypto-Jews. Based on the life trajectory of Gil Rodríguez, as well as the analysis of a letter sent to the inquisitors, the

objective of this lecture is to shed light on the identity conflicts inherent in his social position as a Creole, and to discuss his religiosity, scientific competence, and literary erudition. When he was imprisoned in 1788, there was a gap between his Creole self-representation and the prison space, which the prisoner considered unworthy for him. In addition, his arrogant personality led to arrogant behavior towards the inquisitors, who, in revenge, turned against him.

The existential journey of Rafael Gil Rodríguez provides a clear delineation of the historical break that opens the way to Mexican modernity, as well as the injustices that the prisoner went through in a context of unstable censorship. The phenomenon is enormously important for understanding key facets of the culture of New Spain.

Bio: Silvia Hamui Sutton is a PhD in Comparative Literature, with honors, from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). She teaches at the Universidad Iberoamericana (UIA) and at UNAM. She obtained the 2019 University Merit Recognition for his outstanding professional career at the Universidad Iberoamericana. She obtained the Ernesto Meneses Morales Medal (UIA-2020). Also serves as Representative of Providers of Professional Teaching Services in the Academic Committee of the Universidad Iberoamericana (June 8, 2021 to date). She is a member of the CONACYT National System of Researchers (SNI) from 2015 to the present. In 2022, she was awarded the Prize for the Best Subject Teacher in Hispanic Language and Literature of the Fes Acatlán of the UNAM.

MONDAY, AUGUST 14

7:10 AM *Minyan available*

8:30-9:30 **PANEL 2: ISSUES IN ANCESTRY**
Chair: Jay and Daphnah Sage

Identity and Culture of Sephardic Jews in the New World

Nancy Katz
nancy@comkatz.com

Abstract: Looking at ideas of culture and identity in the context of Jewishness, this paper is a methodological approach to the idea that crypto-Jews of New Spain went to New Spain out of an Iberian/Spanish identity. Engaging in identifying the issue of defining Jewishness, this paper seeks to construct ways to use culture and identity theory to define “What is a Jew” both in the past and in the present. Sephardic Jewishness is one of many identifiers that resulted from the Diaspora following the destruction of the Second Temple and the expulsion of Jews from their homeland by the Romans. Using Clifford Geertz’s culture theory, I analyze the sources regarding Spanish Jews who migrated to New Spain. Identity theory examines people’s social interactions and looks at the development of racial formation theory and scientific racism in anthropology to further define the ideas on Jewishness and other identities.

Bringing this research into the current time, I am also conducting oral histories of these descendants and looking at the ramifications of the 2015 Spanish law bestowing citizenship on these people. When it comes to crypto-Jews, the notion that Spanish culture was a prominent influence has received just a cursory examination in earlier publications on the subject. The fact that the Jewish people of Spain had been a part of numerous transformations in their society while still maintaining a Spanish identity points to the impact of culture on this subgroup of the population. The argument of this dissertation is that the many Jewish people in Spain, after being expelled, chose to go to New Spain due to their cultural identity as Spanish. This chapter offers an analysis of theory and scientific evidence regarding Sephardic Jews that support the idea that they chose to stay within the realm of Spanish power, due to their identity.

Bio: Nancy Katz is a Ph.D. student at the University of Houston, pursuing studies in the Early Modern Atlantic world, emphasizing Jewish connections in that world.

Problems and Perspectives in Sephardic Spanish Heritage Citizenship

César David Ciriano Vela and Magda Ciriano Moreno
cciriano@icab.cat

Spain discovered, a century ago, that Sephardic people belonged to the hearth of our country and that is a part of the history, the constitution of Spain. In 1924, a Sephardic citizenship program started that has never stopped. Over the many decades, from then until today, many thousands of people of Sephardic origin have gained a Spanish passport from this program. In 2015, the Congress of Spain, with support of 100% of its members, approved Law 12/2015, with a special process for citizenship, and through it around 70,000 persons of Sephardic origin got Spanish passports. After this law ended in 2020, Spain continues to permit the traditional procedure, which has been always successful in the last decades. Also, Spain profits from this citizenship program, promoting Sephardic culture and history through the support of *Red de Juderías* (“Network of Jewish Quarters”). Many cities are now offering sites of Jewish history to the public and celebrating their Jewish quarters. Sephardic museums are being created in different Spanish cities, promoting Sephardic food and many other traditions all over Sefarad (Spain).

Bio: **César David Ciriano Vela** is an attorney and public law researcher from Spain, dedicated to help many Sephardic origin people all over the world to get the Spanish passport. He also collaborates with Jewish institutions and congregations from Spain, Israel, the USA, and other countries, to defend Sephardic history and culture. In 2022, the Association Sefarad Aragon and others awarded him the prize “Bahya Ibn Paquda 2021” for his support of Sephardic people and culture. He is an Immigration and Administrative Law attorney since 2002 and holds a PhD in Administrative Law (1999), from Zaragoza University (Spain) where he served as Public Law professor (1993-2002). **Magda Ciriano Moreno** is an attorney partner of César David Ciriano and has specialized in Sephardic Spanish Citizenship and Immigration for two decades, with sites in Zaragoza and Barcelona, Spain. She helped many Sephardic families to become Spaniards through the Sephardic citizenship program. She was formerly a specialist in Agriculture and Environment law in Nicaragua in the early 21st century.

Certificate of Sephardic Ancestry: From Dream to Reality

Genie Milgrom
Hatul72@aol.com

Abstract: As Director of the Emerging Communities of Latin America for Kulanu, I am in Central America or Mexico several times a year, working hand-in-hand to help them build mikvahs, cemeteries and obtain kosher food and much more. They are serious communities embracing the Jewish people and some of those have 200 or more members. With that said, they are rejected by the traditional communities and through their joy, the sadness overwhelms them. My dream was to give them a reason to stand tall and proud and embrace their ancestry.

With the backing of The American Sephardic Federation Institute of Jewish Experience and Reconnectar, a Certificate of Sephardic Ancestry was produced that is a cultural acknowledgement of their ancestry. After producing adequate documentation and family trees, a determination is made as to their eligibility. These many descendants of the crypto-Jews display this proudly and give testimony to their family histories. A full circle, dream come true.

Bio: Genie Milgrom is an author and crypto-Jewish researcher. Having descended from a long ancestry of hidden Jews from Spain and Portugal, she was able to document an unbroken maternal lineage going back to 1405 and 22 grandmothers in a row. She was honored by Netanya Academic College for her work and has received numerous other recognitions. A documentary on her work and life will be released in early 2024.

9:45-11:45 **PANEL 3: NEW SPAIN—MEXICO AND NEW MEXICO**

Chair: Marla A. Cohen, Executive Director, Jewish Federation of El Paso and Las Cruces

The New Mexico Frontier: A Crypto-Jewish Haven or New World Hell?

Amy I. Aronson, Ph.D.

aaronson@valdosta.edu

Abstract: Many scholars support the thesis that the northern frontier of the Spanish empire in the Americas served as a refuge for those fleeing the authority of the Mexican Inquisition. In the case of the crypto-Jews who had fled their homes in Spain and Portugal and arrived to New Spain, the northern Mexican frontier provided these secret Jews a relatively safe haven and respite from persecution. The commonly held idea being that the further one was from the metropolis of central Mexico, the greater the sense of tolerance and safety. In fact, it appears that the distant outpost of New Mexico was considered “the zone of refuge from the zone of refuge,” as one crypto-Jew at the time is quoted as having stated. However, evidence abounds to contradict this commonly held belief. This paper will propose that the northern frontier of New Spain was hardly a haven for crypto-Jews of the time but rather a living, western, New World hell.

Bio: Amy I. Aronson teaches at Valdosta State University in Georgia. She received her Ph.D. in Hispanic Linguistics and Medieval Spanish Literature from Temple University. Aronson is the recipient of a Fulbright Scholarship to Chile and Argentina, and directs Valdosta’s Peru Study Abroad Program. Her publications include *Marginal Voices: Studies in Converso Literature of Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Brill, 2012).

Gitlitz and Silverado: A review and discussion of David Gitlitz’s final book.

Seth Ward

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Abstract: *Living in Silverado* was the last book written by David Gitlitz (1942-2020); the hardcover appeared in 2019 with the paperback edition in 2022. I had the privilege of hearing Professor Gitlitz lecture about three of the large and extended families he covered for the book several times, most recently in 2019, when his book was just finished. His 2019 lecture was entitled “Twenty Generations of *Conversos* and the Transmission of Jewish Identity.”

Living in Silverado uses detailed inquisition records to trace as much as can be known of the personal lives, family relationships, observances, thoughts, even food and clothing of 16th century Spanish-Portuguese individuals of Jewish heritage in New Spain, many of whom were related to one another. Some of them spoke at length to Inquisitors, providing hundreds of pages of recorded testimony. The book focuses on families involved in mining, with a largely solitary existence and children often brought up by non-Jewish wives and a much more attenuated attitude to Judaism than the vibrant Judaizing community in Mexico City. Professor Gitlitz also examined the well-known Carvajal family and those who came to Mexico with them and transformed Jewish identity there, at least for a while.

The scope and detail of the study are quickly evident from lists of the name, town of origin, birthdate, date and residence in Mexico, and profession or status of over 100 16th-century individuals mentioned in this book,

details known about observances of Yom Kippur, Purim and Passover in general, and the names of those who attended 23 Jewish holiday observances of Manuel de Lucena and Catalina Enrriquez.

Gitlitz concluded that the frequency of observance of Jewish customs such as holidays and kosher diet reduced substantially with each generation, but rarely occurred past the early 17th century. He describes an active social and religious life of the Judaizing community at the Cárcel Perpétua (Permanent Prison) in Mexico City. But especially in the mining towns, few if any made a concerted effort to transmit actual Jewish practices past the generation of those who had come from Spain.

Finally, we examine whether Gitlitz's depiction of these individuals and communities helps explain key elements of what is often called crypto-Jewish identity as it emerged in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, especially among persons of Mexican heritage in what is today the Southwestern United States.

Bio: Seth Ward retired last summer from the University of Wyoming. He has been on the Board of Directors of the SCJS for about two decades, and has frequently served as Program Chair, which is the case this summer.

Escaping Rumor in the Mexican Inquisition

Daria Berman

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Abstract: The last major activity by the Mexican Inquisition ended in the 1640s. The trials culminated in the Grand *Auto de Fe*, in which inquisitors arrested over one-hundred Portuguese *conversos* for allegedly practicing Judaism. I research the lesser known cases of ordinary Portuguese *converso* soldier-merchants and soldier-farmers who faced accusations of political conspiracy at the time of Portugal's independence war from Spain, or, the Portuguese Restoration War (1640-1668). While researchers tend to focus on famous cases in this period that showed exceptional cases of crypto-Judaism, the lesser known cases demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of the *conversos* were not crypto-Jews but individuals who engaged in a hybrid of Jewish-Catholic and indigenous religious traditions. These Portuguese *conversos* immigrated to the Spanish Empire, especially Mexico, in hopes of escaping persecution and religious violence in Portugal. However, they suffered from renewed Spanish Inquisition persecution because of their Jewish ancestry and ethnically Portuguese identities. Portuguese immigrants in particular became vulnerable targets of the Inquisition because the Portuguese Restoration War generated suspicion of the Portuguese as political spies. These lesser known cases are critical to unraveling the mystery of the last major Inquisition activity against *conversos* in Mexico

Bio: Daria Berman is a second year PhD student in the Department of History at Washington University in St. Louis and a graduate affiliate of the Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity & Equity. Her research focuses on the Spanish and Mexican Inquisition in the seventeenth century, with a particular focus on the Grand *Auto de Fe* of the 1640s. By analyzing Inquisition trials in relation to the popular literature, medical treatises, and polemical writings of the time period, she engages with a range of methodologies to rebuild the various cultures of worship that formed *converso* communities in the metropole and in the colonies of Mexico. She currently is a contributor to the EarlyPrint digital humanities project that builds a digital library for British writings spanning from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries.

Discovering the Poetry in Mexican Inquisition Trial Transcripts

Mark Schneegurt

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Abstract: Crypto Jews from the Carvajal clan living in Mexico in the 16th Century followed the Laws of Moses in hiding. Eventually they were discovered, arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and many murdered as part of

the Catholic (Mexican) Inquisition. These included Luis de Carvajal, El Mozo, his mother Francisca, his companion Justa Méndez, his sisters Leonor, Marianna, Anica, and Isabel, friend Manuel de Lucena, and grandniece Leonor de Cáceres, among others. During lengthy trials, they were compelled to recite cultic poems and songs with religious meaning for their community, having lost much of their Portuguese Jewish heritage. Fragments of poems were recorded in trial transcripts that now reside in special collections of rare document libraries. The current project served to identify religious poetry in original trial transcripts, mainly related to the *auto de fé* of 1596, and create paleographic transcriptions. Poems were ultimately translated into English and published to proliferate the historic words of these Jewish martyrs. The rare trial transcripts were found in libraries from Berkeley to New York to New Orleans. This talk will tell the story of how the documents were obtained and the challenges of locating and transcribing the poems buried in handwritten trial transcripts from 400 years ago.

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

11:45-12:45 PM **BUFFET LUNCH**

12:45-1:45 **MARTIN SOSIN-PETIT ADDRESS TO ADVANCE SCHOLARSHIP IN THE CRYPTO-JUDAIC ARTS**

Moderator: Corinne Brown

Remember My Soul: Exploring the Jewish History of the Texas Borderlands Through Film

Jillian Glantz

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Abstract: The Rio Grande Valley sits in the southernmost tip of Texas, along the border of Mexico. This region has consistently been ranked as one of the poorest in the nation, and in the media it is most often associated with the Border Patrol, drugs, cartels, and illegal immigration. This overlooks the vastly diverse culture, demographics, and history of “the Valley,” an issue I set out to address in my documentary *Remember My Soul*. The film focuses on the Jewish history of the Valley, tracing the migration of Sephardic Jews from Europe to Mexico, and then north to the Texas borderlands. Additionally, it explores the local cultural traditions that many people believe originate back to the crypto-Jews of Mexico. Finally, *Remember My Soul* highlights the second wave of Jewish migration to the Valley in the early twentieth century, mainly Ashkenazi Jews who were local business people that integrated into the Mexican community.

This presentation focuses on the process (and journey) of creating *Remember My Soul*, which took approximately two and a half years, from inception to finished film. How do you uncover information about a group of people who did not want to be found? How do you fill in the gaps of missing documentation? How do you get funding to make a film like this? And how do you get people interested, including those with no Jewish connection? These questions and others will be discussed, along with clips of the film, and the personal experience of making a film about one’s own heritage.

Bio: Jillian Glantz produced *Remember My Soul*, a feature-length documentary on the history and contributions of crypto-Jews in northern Mexico and South Texas in 2019 while a student at the University of Texas at Río Grande Valley. Since then, she has graduated Summa Cum Laude with a major in Political Science. She is currently in a PhD program at Texas A&M University. Jillian is currently working on her master’s thesis which

will incorporate digital mapping and ground penetrating radar work on a historic Black cemetery on the Texas-Mexico border, and her PhD dissertation will focus on Black female filmmakers during the silent film era.

1:45-3:15 ***Panel 4: THE CONVERSA EXPERIENCE THROUGH A GENDERED LENS***
Chair: Marcia Fine

Mary, Esther, Deborah, Judith: Veneration of the Divine Feminine in Crypto-Judaism

Rebecca Wartell

(Panel Organizer)

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Abstract: Often described as a matrilineal religion, women have historically served as the keepers of crypto-Judaism as a private, domestic tradition. Whereas *conversos* participate in Catholic observance in overtly public arenas of faith and communal affiliation, the veneration of female saints can be understood as a mirror of the feminine underpinnings of hidden Jewish traditions. This paper will explore the repeated invocation of the *Shekhinah*, the divine feminine, in Jewish texts and the parallel cultic venerations of female saints as expressions of the specifically matrilineal essence of crypto-Judaism. In broader terms, the experience of exile, physical and spiritual, takes on gendered layers of meaning in Jewish and Christian experience.

Bio: Rebecca Wartell, PhD, is a Teaching Assistant Professor at the University of Colorado Boulder in the Program in Jewish Studies. Her research focuses on Sephardic and *conversa* women of the early modern period, both in Mediterranean and cross-Atlantic colonial contexts. Her current book project draws primarily from Hebrew rabbinic texts that highlight the experiences of women as refugees and religious converts in the sixteenth century.

Hija kerida, la guardadora de secretos: Inherited Cultural Memory and Conversa Identity on the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands

Teresita Lozano

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Abstract: Growing up in El Paso, Texas as the daughter of Mexican immigrant parents, I was no stranger to the experiences of transnational identity formation, particularly in cultural and religious contexts. However, as a child, I always knew something was different about my Mexican family, especially when seated next to others at a Catholic Mass. Where other necks were adorned with crosses, my grandmother and my father donned something special – a silver star with six points, which they often kept hidden beneath their shirt collar. One day, my father explained, I would also wear such a star, perhaps accompanied by a medallion of the Virgen de Guadalupe. Such a juxtaposition of two powerful symbols, at times accompanied by other strong female saints, reflected a long lineage of inherited cultural memory and *conversa* femininity that would be transferred to me by my paternal grandmother, who had no daughters of her own. My receiving such symbols of my crypto-Judaic and mestiza heritage, initiated an ongoing journey as keeper of secrets, codified in gestures, traditions, foodways, and songs. This paper explores experiences of crypto-Judaic and *conversa* womanhood, analyzing the role of liminality, memory, and music in the shaping of identity on the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands.

Bio: Dr. Teresita Lozano is an Assistant Professor of Musicology and Ethnomusicology at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. A daughter of Mexican immigrants and native of the U.S.-Mexico border, Dr. Lozano engages in research that explores the relationship between music, migration, religion, and identity. Her scholarly interests were directly influenced by her own complex Mexican heritage, framed by intersecting indigenous and post-colonial histories, including crypto-Judaic *conversos* in west-central Mexico. Dr. Lozano is

currently working on a monograph that analyzes the musical testimonies of undocumented immigrants and their transborder encounters with miraculous religious apparitions.

Queen Esther: A Model of Resistance For Crypto-Jews

Ronit Treatman

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Abstract: Queen Esther has played a very important role for the crypto-Jews of Iberia and Latin America. I will explore the symbolic resonance that Queen Esther, and her hidden identity, had for these communities. I will discuss how syncretism transformed Queen Esther into Saint Esther, and Purim into the Fast and Feast of Saint Esther. I will review evidence of the observance of the Fast and Feast of Saint Esther in the Inquisition files of Mallorca in an actual case study. I will also review my field research into the current existence of the phenomenon of Saint Esther in the Southwest United States and the still present tradition of *santeros* making *retablos* of Saint Esther, including actual pieces of artwork

Bio: Ronit Treatman was born in Israel, and grew up in Ethiopia and Venezuela. After serving in the Israel Defense Forces' Foreign Liaison Division, she studied International Business Administration in the United States. She was the president of The Philadelphia Jewish Voice. In 2013 she began to volunteer with Reconectar, a platform that strengthens and reconnects descendants of Spanish and Portuguese Jewish Communities. After several years of corresponding with people curious about their Jewish roots, she wrote Hands-On Jewish Holidays, dedicated to this community. It is available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Catalan.

3:45-5:45 **PANEL 5: EL PASO HERITAGE**

Chair: **Alia Garcia-Ureste** g_a_t_e_w_a_y_22@yahoo.com

A Minyan to a Million: The Work of Artist Peter Svarzbein and the Story of the Returning Anusim

Peter Svarzbein

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This presentation opens the "El Paso Heritage" panel with some photos from Svarzbein's crypto-collection and a talk about his lifelong obsession of documenting crypto-Jews.

Abstract: My practice is focused on exploring notions of history and identity in *La Frontera* the border. Whether it has been shedding light on emerging crypto-Jews to a larger Jewish or Latino community or representing the unique relationship between Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, and El Paso, Texas through the El Paso Transnational Trolley Project, my belief is that art can function as a vehicle for dialog and change. Over the past 30 years, there has been a resurgence of Jewish conversions of "crypto-Jews" or *Anusim*. "A Minyan to a Million" constitutes a nearly 20-year exploration of returning crypto-Jewish communities of the Southwest and Latin America.

This ongoing project has utilized different formats to document these returning Latino families to normative Judaism. Of the different mediums the most successful has been through an evolving food and an art installation entitled "*Conversos y Tacos Kosher Gourmet Trucks est. 1492.*" Art is a universal language but food is the ultimate unifier. Food is love, care, connection and sustenance, holding a special meaning in both Jewish and Hispanic/Latino cultures. By mixing humor with socially relevant issues in public installations, my work aims to inspire and break down borders, whether cultural, aesthetic or geographic.

Bio: Peter Svarzbein is a photographer, curator and disruptive media specialist. Graduate of the renowned Eddie Adams Photojournalism Workshop, Svarzbein earned his MFA from the School of Visual Arts in New York. During graduate school at the SVA, Svarzbein created the El Paso Transnational Trolley Project. This self-created activist/artist project is the impetus for Svarzbein’s public service. His work advocating with community leaders resulted in TXDOT committing \$97 million to construct a trolley route and refurbish the original streetcars that ran between El Paso and Juarez. Svarzbein’s art led him to a run for public office in 2015, where he completed two full terms on El Paso’s City Council as city councilman and Mayor Pro Tempore.

Svarzbein has exhibited work both nationally and internationally including a video installation in the Guggenheim’s “Still-Spotting NYC” exhibition, at UTEP’s Rubin Gallery in a bi-national exhibition “El Flow” and in the “Puro Border” exhibition at the INBA Museum of Fine Art in Cd. Juarez, Mex. Of note was his interactive installation “*Conversos y Tacos* Kosher Gourmet Trucks est. 1492” which was funded through a grant with the National Endowment for the Arts and featured on NPR’s “Here and Now.”

An Incredible Family History Unearthed: How A Search for the Past Can Redefine the Present and Future

Blanca (Garza Enriquez) Carrasco
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Abstract: My name is Blanca Monica Marina Garza Enriquez Espinoza Perez Crispin Tijerina Cortez Salinas and I’ve been practicing Judaism for over 25 years. In some ways my journey to El Paso reflects that of other Hispanics who are referred to as “Mexican Americans” with one difference: I am a *converso*, a Jew by choice.

I was told my many last names might have Sephardic and/or crypto-Jewish origin and wanted to learn more. The resulting search for my roots has been a life-changing experience that took me from the Catholic Church to Judaism, a religion that originally seemed distant and foreign. My passion for understanding led me to an evangelical and messianic movement, until, in 2007, my husband and I sought Rabbi Stephen Leon in El Paso to help us convert.

This presentation dares to ask: “How does one truly identify ethnicity?” How do we claim our heritage? In short, the question “How did I get here?” is as important as “Who am I? “

In 2017, I decided to research my biological father in Torreon, Coahuila, Mexico where I was born. I discovered he was a descendant of Marcos Alonso de La Garza y del Arcon, co-founder of Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, a center for crypto-Jews since Spanish Colonial times. In his lineage, I found Constanza de la Garza, a crypto-Jew who was tried by the Spanish Inquisition and died in house-arrest, possibly my 13th grandmother. Finding this ancestry has strengthened my spiritual and community commitment and sense of connection. With the help of a genealogist and my own determination, I learned that finding one’s roots can shape a person’s sense of self and their life choices.

Brief Bio: Blanca Carrasco, born in Torreón, Mexico, has lived in El Paso, Texas for over 30 years. She is a direct descendant of Marcos Alonso de la Garza y del Arcon, co-founder of Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, an area known for *conversos* and crypto-Jews in New Spain. She shares her journey as a descendant of crypto-Jews and as a *Conversa*, reaching out to people interested in learning about their Jewish roots, especially at the Anusim Center & Synagogue.

“Capital of the Cryptos”

David Mariscal Varela

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Abstract: This presentation will cover a personal story about encountering this part of my lineage not only on my father's side but also on my mother's side. I would explain the small details and encounters in my life. Growing up I believed us to be Catholic only later as an adult to come to realize when discovering this about my family that our customs were not Catholic at all.

Cultural parallels include many cross over details between Latin America, Judaism and Jewish culture that are often overlooked in our region. Cross-cultural parallels and connections between the *converso* traditions and many presently-practiced traditions are still alive and well within this community. Examples include food, dress, animal slaughter, funerary customs and language to name a few.

The objective of this paper is to show that the plethora of micro details that make up our largely Latin community have very profound Judaic roots.

Bio: David Varela is an accomplished city guide and historian. Over the course of eleven years he has studied the history, culture and demographics of El Paso, Texas, and the surrounding regions including New Mexico and the Mexican state of Chihuahua. Mr. Varela studies micro-histories and details and is a regional guide who has worked with several organizations, businesses and schools including the University of Texas at El Paso, where he is a professor via the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.

The Past, Present and Future of the Crypto-Jewish Influence in the El Paso, Sunland Park and Juarez Communities

Rabbi Stephen Leon

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Abstract: Historical documentation, DNA studies, published reference books and current articles all provide sufficient evidence to validate the existence and presence of a significant community of crypto-Jews who reside in El Paso, Texas, Sunland Park, New Mexico and Juarez, Mexico. Through the efforts and activities of the Anusim Center and Synagogue including conventions, conferences, concerts, guest speakers, cultural presentations, the publication of a bilingual newsletter, and offering services and community festival activities in Hebrew, Spanish, English and Ladino, information and educational material has been made available to the public at large from 1986 to the present day.

In addition to the successful local programming as described above, organized cultural visits to Israel with more than 50 members of the crypto-Jewish community in attendance have included visits to the Dona Gracia Museum in Tiberias, the Diaspora Museum of Tel Aviv University and lectures by Rabbi Nisan ben Avraham of Shilo on the West Bank, a former Chueta from Majorca, who made aliya, became a scholar, scribe and professional tourist guide over three decades ago. These past programs and activities, together with current events and educational opportunities and the planning of future classes, informational visits to Israel and services will ensure that the recognition, the validation and the positive influence of the *B'nai Anusim* and crypto-Jews will be known throughout the Jewish, the general and the academic world for many generations to come.

Bio: Rabbi Stephen Leon has served as the rabbi of the Elmwood Park Jewish Center in New Jersey from 1971 to 1986, and the rabbi and rabbi emeritus of Congregation B'nai Zion, El Paso from 1986 to the present. He is the founder, director and currently the rabbi of the Anusim Center and Synagogue. Rabbi Leon received his

rabbinic ordination from the Academy for Jewish Religion in New York in 1971. Rabbi Leon was on the faculty of the Academy for Jewish Religion from 1971 to 1986 and the Dean of the Academy for Jewish Religion from 1974 to 1986. He also was a member of the faculty of the University of Texas at El Paso from 1993 to 2017. Rabbi Leon has been the scholar-in-residence and guest speaker in the following communities: Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Jerusalem, Netanya, London, Capetown, Budapest, Toronto, Montreal, Philadelphia, New York, New Jersey, Florida, Texas, New Mexico, Mexico and California. Rabbi Leon's book *The Third Commandment and the Anusim; A Rabbi's Memoir on an Incredible People* was published by Gaon Press in 2017.

5:45-6:30 Break

6:30-7:30 **BUFFET DINNER**

7:30-8:30 **JUDY FRANKEL MEMORIAL CONCERT**

Hal Aqua and the Lost Tribe

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Hal Aqua and the Lost Tribe are renowned in their hometown of Denver and throughout Colorado for their exuberant performances and lively mix of Klezmer, Yiddish, and world Jewish music. For our conference, the group will perform as a trio and has assembled a set of Sephardic, Mizrahi (Jewish Middle Eastern), and fusion music that runs the gamut from haunting love songs to raucous dance tunes.

Hal Aqua (guitar, mandolin) serves as Music Director for B'nai Havurah, a Reconstructionist congregation in Denver, and as song leader for Temple Micah, a Reform synagogue. He provides music for Jewish life cycle events throughout Colorado, organizes popular music events in Denver like KlezFest and the "Jews Do Jews" concerts, and leads workshops and classes on Jewish world music.

Carla Sciaky (violin, guitar, concertina, recorder) is an accomplished multi-instrumentalist/singer/songwriter and recording artist. She teaches music and performs with Baroque ensemble Semplice and the Baroque Chamber Orchestra of Colorado. Carla has been exploring her Sephardic Jewish roots (her grandparents were from Salonika, Greece), and is one of the conference's workshop presenters.

Miriam Rosenblum (clarinet, tin whistle, recorder) plays klezmer, Irish, Renaissance and Baroque music, performs with Carla in Semplice and in klezmer band The Klez Dispensers, teaches instrumental folk music, and was a founding member of Hal's previous Jewish world beat band, Los Lantzmun.

TUESDAY AUG 15

7:30-8:00 *SCJS Board Meeting*

8:15-8:45 AM **GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING**

Rosa Marina Siegel, SCJS President

Agenda: President's Greetings, Proposal for next Conference, Election of Board and Officers.

8:45-10:15 **PANEL 6: FREEDOM, HISTORY, AND THE MODERN WORLD**

Chair: César David Ciriano Vela

In the Crosshairs- How *HaLapid* Preserves Crypto-Judaic History

Corinne Joy Brown
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Abstract: As crypto-Judaic awareness blossoms around the world, research is disseminated via books, conferences and Facebook groups. In addition, the SCJS long term commitment to print our news in the form of our own publication *HaLapid*. *HaLapid* has a rich history, stemming from the first publication in 1927 by the Portuguese military commander, Arturo Carlos de Barros Basto. He is a legend in the story of the Portuguese crypto-Judaic revival. Barros Basto knew he was a *converso* descendant and following World War I, he returned to Judaism and became committed to awakening his countrymen, building a synagogue in Porto and publishing a newsletter for the *anusim*, other returnees like himself. The news paper was called *O Facho*, the Portuguese translation of the word torch in Hebrew. (*HaLapid*).

Today, this remarkable tradition continues and our journal is proudly collected by the Library of Congress, Princeton University, Harvard University, the New York City Public Library, and others, along with EBSCO, a worldwide resource of educational media for academic research. As editor/publisher, it's a privilege and an honor to sift through the submissions and realize we are in the crosshairs of this remarkable cultural shift. This talk will focus on a few select highlights from past issues, reinforcing how media both unites and educates those who often feel so separate.

Bio: Corinne Joy Brown is an award-winning journalist and multi-published author, former president of the Denver Woman's Press Club, a Fellow of the University of Colorado History Department at Colorado Springs, an SCJS board member for the past ten years and editor of *HaLapid*. She was the 2nd place winner of the Latino-Literary Award in Historical Fiction in 2016 and winner of the 2016 New Mexico-Arizona Book Award in Historical Fiction for her novel *Hidden Star*, a book inspired by New Mexico's crypto-Jews. She was also the SCJS Conference chair in Denver in 2019.

“Almighty God Hath Created The Mind Free:” Religious Freedom, the Inquisition, and the USA

Isaac Amon
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Abstract: In 1791, the Bill of Rights – the first 10 Amendments – officially became part of the United States Constitution. The First Amendment enshrined liberty of conscience in America's nascent governing framework. Yet, this astonishing moment in human affairs was the culmination of centuries of struggle for genuine religious freedom. The arrival and presence in North America of Spanish & Portuguese Jews (including *conversos*) had changed the course of history. The Founders of the American Republic invoked the Inquisition in their correspondence and in debates over procedural protections afforded to criminal suspects. Their famous letters to S&P synagogues assuring Jews of religious freedom may be contextualized as contrasting with the Inquisition, which was in operation into the 19th century. Leading figures in S&P synagogues on the Eastern Seaboard in New York; Newport, Rhode Island; Savannah, Georgia; and other places had directly experienced the Inquisition. In New Orleans, Isaac Monsanto was expelled from the city by the Spanish in the 1760s for being a hidden Jew whilst religious freedom was not unavailable there until the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Experiences of the Inquisition's persecution of *conversos* across time and space helped to enshrine the core principle of religious liberty in the United States.

Bio: Dr. Isaac Amon, an attorney and counselor at law, is Director of Academic Research at Jewish Heritage Alliance, a cultural and historical nonprofit dedicated to preserving and promoting the legacy of Sefarad (Jews of the Iberian Peninsula). He obtained a J. D., LL.M in negotiation & dispute resolution and J.S.D. (PhD in Law) from Washington University School of Law in St. Louis. He was a Legal Fellow at the International

Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague and was Legislative Director at the Missouri Department of Corrections. A descendant of Sephardic Jews who fled Spain in 1492, he writes and speaks on comparative law, legal history, and criminal procedure. He has an abiding interest in identity, memory, and legacy.

The Sephardi Political Tradition and *Converso* Politics on the Frontiers of the Modern World

Reid Heller

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Abstract: This talk will survey representative 16th century *converso* political efforts influenced by an amalgam of Graeco-Arabic political philosophy and Jewish tradition that I call the Sephardi Political Tradition (“SPT”). The SPT emerged in 10th century Umayyad court circles. It achieved its apex following the Almohad mass conversions of the 1140s and innovated a form of Jewish education and political action devoted to the reconstitution of a Jewish Kingdom. The SPT did not disappear from Iberia in the 12th century. It re-emerged following the Christian Reconquista as Jewish elites took up political life again in service of Christian kingdoms. Nor did it disappear following the trauma of 1492. It was carried abroad by Jewish exiles but also cultivated at home and in colonial Spain in crypto-Jewish circles, primarily descendants of Portuguese Jews whose families endured the forcible mass conversions of 1497. Most importantly, the SPT served as a blueprint for political action by Sephardim and *Converso* elites throughout the 16th century. I will address three outstanding examples of *converso* political action influenced by the SPT and conclude with observations on SPT’s reception by 19th European Jews and its role in the founding of modern Israel.

Bio: Reid Heller is an independent researcher in Jewish texts and Jewish history with a special interest in political philosophy. He has written and taught on Southwestern *Converso* history and is the author of the HaLapid article and talk: “Song From a Withered Limb”. Reid and his wife, Karen Heller, have two married daughters, Ilana Nishli, of Los Angeles, and Naomi George, of Dallas. At the time of writing, he and Karen are the grandparents of five. (The sixth grandchild is due in late August, during the week of the SCJS meeting.) He has lived and practiced law in Dallas, Texas for more than four decades.

10:30-12:00 ***PANEL 7: THE WIDE WORLD: CRYPTO-JEWISH PHENOMENA IN UNEXPECTED PLACES***

Chair: Elisheva Irma Diaz

***Anusim* in the Spice Islands – The Historical Origins**

Rabbi David A. Kunin

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Abstract: Indonesia is a new frontier within the world of emerging Jewish communities. *Kehilot* are now found from Sumatra to Papua, with many origin traditions. The returning Jews of Ambon and Sarum Island in the Spice Islands have a five-hundred-year-old tradition as *anusim*, maintaining many Jewish customs and beliefs. How and why did *anusim* flee to such isolated islands, far from Europe? Like *anusim* in the New World, these Jews fled the Church, in the guise of the Goa Inquisition. Coming to India from Portugal in relative safety, feeling even the freedom to practice Judaism openly, these *anusim* soon came under vicious attack and fled to the very peripheries of the Empire. This paper will examine the historical sources charting the movement from Portugal to Goa, and then to smaller outposts beyond the reach of either the King or Church.

Bio: Rabbi David Kunin has researched crypto-Judaism for more than 20 years, focusing most recently on the re-emerging communities of Indonesia. He has been the mentoring rabbi of this dispersed community for more than 10 years and has spent more than four months visiting and working with these *kehilot*. Trained as a

historian, he has been an adjunct professor at SUNY Cortland and at the University of Alberta. Currently (as of July) he is the senior rabbi at Congregation Beth David in Saratoga, CA.

The Torah in the Tarot de Marseille

Stav Appel

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Abstract: The Torah in the Tarot presents the thesis that the original Tarot de Marseille, the artistic ancestor of contemporary Tarot cards, served as a tool for clandestine Jewish education during the centuries-long exile of Jews from French public life.

When the oldest known version of the Tarot de Marseille—the Jean Noblet of 1650 Paris—is viewed through a Judaic lens of understanding, it is shown to be a secret vessel for Hebrew letters, Torah stories, Judaic ritual objects, and Jewish Holy Days.

The comprehensive and systematic depiction of Judaica in the cards suggests it is an artifact of Crypto-Judaism as well as an unrecognized masterpiece of cryptography and world religious art.

The recognition of intentional Judaic imagery in the Jean Noblet Tarot refutes the popular understanding that the numeric resonance between the Tarot's 22 illustrated images and the 22 letters of the Hebrew Alphabet is mere coincidence, as claimed in Michael Dummett's *The Game of Tarot* and Stuart Kaplan's *The Encyclopedia of Tarot*.

Furthermore, it suggests that the entire genre of Tarot history may be suffering from a Judaic blind spot.

Bio: Stav Appel is a Data Scientist. He has an MBA from the Yale School of Management and a BA from SUNY Binghamton. He is the author of the short self-published work *The Torah in the Tarot* and is a frequent speaker at community centers, bookstores, and synagogues about the lost and forgotten Judaica of the Tarot de Marseille. More information can be found at: <http://www.TorahTarot.com>.

The Jewish Waldensian Connection Continued

Lillian Jacumin Modak

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Abstract: There is a connection between the Sephardim and the Waldensian peoples of Northern Italy. The Waldensian Church is a pre-reformation Protestant group living in the Italian Alps on the border of France since the 12th century. Oswaldo Coisson's book on the documented Waldensian families lists many families as refugees. As we know, the Sephardic diaspora made refugees of exiled families. The Waldensians made a safe place for marginalized peoples persecuted by their religious beliefs. About 43% of the Waldensian family names are also documented Sephardic names. The Waldensians called their churches temples and were known by their critics as keeping the Sabbath in "the way of the Jews" from the 12th century to the 1600s.

This paper addresses similarities and adds DNA evidence and genealogy research supporting assimilation of Sephardic Jews into the group. Y DNA testing shows 12 marker matches to persons claiming descent from the Kimhi rabbinic line to men of Waldensian descent. Waldensian family names such as Jacomin were documented in civil records of King Louis XIV as being Hebrew in origin. The Waldensians translated the Bible into common languages and spread their message throughout Europe. A presentation will reveal more insight and will inspire further research.

Bio: Lillian Jacumin Modak is a past contributor to *HaLapid* magazine. She is a high school counselor who loves to research. She is of Waldensian ancestry and began tracing Jewish roots after reading an article about the Sephardic Diaspora. She has been married to Ken Modak for 32 years and is the mother of two adult children; Marielle Modak Hoadley and Thomas Modak.

12:45-2:15 **PANEL 8: THE CRYPTO-JEWISH EXPERIENCE: UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL**
Chair: Art Benveniste

Stories From My Mother's Childhood: Am I Seeing Things That Aren't Actually There?

Ricardo Villarreal De Silva
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Abstract: In “Stories From My Mother’s Childhood: Am I Seeing Things That Aren’t Actually There?” the presenter recounts anecdotes from his mother’s upbringing in South Texas. The anecdotes focus on customs and traditions in the context of death, in-house and outdoor practices. The stories were collected as part of the author’s pursuit of dual citizenship with Spain and Portugal. The narrative describes the presenter’s maternal-line family practices in three general areas: death, within the home practices, and outdoor practices. Specifically, the presenter describes some common and unique rituals surrounding death in general and in the context of the death of a specific family member. In-house customs include a specific method of sweeping, the importance of Fridays and the activities performed, sharing Bible stories, and consuming particular foods during common religious events. The outdoor practice described is uniquely related to rainstorms. The presentation will include photos of the presenter’s maternal line and a handmade needlepoint that may be symbolic.

Bio: Ricardo Villarreal De Silva received his Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin. He’s an associate professor of marketing at the University of San Francisco’s School of Management. He’s an expert in multicultural marketing, where his theory of ethnicity provided great insight into understanding U.S. Hispanics’ consumer behavior. Recently, his work has focused on applying sophisticated statistical approaches to understanding media behavior, advertising, and e-retailing.

Flamenco: Flamboyant Vestiges of our Spanish *Converso* Past

Maria-Luisa Ornelas-June
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Abstract: In Laredo, TX in the 1970’s, *niñas de familias buenas* took ballet. But, we also took Spanish dance classes—*castanuelas*, *zapateados*, flouncy skirts, *palmas*—essentially flamenco. When I went to law school in San Francisco and the *Californios* tested my Chicano credentials, flamenco delegitimized my credentials despite thinking of myself as Mexican-American. So, like much of our *converso* background, I hid the flamenco part of my culture.

In 2019, I applied for Spanish citizenship. In 2020, as I started reading about my *converso* ancestry, I started getting Facebook ads for online flamenco classes from Ballet Hispanico. I signed up for the class and then began reexamining why in Laredo, in the 1970s, we were doing flamenco.

After the Spanish Civil War, flamenco dancers fled Franco to Mexico City. María Luisa Marulanda took classes with them and opened a studio in Laredo, TX in the late 1940s.

The origins of flamenco mark the passage of our *converso* ancestors from the Middle East through the Levant to Andalusia. Marginalization of Jewish, Muslims and the Roma further mixed these cultures into flamenco. The refugees of the Spanish Civil War found a home among *converso* compatriots from prior centuries.

Bio: María-Luisa Ornelas-June is an independent scholar and folklorist studying Tejano culture with a focus on the *converso* perspective. She is writing a book that incorporates this history and culture. María-Luisa Ornelas-June attended UT Austin and got her law degree from the University of California College of Law, San Francisco (formerly Hastings College of the Law). She spent 20 years as a trailing spouse raising three children in the Netherlands, Singapore, and India. Although she was born and raised in Laredo, TX, she now resides in Houston. As a result of her ancestry, she received Spanish citizenship in 2021.

DNA Test – Tracing Sephardic Ancestry from a User Experience

Rosa Marina Siegel
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Abstract: Genealogy has become essential in tracing Sephardic roots. But DNA testing can fill in numerous gaps and complete the picture. You start by putting together your personal narrative by interviewing family members and piecing together their stories, customs, traditions, locations, occupations, etc. Then you start by creating a basic tree, where you are the starting point, then you add your parents, then grandparents, great grandparents and beyond. In your search you gather documents, names, surnames, photos, heirlooms and more. Maybe you don't know where to start, or maybe you had hit the "brick wall" and cannot pass beyond that branch of your family tree. This is where DNA can help you to trace Sephardic roots.

DNA research has confirmed Sephardic DNA in Latin America (e.g. Chacón-Duque, et al.) You can test for Autosomal DNA (general), Mitochondrial DNA (Maternal) and Y-Chromosome DNA (Paternal). It is recommended to do an Autosomal DNA test first, and if needed to narrow down a family line, complete the Y DNA or the Mitochondrial DNA.

Several useful tools are available. DNA testing can confirm Sephardic ancestry, ancestors' locations, DNA relatives, and paternal or maternal lines, but cannot verify whether you are Jewish, your tribe or citizenship. This presentation will discuss the itinerary traveled from genealogy to genetics from the perspective of a user. It argues for the utility of a well-informed approach to genetics, and assesses the types of testing available, conclusions that may or may not be drawn, and the significance for those who travel the Crypto-Jewish path.

Bio: Rosa Marina Siegel has a Biology degree from Universidad de El Salvador. Of Converso background she is an avid researcher of Converso Jewish ancestry in Central America, through family narratives, DNA, colonial and inquisition records. She has been a SCJS member since 2015 and the current President, a past contributor of *HaLapid* and a speaker at the SCJS conference in Philadelphia. She is an active member of the Sephardic congregation of Hollywood Torah Center and a guest member of the Sephardic congregations of Honduras and El Salvador.

2:15-3:00

CONFERENCE CLOSE

Rabbi Stephen Leon, Larry Lesser and Bill Radcliffe, Musical Program
Isaac Amon, Summary and Conclusion

Socialize with your friends, make new connections, celebrate, and have fun at the end of the conference. *Light refreshments and entertainment.*

SEE YOU in LOS ANGELES in 2025!