



# HALAPID

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AUTUMN / WINTER • 2023 / 5784

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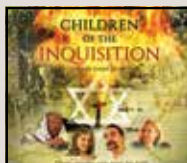
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Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies  
18555 East Smoky Hill Road  
PO Box 460448  
Aurora, CO 80046

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HOTEL PASO DEL NORTE

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**Best of The Lost Tribe**

Tour – Camino Real Mission Trail  
and Portales Museum in Elizario

Genealogy Workshop  
**Genie Milgrom and Arturo Cuellar**

*The Conference  
in Pictures*

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August 2025

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# FROM OUR PRESIDENT

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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#### EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Corinne Joy Brown • [corinnejb@aol.com](mailto:corinnejb@aol.com)

#### POETRY EDITOR

M. Miriam Herrera • [herrera.miriam@gmail.com](mailto:herrera.miriam@gmail.com)

#### CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Mark Bennet • Corinne Joy Brown  
Blanca Carrasco • M. Miriam Herrera  
Karen Hesse • Maria-Luís Ornelas June  
Jessica Leigh Lebos • Joseph Lovett  
Bruni Penina Castro Viuda de Mandracchia  
Genie Milgrom • Humberto-Rodríguez Navas  
Doug Schar • Ricardo Villarreal

#### CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS

Corinne Brown • David Sabal • Doug Schar

#### ISTOCKPHOTOS CREDITS

ikhwan abduallah • camaralenta • Janice Chen  
Gwengoat • ipopba • johavel • josehsleamara  
kevron2001 • nito100 • orsonsurf  
Juan Ramón Ramos Rivero

#### GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Jacqueline Hirsch • [jrh@hirmon.com](mailto:jrh@hirmon.com)

#### PRINTER

Update Printing • [www.updateprinting.com](http://www.updateprinting.com)  
Colorado Springs, Colorado.

### 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 be reprinted with permission only.

*HaLapid* usually mails twice annually in the Spring and Autumn. Please send submissions to the editor-in-chief by March 1 and September 1, [corinnejb@aol.com](mailto:corinnejb@aol.com)



**ROSA MARINA SIEGEL**  
Naples, Florida  
[marina\\_ardon.siegel@yahoo.com](mailto:marina_ardon.siegel@yahoo.com)

As we announced in our last edition, the long wait for the in-person conference was finally over! I do not know where to start. The pre-conference highlights: “A Minyan to a Million” photo exhibit by Peter Svazbein? The double feature film at Temple Mt. Sinai? The bus tour of the Camino Real Trail? The gracious sisterhood ladies of Temple Mt. Sinai store? The performance by *Mariachi Los Pasajeros* and *Ballet Folklorico Orgullo de mi Tierra de Elena Vargas*? These were just the beginning to our three days in El Paso, Texas.

We were so pleased with the response to our conference call for papers. The proposals came from scholars, professionals, advanced graduate students, and individuals with personal narratives related to crypto-Jews. On our first night, we were honored to welcome Mauricio Ibarra Ponce de Leon, Consul General of Mexico, and Martha Vera, Honorary Consul of Spain. We were delighted by Genie Milgrom’s documentary preview, *Between the Stone and the Flower: The Duality of the Conversos*, and the presentation by Dr. Silvia Hamui Sutton, “Rafael Gil Rodríguez and the Decline of The Inquisition: New Spain, 18th Century.” The sweet and blessed closing of our event was performed by dear Rabbi Stephen Leon of The El Paso Anusim Center and Synagogue, Larry Lesser and Bill Radcliffe, and the ones who danced as if no one was watching. So many wonderful presentations; the genealogy workshop, the fiesta, etc. — we wish we could list them all for those of you that did not attend. Very sincerely, we say thank you so much to all the speakers and attendees for your participation.

I also want to say thank you to Conference Chair Blanca Carrasco and Program Chair Seth Ward, Conference Co-chair Corinne Brown, and Emcee Isaac Amon; to everyone who helped create this wonderful conference, donated funds or items to the auction, and to the volunteers who gave their time and service, and more. We thank those who answered the survey; all your comments and suggestions are very helpful and will be taken into consideration to make our next conference even better.

We are energized and already planning our next conference — get ready for Los Angeles 2025! Please stay tuned, follow us on Facebook, and renew your membership so you can stay up-to-date through *La Granada*, our online newsletter and more. Watch for new collaborations with like-minded organizations and our very own educational outreach program via Zoom.

We hope your High Holidays were blessed and wish you a Happy Hanukkah and a fantastic, productive 2024!

Best regards,

*Rosa Marina Siegel*  
Rosa Marina Siegel, SCJS President

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.

## Our story grows ever-more profound



**CORINNE J. BROWN**  
Englewood, CO  
corinnejb@aol.com

**W**ith the El Paso conference behind us, I am back at work —renewed and inspired by all I have seen and heard.

The SCJS field of study is enriched by new voices, new individuals finding their family histories, and new works in print. The El Paso conference was a microcosm of the global crypto-Judaic picture, as speakers came from Israel, from

across America and from Mexico to share and learn. I can only say kudos to one and all.

In this issue of *HaLapid*, be sure to read the inspiring poem by Ricardo Villarreal and the amazing account of the entire event, “Savannah Sideways,” by Jessica Lebos, daughter of long-time SCJS member and frequent *HaLapid* contributor, Marcia Fine, and a professional writer with great talent, printed by permission, from her amazing blog by the same name.

Be dazzled by the research of Doug Schar on the assimilation of crypto-Jews into Huguenots in medieval France and feel humbled by the words of Humberto Rodriguez Navas as he searches for his hidden Jewish past. The delightful memoir by María-Luís Ornelas June takes us into the communities of the Rio Grande with an intimacy and understanding few possess; exploring the challenge of growing up belonging to two cultures, even three.

Enjoy the photo spreads and comments from the El Paso conference and know that if you were there, we made history.

This issue is bursting with feeling, memory and respect for a story that grows more profound as the years pass by. Between our esteemed scholars and the awakening of descendants of every age, the world will know what really happened. I hope you will read every word.

At the time of this writing, Jewish life all over the world feels threatened. In Spain, several news sources have confirmed a series of attacks against synagogues as a result of the conflicts in the Middle East. Multiple Spanish synagogues, old and new, in Madrid and Barcelona, have been hit with anti-semitic graffiti. In a statement by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain, graffiti had also been found in the Jewish quarter of the medieval

### Surgery takes back seat

**I** just wanted to compliment you on the *Halapid* magazine. You did a great job as usual. I am looking forward to the conference. I am having to get a knee replacement and seeing an orthopedic doctor. Will stretch the surgery out till September to get to the conference.

Hope all is well with you. Appreciate you!

**אלישבע**

**Dr. Elisheva Irma Diaz, BAJS, MTS, DD (Rabbi)**  
President and Founder, Author and Lecturer  
[www.Ayekah.org](http://www.Ayekah.org) • Los Angeles, California



### Courage and validation

**M**y name is Ricardo Villarreal De Silva. I'll be presenting “Stories From My Mother's Childhood: Am I Seeing Things That Aren't Actually There?” on 15 August [at the El Paso Conference].

I'm emailing you to tell you that your “From the Editor” article moved me. The latter part of the second paragraph really captured how I've felt growing up and still feel today. Being from Texas and telling people that I'm not Mexican didn't, and doesn't, make me a lot of friends. Since I was young, I've been made fun of because of this identity and accused of “making it up” because I'm ashamed. I inherited my identity from my family, which is an expression of their collective experiences. And because of SCJS, I'm able to express my identity as a Jew. This is what your article said to me. Thank you.

I hope to meet you in El Paso.

**Ricardo Villarreal, Davis, California** 🇺🇸

town of Besalú, on the door of a synagogue in Girona, and outside the house of a Jewish family in Madrid.

Hopefully peace is ahead. May all who have lost their lives never be forgotten, and may Jews, Muslims and Christians everywhere be safe.

Respectfully,

  
Corinne Joy Brown, Editor



# SCJS Board Changes



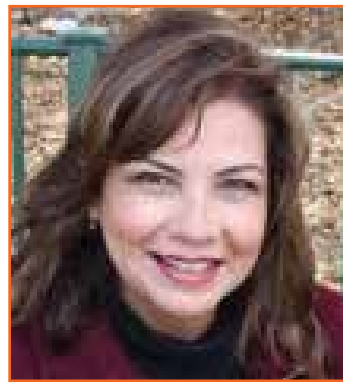
**MARIA APODACA**  
Albuquerque, New Mexico



**NATALIE TRUJILLO GONZALEZ**  
Dover, Delaware

**E**lisheva Diaz will suspend her duties as secretary in order to work on the 2025 conference. Beth Chernoff will assume these duties as an interim secretary.

Invitations to consider new candidates for the board will become active in April 2024 and will be based on open positions. 🌐



**ELISHEVA IRMA DIAZ**  
Los Angeles, California  
Elishevairmadiaz@gmail.com  
www.ElishevalrmaDiaz.com



**BETH CHERNOFF**  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
bec411@hotmail.com

**T**he SCJS board wishes a fond farewell to two long-time board members who retired in August 2023. Thanks to Maria Apodaca of Albuquerque for her years of service in membership and outreach.

And a special thanks to Natalie Trujillo Gonzalez of Dover, Delaware who served as membership chair for the past several years. We appreciate all your time and effort.

## ABOUT THE COVER



### Our Shabbat Table

**“M**y name is Bruni Penina Castro Viuda de Mandracchia. I am a Puerto Rican Jew with Spanish Portuguese Sephardic parents. They are descendants of the Inquisition. I took this picture (left) because this is how we would light our Shabbat table – ready for *Lecha Dodi* at the entry way – so that whoever walks by our home – and when my husband, the late Vicente Mandracchia would come from trucking – this would be the first thing he and our neighbors would see: our home ready for Shabbat. Shabbat has always been life for us, a way to survive, and helps us disconnect from this world and enter into *Gan Eden*. My ancestors did it this way, and the tradition continues from my parents to me, to my children and grandchildren. The crocheted *mantilla* I made, as my mother and my grandmothers did before me.” 🌐



# SEPHARDIC JEWS IN THE HUGUENOT DIASPORA

.....

DOUG SCHAR



*Drawing of the wandering Jew made in 1852 by Gustave Doré to illustrate the mythical immortal man whose legend began to spread in Europe in the 13th century.*

Some years ago, I read the late Dr. Abraham Lavender's article, "Searching for Crypto-Jews in France: From Spanish Jews to French Huguenots," Dr. Lavender suggested that many *conversos* fled the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal and hopped the border into southern France. Once there, some became French Protestants or, as they are more commonly known, Huguenots.

Lavender's theory intrigued me as I have Huguenots woven into my crypto-Jewish family tree. The Huguenot part of my tree had never held any great interest for me, but thinking some of them may have been Spanish crypto-Jews, suddenly made them a lot more interesting. I decided my neglected Huguenot ancestors and Lavender's theory needed a more thorough examination.

To begin with, Lavender pointed out that France, as a refuge for fleeing Spanish *conversos*, was often overlooked. This is odd because for *conversos* on the run, France was the easiest way out of Spain. They could walk there. It was an obvious place for them to go and they did.

Once in France, the *conversos* had three lifestyle options. They could return to Judaism, remain Catholic, or join the French Protestant Church.

Lavender said, "Protestantism appealed to social groups that felt themselves repressed, threatened, or in some way frustrated" by the Catholic Church. For the Iberian Jew, from the time of the Expulsion through the Inquisition, repression, threat and frustration would understate their experience with the Catholic Church.

Thus once in France, some *conversos* found Protestantism a more appealing option than Catholicism and perhaps a more comfortable option than returning to Judaism. More than a few *converso* families joined the French Protestant Church. That is where Lavender left his research and where mine began.

It turns out, not only was France close to Spain, at the very times *conversos* were on the run, it was a welcoming place. When the French regained control of Bordeaux from the English (1453), it was depopulated. Decrees issued in 1472 and 1550 welcomed foreigners to migrate to Bordeaux. The decrees worked and Bordeaux became a haven for *conversos*. At a point, there was talk of expelling the *conversos* from Bordeaux, but the Parliament of Bordeaux petitioned the French king to allow them to stay. The *conversos*

brought in business and taxable income. As a result, Bordeaux, Bayonne and the surrounding areas continued to welcome wave after wave of Spanish refugees. Many arrived in the late 1560s, a time when the Inquisition was particularly active in Spain and Portugal. Once in this haven, they lived as Jews, as Catholics, and as French Protestants.

After several generations of living in France, *conversos*/French Protestants, realized they had picked the wrong team. On October 18, 1685, Louis XVI issued the Edict of Fontainebleau, removing the right of French Protestants to live in France. They could convert to Catholicism or leave the country. Once again, *conversos* had to choose between becoming Catholic or fleeing. Some became Catholic, some fled.

The French Protestant refugees, once living outside of France, became known as Huguenots. The mass exodus of Huguenots from France had a curious benefit. It provided cover for recent escapees from the Iberian Peninsula. The countries that welcomed the Huguenots did not ask too many questions. If you said you were a Huguenot, you were a Huguenot, even if you had a Spanish last name and a last known Spanish address. There is evidence that more than one *converso* family adopted a “French Reform” identity having never lived in France.

The English *Alien Registry 1503-1626*, lists dozens of “Spaniards and Portingales” recently moved to London from Spain, who bore Sephardic Jewish last names and upon arrival, joined the “Frenche Church.” Albert Hyamson said this, “Whether or not these communities were known to be Jewish, they passed generally as groups of Protestant refugees from Spain and Portugal and as such, were given shelter.”

Thus some *conversos* became French Protestants in France, and some became French Protestants



**DOUG SCHAR**  
Great Falls, Virginia  
dougshar@aol.com

**D**ouglas Schar received his undergraduate degree in Jewish history. He then earned a medical diploma and a PhD in medical botany. Upon retiring from medicine, he returned to his first love, Jewish history. He now works full-time researching the crypto-Judaic identity and is currently focusing on the crypto-Jews of Northern Europe. His next project involves the crypto-Jews who lived illegally in England, 1502-1626. Doug publishes his research on his website, [www.HiddenJewishAncestry.com](http://www.HiddenJewishAncestry.com).

outside of France. From either direction, Dr. Lavender was quite right: some Huguenots had Sephardic Jewish origins. Since Abraham Lavender wrote his paper, more research resources have become available. For example, many Huguenot genealogical societies have made their databases available online. To test Lavender’s theory, I decided to collect Huguenot surnames and then compare them to known Sephardic Jewish surnames.

Using available refugee lists, I was able to create a database of over 102,000 Huguenot refugee surnames. Genealogist Genie Milgrom ([www.Geniemilgrom.com](http://www.Geniemilgrom.com)) was kind enough to share her Sephardic surname database for my research. When I merged my database with Milgrom’s database, the result was astonishing. Approximately 35% of Huguenot refugees had Sephardic surnames.

My next step was to look at specific Sephardic families that “became” Huguenot.

## ABBADIA

The Abbadia family, with its many spellings, was firmly entrenched in Spain long before the Edict of Expulsion (1492). When given three months to convert or leave Spain, some family members evacuated as Jews to North Africa, the Ottoman Empire and Italy. In Genie Milgrom’s Sephardic database, one can find 1,116 Jewish Abbadias living around the world.

For those that remained in Spain, conversion did not solve their troubles. They may have been outwardly Catholic, but their Jewish ancestry was never forgotten. When they could not be persecuted for being Jews, they were persecuted for being bad Christians. Inquisition records from *El Libro Verde* indicate a Maria de la Abbadia, Juan de la Abbadia and the brothers Pedro and Juan



Abadia were sentenced to death by the Inquisitors.

Not surprisingly, this caused another wave of Abbadias fleeing the Iberian Peninsula, this time as *conversos*. Looking at three *converso* refugees, we can see this wave ended up living very different lives.

Israel Abbadié lived and died in Pyrenees-Atlantique, Nouvelle, Aquitaine. He married Marie Lannes, another Sephardic Jewish surname. His three children, Jeanne (1685), Catherine (1687) and Jean (1689) were baptized in the Catholic Church. Israel died in Aquitaine in 1702.

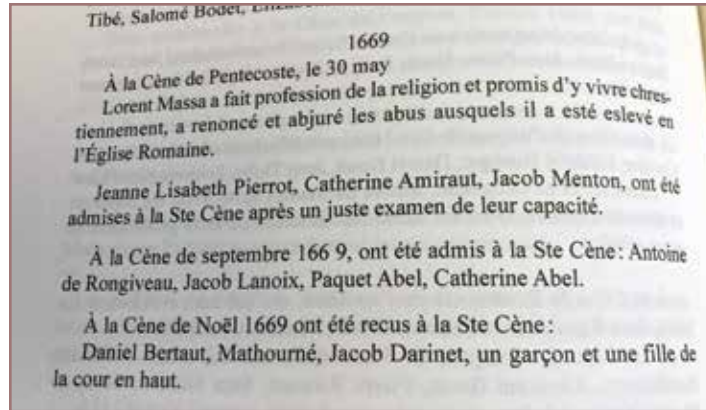
A different Israel Abbady became the minister to the Jewish congregation in St. Thomas, Kahal Kadosh Nidhe Israel, from 1772-1794. He was appointed to the post by the Spanish and Jewish congregation of London. He married the widow Abigail Rodrigues de Leao in Barbados (1782), died in St. Thomas and was buried as a Jew.

Abbadias appear in the French Reform Church books in Germany, England and the United States. One such Huguenot would be Jacques Abbadié. He was born in Nay, Bearn in 1654 to a Huguenot family. He achieved his Doctor of Theology before the age of 17. The elector of Brandenburg invited him to Berlin to be the minister of the French Church. In 1688, he moved to England and became the minister of the French Church in Savoy, London. A year later the English King William III made him the dean of Killaloe in Ireland, an Anglican church. He remained in that position for 30 years. Keeping up the *converso* tradition of aliases he was known as Jacques Abbadié, Jakob Abaddie, and finally James Abbadié. He died in 1727 having had a distinguished career as a “Huguenot minister.”

And then some Abbadias came to America. Jean Vincent D’Abbadie de Saint Castin (1652-1707) came as a child to Canada, became a military powerhouse, and had a lot of children. Beyoncé is thought to be one of his descendants.

## THE ARRANDA FAMILY

The Sephardic Arranda family (Aranda, De Aranda, De Arande) represents a certain sort of Spanish Jewish story. Some Jews in Spain between the 12th and 14th centuries rose to high positions. And when given the choice to leave the country or convert, some converted and retained their high positions — for a while.



In Cecil Roth’s books, *A History of the Marranos*, and *Conversos, the Inquisition and the Expulsion of the Jews of Spain*, the Arranda family appears.

Roth states, “After the Expulsion, Torquemada also presented charges against another *converso* Bishop, Pedro D’Aranda, Bishop of Catalonia and head of the

Concejo of Castille. He and his bastard son, the proto-notary Apostolic of Alexander IV (Borja; A Spanish Pope) were tried by that pope and sentenced to life in prison in Rome.”

Pedro D’Aranda must have been a Jew of some standing to land a Bishopric, and the fact that his son also got a prime job in the Church in Rome confirms this position. But as was often the case, anyone carrying Jewish blood, no matter what their standing, was not safe from accusation and trial by the Inquisition. In the *El Libro Verde de Aragon*, Gonzalo de Aranda, Pedro de Aranda (alias Juce Arrepol), and Esperandeu de Aranda (alias Samuel Albala) were all sentenced to death by the Inquisitors.

In *El Libro Verde*, we find an odd Aranda family story. Juan de Aranda (alias Juan de Linares) was sentenced to death by the Inquisition. His charge was worse than practicing Judaism secretly. His crime was being a member of the French Reform Church. So here we have a Spanish Jew who became a Catholic who became a member of the French Reform Church in Spain.





The Aranda family appears in the Huguenot world usually under the name D'Aranda and D'Arande. Like in Spain, the family continued to occupy high positions. Reverend Elie D'Arande (1619-1683) was a minister in the Walloon Church in Flanders. He was married to Elizabeth Bonhomme. The surnames indicate both were of Sephardic Jewish origin. When the Duke of Alba arrived in southern Holland to rid it of *conversos* and Protestants, the couple being double winners – both *converso* and Protestant – fled to London.

Their son, Rev. Elie Paul D'Arande (1625-1669), was born in London and would attend Oxford and become a minister in the French Reform Church. Their grandson, Paul Arande (1652-1712) and their great-grandson Paul Arande (1686-1732) became “Turkey Merchants” in the city of London.

“Turkey Merchants” belonged to the Levant Company also known as the Turkey Company. The company forbade Jews to join. However they traded with the Levant (Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and Cyprus) through *converso* intermediary merchants. And apparently, they also employed Huguenots of Sephardic origin.

## THE ASTRUC FAMILY

The Jewish Astruc family pops up all over Spain long before the Edict of Expulsion. A common Jewish surname, it had many variations. Jews of high and low position carried the name.

In France, being of *converso* ancestry was neither a secret nor a social impediment. We can see this in the life story of Jean Astruc (1684-1766). Jean was born to a family of known Sephardic origin. However, his father was a Huguenot pastor! This branch of the Astruc family was super-Huguenot. Until they were not.

When given the choice of becoming Catholic or leaving France, Jean Astruc and his immediate family became Catholic. He was and still is noted as a gifted biblical scholar and physician.

Many French Protestant Astrucs did cleave to their Protestant identity. They fled France in 1585 and became part of the Huguenot Diaspora. Shortly thereafter, they can be found living in Germany, England, Ireland, and America.

## BELLOC FAMILY

This family appears in Mallorca when Daniel Belloc, a converted Jew, was tried by the inquisition in 1488 and in 1491. In both cases he was granted a reconciliation or Edict of Grace. He somehow managed to avoid being put to death. The name Belloc is listed in Pere Bonnin's “who is who” of Spanish Jews, *Sangre Judia* and in *Dictionario Sefardi de Sobrenomes*. Some family members left at the time of the Edict of Expulsion for Tunisia, Algeria, and Italy under the name Belhaiche. Others left as *conversos* for the New World under the name Belicha, Bellicha, Belich, and Belloc.

The Bellocs, like many *conversos* ended up in Bordeaux. Some lived as Jews and some as French Protestants.

One Bordeaux French Protestant family was headed by Moise Belloc (1650-1719). Moise and his wife Jeanne Sere, were both from families of Marchands de Bordeaux, Bordeaux merchants of Sephardic origin. Moise was not only a French Protestant, but a powerful one. He was *Procurator Protestant de la Chambre et Edit* or the Protestant Prosecutor of the Chamber. What does that mean in English? He was the judge of a special court that adjudicated disputes between French Protestants.

This particular French Protestant family was made famous by Moise's great-great-great grandson, the painter Jeanne-Hillaire Belloc (1786-1866). Jeanne-Hillaire lived in Paris but moved to London after marrying an English woman, Louise Swanton.

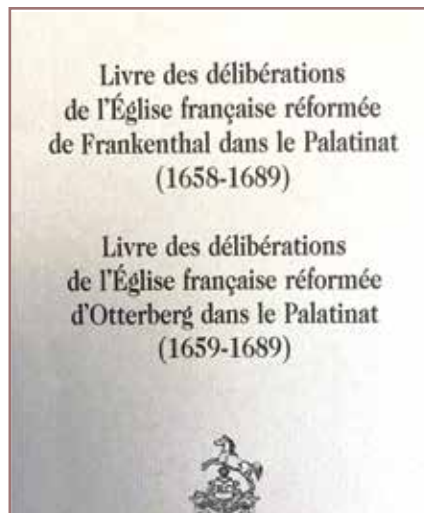
This is where the family history turns weird. Jeanne's grandson, Hillaire Belloc (1870-1953) would become a famous writer in London. He wrote popular, though sadistic children's books, and essays on contemporary topics. He joined the Catholic Church. And finally, he became one of England's leading anti-Semites. His 1922 book, *The Jews* is littered with blatant anti-Semitism. In his opinion, it was impossible for Jews and Christians to co-exist –

Jews of any form, converted or compliant. Oddly, he seems oblivious of his own Jewish origins.

## CONCLUSION

Dr. Abe Lavender was quite correct: some Huguenot families descend from Sephardic Jews! If you have Huguenot ancestry, you might want to examine it a little more closely. I found many of my Huguenot ancestors descended from Sephardic Jews.

My 11th great grandfather, Lorent Massa (Loys, Luis), bore a Sephardic surname, converted and joined the French Reform





Church in Otterberg, Germany on May 30, 1669. He married a Huguenot woman, Esther Baugeo (Baugez), in the French Reform Church in Otterberg. Their children did the same. Their Huguenot granddaughter, Christina Marguerite Massa, arrived in America on a boat called the *Phoenix* on October 1, 1754 and once landed, he promptly became a Lutheran.

Looking at the *converso* families that became French Protestants, one thing becomes clear. These families had an elastic identity. With each twist and turn of history, they were inclined to become something else, ever passing farther and farther away from their Jewish past. Joining the French Protestant Church would be the first identity change, but in many cases, it would not be their last. And the French Protestant Church was just one Protestant church *conversos* called home.

I found some very revealing lines in the article, “A Review of the Jewish Colonists in Barbados in the Year 1680” in the 1935 *Journal of Jewish Historical Society of England*:

“A very interesting character too, was Mijnheer Paul Jansen De Vreda who had moved from St. Michael’s into St. Peter’s Parish at the commencement of 1680. In that very year, 1678, which saw a godly Christaen de Breda appointed a deacon of the Dutch Church in Austin Friars, London, this other scion of that well known Flemish family was to be found living in Barbados among the Jews and as a Jew. In the congregation he was naturally known as Abraham Devreda. It is not difficult to picture the angry mutterings and the looks of shocked surprise with which Mijnheer Francis Vanderwarfe and the other Hollanders of St. Peters must have greeted “Mr. Paul Dawrade’s” daily passages through the street of the Spreights. On September 27, 1662, he became an English subject.”



Warmest thanks for their generous gifts  
 ROBIN AND BENNETT GREENSPAN FUND  
 at the HOUSTON JEWISH COMMUNITY  
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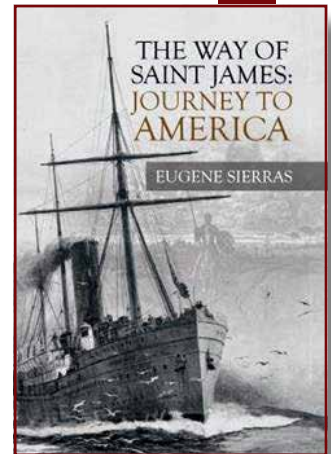
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# Rhythms

## Along the Río Grande

.....  
MARÍA-LUÍSA ORNELAS JUNE

FROM CHAMISA — A JOURNAL OF LITERARY, PERFORMANCE, AND  
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OUR FAMILIES  
OUR SECRETS

**L**AREDO 1971. Dressed in a black leotard and skirt with ruffles lined with white ribbon, I stand in third position wearing a pair of black, ribbon-tie, tap shoes. Miss Zúñiga, our teacher, is also dressed in a black leotard and skirt, her eyes accented with liquid eyeliner like a cat. I place my castanet-clad hands in first position.

Twelve five-year-olds in two lines face a mirror. Angled shafts of afternoon sun illuminate the ever-present dust in Laredo, Texas. Miss Zúñiga circles, shaping our left hands into *toritos* to tap the castanets, and positioning the right ones for the roll. Ta-ria-ta-pi-ta, ta-ria-ta-pi-ta. Left hit, right roll, left hit, right hit, left hit. Our little hands click through a basic *Sevillanas* pattern. Later we roll our hands toward and away from our bodies creating *manos floreadas* (flower hands) and bend as close as we can to the ground without falling, making a 360-degree turn in *vuelas quebradas* (broken turns).

Just as little girls of white, middle-and-upper classes in the United States take ballet, *las niñas de las familias buenas* (girls from good families) in Laredo and other parts of the Río Grande Valley, take Spanish classical dance. Later in the week, we will return for ballet because we are Mexican-American, straddling the mix of cultures along the Río Grande border. But Spanish classical dance sets us apart from our American counterparts and provides a rhythm that will reoccur throughout my life and become a part of my history, 216 years after the Spanish settled along the Río Grande.

My family founded Laredo in 1755. A number of settlers were *conversos* of Sephardic origin, descendants of Jews who converted to Christianity after Isabella and Ferdinand, the Catholic Spanish monarchs, enacted the Edict of Expulsion in Spain in 1492.

Having this ancestry comes with baggage. For many Latinos and Latinas in the Americas, the claim to Spanish ancestry is code for social and racial superiority. The Spanish enforced a caste system in the Americas that confirmed a colonial social hierarchy in our DNA. Having Spanish ancestry gets complicated when one's Sephardic ancestors saw themselves as Mexican. This edict forged the birth of the *Tejano*, a sort of post-*converso* phenomenon, and one of their progeny is this *Tejanita*. Me.

Life on a border creates a space where various cultures co-exist, externally and internally, both in the physical world and inside one's head. The historical record of my male ancestors is rich, but provides little information about the women who settled along the Río Grande beyond their births, deaths, marriages, and the children they bore. My ancestor, Catalina Uribe, had 13 children, a few after her husband founded the settlement of Laredo. They joined the exodus of *nuevoleoneses*, uprooted residents from Nuevo León who helped settle the new province of Nuevo Santander in 1748. Catalina likely birthed a number of her children in a *jacales*, a homestead made of mud and sticks. >>>



Another ancestor, Macaria Ramos, was born in Laredo, Tamaulipas, Mexico in 1840, four years after Texas declared independence from Mexico, but eight years before Mexico ceded the land between the Nueces River and the Río Grande, including Laredo, to the United States in 1848. She married a man born in Laredo but on the west bank of the river; an area that would become Nuevo Laredo with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. She and her husband raised a family in a stone house on a prosperous rancho and worked in the cattle industry, the core economy of northeastern Mexico. Macaria's son, my great-grandfather, lived and died in Laredo.

During these two generations, the family stayed in Laredo, but their citizenship changed. They have lived on the eastern banks (for American border purposes, the northern banks) of the Río Grande ever since. By the time I came around, my family had lost the rancho like so many other *Tejanos*. Still, both at home and on the streets, we spoke English, Spanish, and Spanglish. Those whose families have lived along the Río Grande for generations do not talk about the river as a national border. When we go to Mexico, we say, *Vamos al otro lado*. ("Let's go across the river.") We do not say, "Let's go south of the border."

But what goes on in our heads and is expressed in our culture is more complex. Unlike our mother, my sister and I are stay-at-home wives and mothers; however a common thread runs between us. Even though my sister and I live in different cities, we celebrate holidays together.

Christmas in Laredo involves Mass on Christmas Eve, followed by tamales and hot chocolate. On Christmas Day, we make a prime roast dinner, a version of a Hallmark Channel Christmas celebrated by *Tejanos*. At Easter, the family makes *carne asada* while the kids hunt for confetti-filled eggshells, *cascarones*.

\*\*\*\*\*

My sister and I talk daily. We gossip, *chismearnos*. We plan family vacations together and solve problems that our kids and our nieces and nephews bring us, as well as ones they do not. We are meddling *metichonas* and do not wait for an invitation to give advice which, when disregarded and catastrophe falls, causes us to stare and say one thing only: *Por?* It is a rhetorical question, the answer to which is *pendeja/o* (figuratively, "idiot").

My sister and I got advice from our mom daily, even when I lived overseas and calls were costly. This rhythm of household management is nothing new. In 1930, the Texas folklorist, Jovita González wrote about the social life of women along the Río Grande, noting the demands of home management, while living a life of cloistered seclusion. We complain about the lack of time

for socializing, thus reinforcing the idea that our home life is all-consuming. But as stay-at-home moms, we enjoy our home management even if it takes up all our time. Given that we live the lives of our foremothers, iron-fisted home management is in our genes.

Latin American history professor Susan Migen Socolow explains that the focus on family, both nuclear and extended, was a Mediterranean cultural value that the Spanish and Portuguese imported to America. The rhythms of family life brought across the Atlantic from Spain to the banks of the Río Grande continue to shape our daily lives despite the passage of over 200 years.

Our culture takes elements from our ancestry in many ways. My maternal grandmother saw herself as American, as did my mom, both of whom had Southern inflections in their speech and exhibited



*The Río Grande border straddles the mix of Mexican-American cultures.*

Southern mannerisms, reflecting old ties with the French along the Gulf Coast. As a child, I remember them fussing over finger sandwiches, punch recipes, and desserts involving marshmallows and Jell-O for bridal and baby showers. My paternal grandmother Margarita Mamie Hynes, came to the United States during the Mexican Revolution, c. 1910. Her father was an Irishman who worked the railroads during the period of rule by Porfirio Díaz, 1876–1910, and married a woman from Nuevo León. Every Thanksgiving,



my *Tía Lucy*, Margarita's daughter, prepares a side dish of roast beef and potatoes that reflects this Irish heritage. *Tejano* becomes the most inclusive term for this blending of cultures on the banks of the Río Grande.

Despite being a United States citizen, when asked, I would tell people I was

Mexican because they would not be asking if they thought I was American. When I was in high school and college, people from the interior of the United States treated me more favorably when they realized I had Spanish heritage because they could put me in the white category. Because of my contrary nature, I took on my Mexican heritage with vigor; it helped me weed out the racists. Thank God for the late Selena (Quintanilla-Pérez) because many understood better what I meant when I told them that I was a *Tejana*.

\*\*\*\*\*

Once Mexico declared independence from Spain, the “ideal” Mexican came to encompass a mythologized *mestizaje*, a mixture of Indigenous and Spanish heritage. Being *mestizo* assumes a claim to the Americas, as well as a flimsy exemption from the liability of Colonial atrocities. Claiming *mestizaje* is the path of least resistance. As a child, we shopped in Mexico. At the *mercado*, my mom bought me cotton dresses embroidered with flowers, along with leather sandals painted with cacti. She called the best and most raucous parties *mitotes*, which is a Nahuatl word. In high school, I wore Mexican floral blouses with my straight leg jeans and penny loafers. As teenagers, we would go clubbing in Nuevo Laredo. We would change our dollars to pesos and head to the dog races. A lucky night meant you could buy drinks when clubbing. The music at the club was Mexican, American, and a blend of both. Our social lives were lived in two different countries, filled with rhythms from our shared past. It is not embarrassment that keeps me from dwelling too much on my Indigenous ancestry, but doing so seems like cultural appropriation when so much European colonial culture defines my life. Still, Indigenous influences exist and are part of being *Tejana*.

I gave up the Spanish classical dance classes in middle school. When I went



**MARÍA-LUÍSA ORNELAS JUNE**  
Houston, Texas  
marialuisa.june@gmail.com

**B**orn and raised in Laredo, Texas, María-Luisa followed her spouse to postings in the Netherlands, Singapore, and India. She is an independent scholar focused on the folklore of *Tejano* culture, a self-described *Tejanista*. Her previous works have appeared or are forthcoming in *Chamisa: A Journal of Visual, Literary and Performance Arts of the Southwest*, *The Nasiona*, and in an anthology, *¡Somos Tejanas!* and she is currently working on a book.

to law school in San Francisco, I joined La Raza Law Students Association. The *Californios* tested my Chicano credentials. Did I identify as Mexican or Spanish? Maybe as white? One student belonged to an Indigenous people's dance group. I kept quiet about my Spanish classical dance classes. I hid my Spanish ancestry and silenced a part of the soundtrack of my childhood. But in 2019, the Spanish ancestors demanded my attention.

As part of Spanish reparations for the Edict of Expulsion, Spain enacted a law in 2015 offering Spanish citizenship to those who could prove Sephardic ancestry. In March 2019, my daughters found that the Jewish Federation of New Mexico provided information on this process. It involved taking exams, collecting documentation, providing certifications of ancestry, and proving a special connection to Spain. My daughters teased that my childhood recital dance photos in various Spanish costumes would suffice. My





*Castanets – essential to flamenco rhythm...*

genealogy revealed that my ancestors came from the southern coast of Spain, which mirrored the DNA that tracks my ancestry from Judea to the Spanish southern coast and from the Port of Veracruz to the banks of the Río Grande. My ancestors came from the small town of Lepe in the province of Huelva, in the autonomous region of Andalusia which is also the heart of the flamenco tradition. Think of the music and dance of that region... *Las Sevillanas, La Malagueña, El Fandango de Huelva, the Alegrías of Cádiz*, all towns in Andalusia. Moreover, I learned that some of my ancestors from Huelva had been burned at the stake in Las Palmas for Judaizing (practicing Jewish rituals in secret while professing Christianity in public).

We traveled to Málaga to sign before a *notario* in January 2020. As we took the AVE (the Spanish high-speed train) from Madrid to Málaga, we noted similarities between the Spanish landscape and the tropical desert plains of South Texas. I read up on Sephardic ancestry. I learned about the Spanish expeditions to the northeastern region of Mexico that established the towns on the banks of the Río Grande. I learned about *ganado mayor* (cattle), haciendas, ranchos and a way of life that has been culturally appropriated by the Anglo cowboy of the Western United States. Not surprisingly, an ad for an online flamenco class with the Ballet Hispánico in New York came across my Facebook feed. I signed up. When I introduced myself to my teacher, JoDe Romano, a former soloist with the José Greco Dance Company, she told me that she too was originally from Houston, where I currently live. I told JoDe that I was originally from Laredo.

“Oh,” she exclaimed, “my first teacher, María Luisa Marulanda Ballas was too!”

I informed her that María Luisa was my *Tía Lucy’s* dance teacher and that another dear friend of the Marulanda family, Silvia Zúñiga, was my teacher.

Many more connections followed, all with ties to different points in my family history. So in my mid-50s, I took up flamenco. I looked at YouTube videos of various *bailaoras*: *La Chispa, La Condesa, and La Capitana*. My interest in flamenco returned when my mind was ready, but my body was now past its prime. These days, my flamenco name is more likely to be *La Albondiga* (the meatball) rather than *La Coqueta* (the coquette). Wearing a black top and red skirt, castanets in hand, I stand in front of my computer while JoDe takes us through a *Sevillanas* practice, ta-ria-ta-pi-ta, left hit, right roll, left hit, right hit, left hit. The same rhythm of the Spanish *Sevillanas* of my childhood.

Flamenco traveled with the *Rajasthanis* to the coast of Andalusia, much like my ancestors traveled from Judea to Spain. Both took routes through the Levant and across the Mediterranean. Dances, instruments and songs melded along the way. The Inquisition turned the Jews, the Moors and the Roma into outcasts but together, they brewed the remnants of their itinerant cultures into the flamenco of southern Spain while hiding from the Inquisition and later, from Franco’s dictatorship. Perhaps this strife helped forge a certain resilience in flamenco.

Life on the border experienced a similar mix of culture and political strife. Indigenous peoples and *converso* Spanish mixed for about 100 years before Anglo settlers came for the land on which they could keep slaves. We again became the outcasts. Between a collapsing Spanish empire and Anglo encroachment, Mexico called for independence from Spain, sparking the beginning of more than 100 years of revolution. Soon Texas sought independence from Mexico. The newly minted Republic of Texas quickly became the 28th state of the United States, a slave-holding state despite slavery having been outlawed in Mexico in 1829.

In 1845 the US would initiate a war with Mexico to capture the land between the Nueces River and the Río Grande, land that had not been part of the territory the Spanish called Texas, but part of another state, Nuevo Santander, today known as the Mexican state of Tamaulipas. After the Civil War ended, life on the border involved Anglo settlers chasing off any previous settlers, including those with Spanish land grants. By 1910, the Mexican Revolution saw Mexicans crossing the border to find sanctuary in the United States.

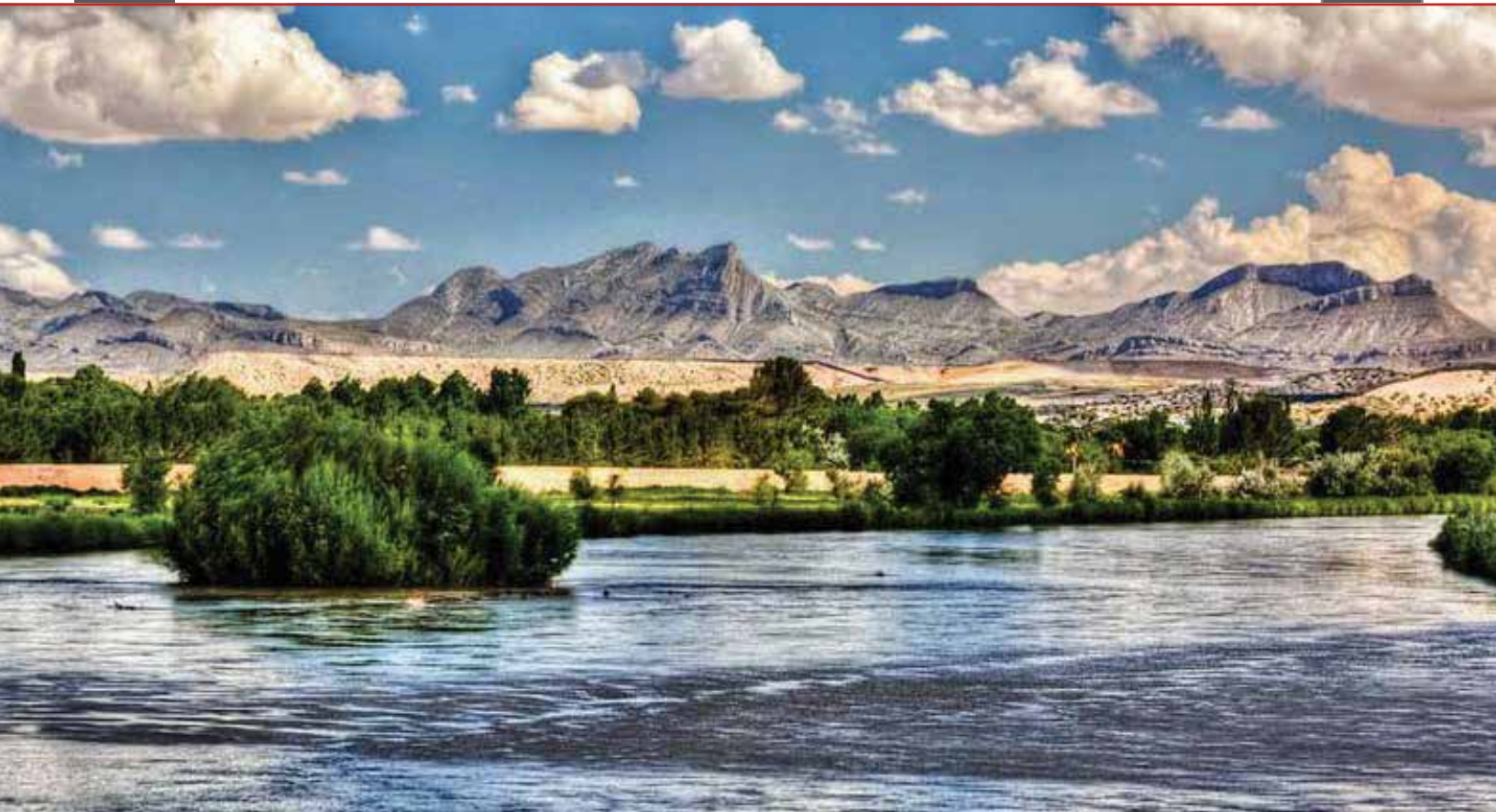
The revolutionary turbulence brought different cultures together, much like the Edict of Expulsion did for the Jews, the Moors and the Roma. With the Anglo settlers came the Germans – and their accordions that now feature so prominently in *Tejano* music. In order to survive, alliances along the border shifted with astonishing speed. Through it all, we were in turn, *conversos, españoles, republicanos, Mexicanos, constitucionalistas, Federalistas, Texians, Confederates, and United States citizens*. Despite nearly

a hundred years of revolution, life went on — celebrations were held and music was made and danced to. *Corridos* were sung to document the turbulence, using musical influences from both sides of the new border. The *conversos* from southern Spain, thrown together with the Indigenous people of the Americas into over a century of revolutionary fires along the Río Grande, forged today's *Tejanos* and their *Tejano* music. Yet in the 1970s, we still learned Spanish classical dance despite having given up our Spanish identity over 200 years ago. In Selena's last performance of "Como La Flor" at the Houston Astrodome, the Queen of *Tejano* embellished her song with *manos floreadas*, a flamenco flourish from our Spanish past.

My *Tía Lucy* still lives in Laredo. Her house sits in a middle-income neighborhood. Around her are *Tamaulipan*, scrub consisting of palm, mesquite, and *huisache* trees; assorted prairie grasses, prickly pear cacti and the occasional bougainvillea that dot front and back yards. Many houses have custom wrought iron door and window coverings; the occasional abandoned car or truck sits in the

yard. The smell of *leña* (firewood) and *carne* (meat, specifically beef) permeates the air every weekend night as families sit in the backyard cooking up a *carne asada* on oil drums converted to grills where fajitas, *costillas* (ribs), and polish sausage are grilled over mesquite. To add to the *puro pinche pari* (Spanglish for damn good party) atmosphere, *Tejano* music can be heard playing throughout.

*Tía Lucy* is 90 years old and suffers from dementia, yet when she heard about my dance classes, she asked her daughter for her castanets. Then she asked Alexa to play some flamenco music. *Tía Lucy* immediately started playing the castanets, flawlessly. She too recalled a rhythm from her youth and mine. Both of us, aging *Tejanas*, using our hands to recreate rhythms from a past shared by ancestors along the Río Grande and stretching farther, all the way back to the Mediterranean. 🌍



... the Río Grande — essential to life's rhythm in Texas.



# OUR FAMILIES OUR SECRETS

To recount my relationship and burning passion for Judaism, I must first frame it with a little story.

I was driving back home when I got a call on my cellphone from a headhunter in London. I was then working in Al Jubail, Saudi Arabia; it was 2010. I pulled over to take the interview and when we finished, I asked her for her full name. Upon hearing her name, I jumped from my seat and asked, "Are you Jewish?" "Yes, I am!" she answered, and without even thinking, I told her, "You know what!? I have a lot of sympathy for the Jews!" With a sense of humor she said, "Well, don't say that too loud over there in S.A." Later, reflecting on my reaction, I realized if it had happened when I was a child, my reaction would have been just the same. But where did those feelings come from? I have a clear mind about my sympathy for the Jews even then.

I was born and raised in a devout Catholic family in Maracaibo, Venezuela, but Catholic with a twist. Mom used to take much care to not miss a Sunday Mass, and at the same time, keep our house clear from pork. Her Christmas *hallacas* were pork free — traditional Venezuelan *hallacas*, by definition include pork. Our diet was at odds with the traditional *maracucho* aversion to vegetables. We had plenty of eggplant, cauliflower, green beans, and traditional Spanish Sephardic dishes. On holidays and weekends, we had special meals that included "kosher" wine. Neither Mom nor Dad ever explained to us children that our silver cups were *kiddush* cups. Later as an adult, I knew what they were when I saw them in a catalog from a Judaica shop. As a Catholic, I obviously never had a bar mitzva



## Hidden and Visible

.....  
HUMBERTO-RODRIGUES  
NAVAS

but my mom served me an inch of kosher wine for the first time when I reached 13 years of age. Something really special and different was going on that day. I will never forget her festive mood on that occasion. Now, she is not around for me to ask her.

When we kids were going out to play, she insisted that we wear our "kippa." Yes, you heard right, *kippa* and do not think of it as the round hat traditionally used by Orthodox Jews. She called *kippa* any kind of hat a male wore. This included baseball caps, military hats and so on and there was no power or argument on earth to convince her to use the common names. I often argued with her about the *kippa* thing and my father would gently step in to explain to me what a Jewish *kippa* was. I never considered Mom could have Jewish roots as she never mentioned a word about it, and we were officially Catholic after all. Nowadays I am more than convinced of our maternal Sephardic ancestry for a number of reasons I could recount at length and investigate on a later occasion.

**"Because they killed his parents."**

There were weird roots in Mom's Catholicism. Grandad Don Leopoldo, went to seminary to become a Catholic priest but dropped out when he met Grandma Ana (Hanna) and married her. They had 13 children with Mom being the youngest of all. Their names and those of the extended family displayed an array of *Tanach* names. Mom is the only Eden I have personally met in my life; it is a name far from common in Venezuela but very common within Jewish women from Israel and the Diaspora. I often tried to praise Grandad's attempt to become a priest





and make Mom feel proud about it. “Tell me Mom, how was it that Grandad went to the seminary?” Far from jumping with joy, her answer was always the same – short, mysterious and emotional: “Because they killed his parents.” Not a single word beyond that. Her sight lost in the vacuum, her lips pressed and would cut off the conversation. I understood clearly that I should not ask any further. But what happened and who were “they?” The mystery remained closed for me and after some time I would go back to ask again. As an adult, I learned about the Spanish Inquisition, the trials and the killings, and the families trying to keep their traditions in secret and fear. I learned that sacrificing a family member to become a priest or join the military was a resource to keep the family clear from suspicion. I also learned that when a Jew says “our parents,” she might well be referring to her direct parents or other ancestors up to Abraham and Sarah. I must admit that Mom was paranoid despite being very social. No newcomer would gain access to our family intimacy but after a period of deep scrutiny, and she was always on alert about strangers. I came to understand



Mom,  
Eden  
Navas  
Freites



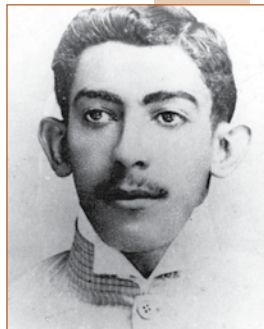
Sons and Mom –  
me in the middle



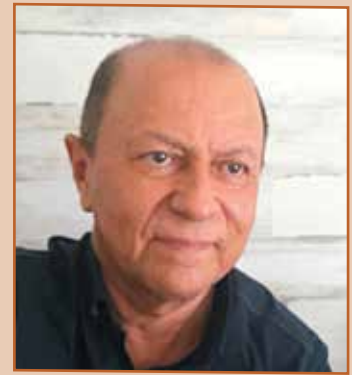
Family relics  
– kiddish  
cups



Dad, Hector



Grandad,  
Edgard



**HUMBERTO-RODRIGUES NAVAS**  
Katy, Texas  
humrodrig@gmail.com

**R**born in Maracaibo, Venezuela and currently living in Katy, Texas, Humberto graduated in architecture in Venezuela and completed a Master of Science in Architecture and Urban Design at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). After some years of urban design practice, He shifted his professional focus to project and construction management of refinery and petrochemical projects in South America and the Middle East and attained Advanced Project Management Certificates from Stanford University and the Project Management Institute (PMI). Currently he work as a project management consultant in oil and gas. "Family life, endurance sports and Torah study make my life plentiful, happier and healthier," says Humberto.

that fear and paranoia can pass from generation to generation, reaching up to me. But fortunately, along with it passes the love for our hidden family roots.

## Dad and the Jews

Our maternal family certainly had a degree of endogamy – recurrent intermarriage among a close circle of families was the rule. But Mom broke the rule when marrying my dad. Well, broke it in appearance, not in essence. A key ingredient seems to have been present in my dad’s personality to fit Mom’s criteria.

If Mom never said a word about Judaism, my father was a different species. If there is someone I consider I owe my conscious appreciation for the Jews, that was my father. I must insist he, like my mom, tried to raise us in the Catholic faith. Nevertheless, I never heard him saying, “look at the virtues of Saint this or that.” It was always, “the Jews do it this way or the other way,” and I only had to look around to see a Jewish



friend, classmate or neighbor to validate his teachings. Jews were the role model in many aspects of his values—education chats with me. I cannot assure that was the case with all of my brothers as he treated each of us with respect for our individual personalities and inclinations, but certainly we owe him a great deal for who we are and what we strive for.



corner. There and then I learned that Jews were nice, educated and discrete neighbors, and I loved that. It was also the time when Dad started to spend more time with me in intimate conversations filled with guidance and encouragement. I knew how far this Jewish connection had developed when Shirley, a girl who

lived in my block, was suddenly flown to a hospital in New York and returned a week later in a coffin. She died from fulminant leukemia. It was devastating for me at age ten. For me, she represented the image of the Jewish person my father had imprinted in my mind and encouraged me to follow.

My father instilled in me several loves, among them love for science and study, love for the Jews, and love for Holland. My grandad was a Dutchman and Dad himself knew Holland first hand as he worked with Anglo-Dutch Shell Oil Company since he was 19. Dad was born in Coro, Venezuela in 1918, a city that has one of the oldest Jewish cemeteries in the Americas and its Dutch community was essentially Jewish. I strongly believe that Grandad was a Jew though Dad never elaborated on the topic. Nowadays Coro has no practicing Jews and most of the original families have long left town or have fully assimilated.

## Me and the Jews

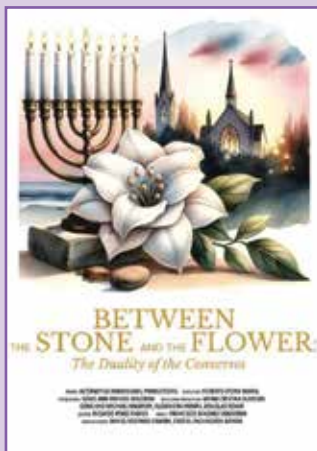
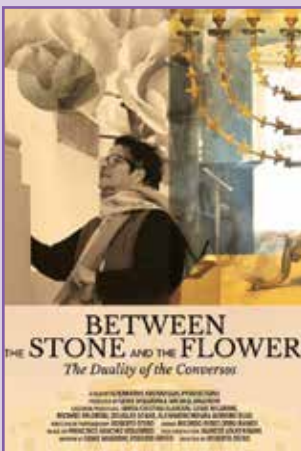
My family moved to a better house (Calle 75 with Avenida 12) and neighborhood when I was seven years old. There my inner connection with the Jews really started to grow and develop. The new neighborhood was home to quite a number of Jewish families and the Jewish school of Maracaibo (Bilu) was literally around the

Years went by and Jewish friends, classmates, professors, colleagues, and workmates kept nurturing in me this love and connection. Many of them gave me support that became personal and professional turning points for which I am profoundly grateful.

It took me almost a lifetime to see clearly that Judaism is my place; Jews are my family for which G\_d created me in the first place. I received a candle with a smoking wick and it is my mission to light it up again.

This process of awareness, education and return has taken several years already and I am conscious there is still quite a stretch to go. I am aware of the challenges, which are not small, but I am resolved to do all it takes to overcome each of them. 🕯️

## LONG-AWAITED DOCUMENTARY



I am so excited that the documentary, *Between the Stone and the Flower*, about my incredible journey and decades-long quest for my Jewish lineage, will premier in early 2024 in the United States and Europe (locations to be announced soon)! Reactions to the trailer have been amazing; everyone is anxious to see this long-awaited project. Filmed in seven countries by director Roberto Otero, a seasoned filmmaker, who



GENIE MILGROM  
[www.geniemilgrom.com](http://www.geniemilgrom.com)

was as thrilled to produce this film as I was to have him direct it.

“My family hid from the Inquisitors for 500 years under the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition without being able to say they were Jewish and eventually blended into a Catholic culture. I did not spend decades searching and returning to the Jewish people to hide now. I am proud to say ‘Ani Yehudi’ and #IStandWithIsrael. Stay tuned to see my journey in my soon-to-be-released documentary *Between the Stone and the Flower*. — GENIE MILGROM

Watch the trailer at  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=yflLzDoQA6k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yflLzDoQA6k)



# My Visit with Pope Francis

.....  
GENIE MILGROM

For over seven years I have been struggling to convince the archives around the world that contain Inquisition documents to agree to have them digitized at no cost (funding has been fully provided by a company in Israel) and I have hit brick walls and incredible resistance. Whether the reason for this is to leave the “ugly” history behind or some other reason, the reality is that only Portugal, and to some extent Mexico, have been positive in moving forward.

I have personally called on the directors of the archives in Spain, Canary Islands, Lima, Peru, Cartagena, Colombia, and others. After all these years and negative answers, I felt that Pope Francis would not only be able to move mountains for me but also allow me to have access to the unknown Inquisition records that are housed at the Vatican’s secret archives.

I called on the EJCC, Jewish Community in Brussels and my colleagues and leaders of the community, Rabbi Avi and Nehama Tawil, to help me get my foot in the Golden Door. They not only got me in but they organized a group of eight to accompany me and express to the Pope the major projects in the EU community.

We were led in through a back door and walked through mazes of Vatican rooms within the palace and private home of Pope Francis. It was an incredible and energizing experience to

realize we were very close to the windows of the balcony where he greets thousands. He met us graciously in his private library and asked all the cardinals and priests to leave us alone as we discussed back and forth. In total, we had one half-hour.

I had the opportunity to speak to him in Spanish (his native language) for about six minutes and explain fully why these records, containing the genealogical lineages of the Jewish people before their Diaspora from the Iberian Peninsula, were crucial to our history. He engaged with me, fully understood the need for transparency, and we even lightly joked with each other. He promised to follow through with this project and assigned an emissary that I have been working with ever since. We have met several times on Zoom. The Vatican prefers to start with what they have in the archives and move on to helping pursue the countries that are reticent to digitize.

Soon I will be meeting with the heads of the libraries and Vatican archives in Rome and covering all the documents I have identified that need to be or should be made available to the public. I am very close to making this dream come to fruition and

making an important contribution to the history of the Diaspora of the Inquisition. May we always face our challenges head-on and continue until we are successful no matter how difficult the road may seem. 🕊



*Genie Milgrom meets Pope Francis*



*A meeting with Pope Francis in his private library*

# IN MAIMONIDES' OWN HAND

Commentary on the Mishnah by Maimonides, circa 1160

.....  
COURTESY NATIONAL LIBRARY OF ISRAEL

**D**rafted in Morocco, completed in Egypt, sold in Syria, brought to England, auctioned in Switzerland, and purchased by Israel – this is the 800-year odyssey of Maimonides' (1138–1204) masterwork, *Commentary on the Mishnah* (an authoritative collection of exegetical material embodying the oral tradition of Jewish law and forming the first part of the Talmud), written in the sage's own hand. This autographed copy allows us to follow Maimonides' revisions throughout his life; his son, Rabbi Avraham, and grandson added further marginal notes based on Maimonides' oral teachings.

The first of three monumental works by Maimonides, the *Commentary* laid the legal and philosophical groundwork for the later *Mishneh Torah* (Code of Jewish Law) and *Dalalat al-Ha'irin* (Guide for the Perplexed). The *Commentary's* three lengthy introductions, in which Maimonides explains the nature of Jewish law, ethics and theology, are among the most important works of Jewish philosophy of all time. The six orders of the *Mishnah* of this *Commentary* were dispersed throughout the world over the centuries. When two sections went to auction in 1975, the Israeli minister of education, the mayor of Jerusalem, and other important Israeli figures who realized their cultural importance, called on philanthropists and the general public to contribute funds for their purchase. The successful acquisition of the manuscripts with collective funds made these documents the symbolic heritage of the entire Jewish people.



*Autograph manuscript of Maimonides, Commentary on the Mishnah, Order of Women (Nashim), Egypt, c. 1160s. Ms. Heb. 4° 5703, folio 31r. Photography by Ardon Bar-Hama.*

**M**oses ben Maimon, commonly known as Maimonides and also referred to by the acronym Rambam, was a Sephardic Jewish philosopher who became one of the most prolific and influential Torah scholars of the Middle Ages.

Born: 1138, Córdoba, Spain

Died: December 13, 1204, Fustat, Egypt

Influenced by: Ibn Rushd, Aristotle, Ibn Sina, al-Farabi, Galen, and others

Place of burial: The Tomb Site of the Rambam, Tiberias, Israel

Children: Abraham Maimonides

Parents: Maimon



In his time, he was also a preeminent astronomer and physician, serving as the personal physician of Saladin. Born in Córdoba within the Almoravid Empire (present-day Spain), on Passover eve, 1138 (or 1135), he worked as a rabbi, physician and philosopher in Morocco and Egypt.

During his lifetime, his writings on Jewish law and ethics were accepted with acclaim even as far away as Iraq and Yemen. He was acknowledged as one of the foremost rabbinic philosophers in Jewish history, and his copious work comprises a cornerstone of Jewish scholarship. His 14-volume *Mishneh Torah* still carries significant canonical authority as a codification of Jewish law. He is sometimes known as *haNesher haGadol*, הנשר הגדול, The Great Eagle. 🦅



# The Door is Closing

Portugal moves to end Sephardic Jewish citizenship law

CONDENSED FROM JTA, OCTOBER 17, 2023

Portugal's parliament has advanced a bill that would end the country's citizenship law for descendants of Sephardic Jews who were expelled during the Spanish Inquisition. It has passed an initial reading at the time of this writing, to be further reviewed.

Leaders in Portugal felt the law had served its purpose. Discussions in parliament over the next several weeks could push the end date for applications to December 31, 2024. According to the latest figures, approximately 262,000 individuals had applied for naturalization under the law by the end of 2022, and around

75,000 were granted citizenship. Some members of parliament expressed reservations about the move to close the citizenship pathway. But the Communist Party's Alma Rivera questioned the law's continued relevance. Portugal's law of return was less stringent than that of Spain, demanding only a clear criminal record and verifiable Sephardic lineage certificate, typically vouched for by major Jewish communities in Lisbon or Porto. Many controversies resulted in a tightening of the vetting process. Spain stopped accepting applications for its Sephardic citizenship law in 2021.

For the full story go to [https://www.jta.org/2023/10/17/global/portugal-moves-to-end-sephardic-jewish-citizenship-law?utm\\_source=JTA\\_Maropost&utm\\_campaign=JTA\\_DB&utm\\_medium=email&mpweb=1161-63381-7501](https://www.jta.org/2023/10/17/global/portugal-moves-to-end-sephardic-jewish-citizenship-law?utm_source=JTA_Maropost&utm_campaign=JTA_DB&utm_medium=email&mpweb=1161-63381-7501)

## Praying in Her Language

This *siddur* for women, *Seder Nashim*, is the first printed translation of prayers into Ladino, and one of the oldest printed works in this language. It appeared in Salonica (Thessaloniki), Greece as early as 1565, and its opening page contains what is likely the first printed appearance of the word, "Ladino." The *siddur* includes prayers and instructions for prayer for the whole year, brief summaries of the laws traditionally associated with women, and a translation of the Passover *Haggadah*.

Ladino, also called Judeo-Spanish or *Judesmo*, was a vernacular language that originated in Spain and developed primarily in the Balkans, Greece and Turkey among descendants of Jews expelled from Spain in 1492. Translating an entire *siddur* into the

vernacular was revolutionary in the 16th century, reflecting the popularization of printed books and the assumption of a female audience who were less comfortable with Hebrew. Although it is difficult to reach firm conclusions regarding the actual knowledge or practice of Jewish women based on this prayer book, *Seder Nashim* nonetheless exemplifies a socio-cultural context in

which it was expected, or at least hoped, that women would pray regularly and fulfill specific Jewish traditions.



Courtesy National Library of Israel.

Photography by Ardon Bar-Hama



# BLURRING THE BORDERS

## *El Paso and the Return of the Lost Jews*

Originally Published in *Savannah Sideways* • August 23, 2023

.....

JESSICA LEIGH LEBOS

The wall of rust-colored slats topped with curls of razor wire flashed with shadows as the tour bus sped by. I had seen it on the news, of course, but something about seeing it in person made me shudder. Maybe because I had only thought about it in the abstract, this hardline symbol of American divisiveness. But here was The Wall in person, the physical barrier separating West Texas from Mexico, the rush of the Rio Grande River contained in a concrete culvert just on the other side.

“Welcome to the Borderlands, the largest bi-lingual, bi-governmental crossroads in the world,” intoned tour guide and El Paso native David Varela as our air-conditioned bus passed under the massive eye of the giant red “X” sculpture, *La Equis*, the public art monument in Ciudad Juarez visible for miles from both the US and Mexico.

An ebullient historian in his early 30s, David briefly filled in the history of this scenic mountain pass once claimed as New Spain, its two largest settlements sprawling on both banks of the river that are now modern sister cities delineated by its ancient flow and more recently, the wall.

“Here’s the thing, though,” he explained as we traversed the highway on the American side, the rusty slats continuing into the distance. “Many of us who live here and have grown up in both places don’t see them as separate. The histories — and our families — go beyond these borders.” They are also part of a grander, complicated story that has barely begun to be told.



JESSICA LEIGH LEBOS  
Savannah, Georgia  
savannahsideways@gmail.com

I came to El Paso for the 33rd Annual Conference of the Society of Crypto-Judaic Studies (SCJS), a scholarly organization dedicated to uncovering the historical, religious, and cultural origins of a growing subcommunity of crypto-Jews around the world.

Now this can be confusing if you have never heard the term “crypto-Jews,” and given the times, some of you are either offended or looking around nervously for the space lasers. But this has nothing to do with the blockchain or Majorie Taylor Green’s favorite QAnon conspiracy.



*La Equis and the Rio Grande. Photo courtesy of Artistic Fuel*



*The Inquisition kept track of the thousands of crypto-Jewish surnames*

“Crypto” in reference to Judaism, precedes contemporary usage by centuries – back to 1492 in fact, when the Spanish monarchy, followed a few years later by the Portuguese king, expelled all the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, where many had been established for generations. Historically known as Sephardim, these Jewish families had settled in this part of the world after the fall of Rome, separate from their Ashkenazic cousins who later found refuge in what is now Eastern Europe.

Tens of thousands fled the only countries they had ever known, their property and possessions seized or sold for a pittance, some seeking asylum in the New World (some of Columbus’ navigators are theorized to have been Jewish). Others braved the Black Death in Europe and England, surviving in the margins of hostile societies until better opportunities prevailed for their grandchildren. (To bring this home quickly, a reminder that it was Portuguese descendants who sailed from London to Savannah, Georgia to found Congregation Mickve Israel in 1733.)

While large numbers of Sephardim left Spain and Portugal, hundreds of thousands more chose to stay and convert to Catholicism in order to save themselves and their families, becoming

“New Christians,” at least outwardly. Many dedicated themselves to a double life as faithful churchgoers, hiding their Jewish identities, practicing rituals, and studying Torah in secret – cryptically, as it were.

And for good reason: The enforcement arm of the Church called the Inquisition, known for its zealous interrogation of these *conversos* and others considered heretics, took special care in rooting out so-called “Judaizers,” sowing mistrust among neighbors and torturing suspects. Among the sadistic methods of these fanatical church cops were waterboarding



*Jessica (r) with crypto-Judaic scholar and Savannah girl Dr. Amy Aronson*

and “the rack” that plucked people’s limbs off, as well as the *auto da fe*, which were public burnings that were preceded by Mass and followed by a party afterward.

An estimated 32,000 people were executed by the Spanish Inquisition and those who came to colonize the New World did not escape its watchful eye. As the conquistadors and missionaries displaced the Aztec people and set up shop in what became Mexico City, the regular Spaniards who followed were

subject to the same terrors. Many of them were *conversos* who enfolded their Jewish identities even further into devout Catholic practices, passing them down through the generations until they blurred beyond obvious recognition.

As their descendants settled in Mexico as well as the future US territories of Texas, New Mexico and southern Colorado, they learned to light candles on Friday nights before saying the rosary, cover the mirrors when someone died, and abstain from eating pork – often without knowing why.

But it is not only the rituals that suggest Judaic connection: A 2018 research study published in the scientific journal *Nature* indicates that as much as 25 percent of people of Hispanic descent have genomes that contain Sephardic Jewish DNA, meaning that the *mispocheh* (extended family, and then some) is a lot bigger than anyone thought.

I know, it is a lot to take in.

I am still stupefied by it all, even though I have been reading about this secret history for years thanks to my mother, Marcia Fine. She researched it extensively for her novel, *Hidden Ones*, and has become a renowned lay-expert on the topic, speaking at past SJCS conferences and lecturing around the Southwest. (Some mothers treat their daughters to Caribbean cruises or shopping trips to New York; mine invites me to obscure, fascinating academic symposiums. Plus, we stayed at the historic Hotel Paso Del Norte, so refined!)

Even with the genetic evidence, it would be hard to believe that larger numbers of Latinx folks have Jewish roots if not for the vast documentation, including transcripts of trials conducted by the Church and the death sentences carried out. (The Nazis would later model their impeccable record keeping on the Inquisitors’ perverse attention to detail.

>>> On a related note, David Varela imparted that German SS scientists also got their poisonous “delousing” protocol at Dachau and other concentration camps — including the use of Zyklon B — from the tyrannical 1917 El Paso Bath Riots, another suppressed piece of American history.)

There are also firsthand accounts from those who died at the stake, notably Luis de Carvajal, who kept an illustrated diary before



*New mispocheh! L to R — My mom Marcia Fine, Georgia Gabehart, her mom Virginia, and me*

being imprisoned in 16th-century Mexico City and wrote prayerful missives on avocado pits and banana peels to smuggle out to his family before they were all murdered in the *auto da fe* of February 24, 1590. But Carvajal’s manuscript has only been studied in earnest since 2016 when it was returned to the Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City after its theft in 1932.

Perhaps that is why it has taken so long for some of these descendants to reclaim the Jewish parts of their identities, a movement that continues to gain momentum. Many begin exploring after recognizing familiar family customs in Trudi Alexy’s 1993 book, *The Mezuzah in the Madonna’s Foot*, as well as the work of Dr. Stanley Hordes, who discovered so many Jewish-ish aspects as New Mexico’s state historian in the 1980s that he co-founded SJCS in 1990 to give people an organized place to research their backgrounds — and find each other. 🕯

## Painting Finds A New Home

**K**udos to SCJS member, Natalie Trujillo Gonzalez, for donating the beautiful prints of her 2008 painting, “The Skulls,” to the first 20 attendees of the El Paso Conference. They were deeply appreciated.

This painting represents Natalie’s ancestors, the death of her family history and heritage, past and present, and pays homage to all the descendants who remember and honor their Sephardic Jewish past.

The larger print version of the original, a framed giclee, created for the silent auction, found a permanent home at the Los Portales Museum and Information Center in nearby Elizario, Texas.

“We are delighted to announce the newest addition to our museum’s distinguished collection,” said Director Marysol Benton, “a generously donated piece of art from Natalie Trujillo Gonzalez and the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies. This remarkable contribution not only enriches our gallery with its artistic brilliance but also brings with it a profound personal reminder of community and togetherness. It serves as a powerful testament to the enduring legacy of crypto-Judaism, a heritage that we hold dear to our hearts. This invaluable donation not only enhances our museum’s cultural significance but also strengthens our commitment to preserving and sharing these important stories with our community and future generations. We extend our deepest gratitude to Natalie and SCJS for their invaluable support in furthering our mission.”





## David M. Gitlitz Emerging Scholar Award

**Outstanding  
Academic or  
Graduate  
Student**

**LEONARD  
STEIN**



LEONARD STEIN, PhD  
Beersheva, Israel  
tintin.israel@gmail.com

Dr. Seth Ward, the 33rd SCJS Conference program chair, made the exciting announcement at the El Paso Conference of the selection of our second David M. Gitlitz Emerging Scholar Awardee, naming Dr. Leonard Stein of Beersheva, Israel, an academic in the field of comparative literature.

The award is a distinction created to recognize an emerging scholar in the crypto-Judaic academic community. The award honors the memory of David M. Gitlitz (1942-2020), a leading scholar of 15th- to 17th-century crypto-Judaism, frequent contributor to our conferences, and initiator of the SCJS Stanley M. Hordes Distinguished Scholar Lecture.

The award was established shortly after Gitlitz's tragic death in December 2020 due to COVID-19. The first recipient was French scholar H el ene Jawhara Piner awarded in 2021.

Dr. Leonard Stein completed his PhD in 2021 in comparative literature at the University of Toronto. He has also served as a past president of SCJS and helped chair the SCJS Philadelphia Conference in 2018. He has been a frequent contributor to many Sefardi and other related forums. Stein graciously accepted the award via Zoom on Monday at midday, before the lunch break. An honorarium accompanies the award, shown here.

We extend our sincere congratulations.  



## Conference Gratitude

The Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies (SCJS) 33rd Annual Conference in El Paso, Texas was a tremendous success!

Thanks to the efforts of the conference committee, we welcomed over 100 people from different parts of the country, received attendees from as far as Israel, Spain and Mexico, and over 40 people from the Borderlands region to a three-day program, August 13-15, 2023, that included pre-conference events starting at Temple Mt. Sinai in El Paso and ending at Los Portales Museum in San Elizario, Texas.

Two years ago I started knocking on doors, sending out emails, making calls, and networking. I made new connections that have now turned into friendships. All this was done to introduce to our region the upcoming SCJS annual conference in El Paso. El Paso is not a resort destination, but it has one of the most valuable things for our members, something not many other places have – the very relevant history of El Camino Real and El Paso del Norte.

From the moment I started researching the history of our region to create a special event, I not only enriched my life with information, but also with the love and openness I experienced from the many people who offered their support.

With many beautiful memories in mind, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Jewish Federation of El Paso and Las Cruces, The Anusim Center and Synagogue, Temple Mt. Sinai, Temple Mt. Sinai Sisterhood, Congregation B'nai Zion, Chabad El Paso, Temple Beth-El Las Cruces, the Consul General of Mexico in El Paso, the Honorary Consul of Spain in El Paso, the University of Texas-El Paso (UTEP) Center for Inter-American and Border Studies, UTEP Friends of the Library, KTEP, Mt. Franklin Insurance, Los Portales Museum, San Elizario Genealogy Association, El Paso Mission Trail Association, Ysleta Mission, Socorro Mission, Paso del Norte Hotel, Destination El Paso, *City Beat Magazine*, *El Diario de El Paso/Juárez*, and Cinewest.

And to those who answered the call for help ranging from donors who provided financial support to others who helped to choose the



Blanca Carrasco and SCJS long-time member, Art Benveniste celebrate 33rd Annual Conferences

venue, create the budget, reach out to prospective presenters and create the program, as well as design marketing materials and the conference schedule, I say a heartfelt thank you. I have to thank those too who proudly presented their research, volunteers who welcomed our guests, prepared registration materials, delivered special meals and coordinated specific programs. Thanks also to the drivers, those who helped promote the many events in the schedule, posted marketing materials, guided the tours, played music, sang, danced, recorded the presentations, translated presentations into English and Spanish, and most of all, opened their hearts to make this conference a one-of-a-kind experience.

Every one of you helped to leave a lasting memory among the people who attended the conference. We all proved that SCJS provides events that allow its members and guests to stay connected and appreciate fully the academic research underway worldwide about the amazing history of our people.

Looking forward to seeing you in Los Angeles in 2025!

Blanca Carrasco  
Chair. SJCS 33rd Annual Conference in El Paso, Texas

### Community Sponsors & Supporters

#### The Anusim Center/Synagogue

Rabbi Stephen A. Leon, Founder and Director  
Bill Radcliffe, Musician

#### Jewish Federation of El Paso and Las Cruces & El Paso Jewish Foundation

Marla Cohen, Executive Director  
Monika Kimball, Past Executive Director and Past President  
Rebecca Mendez, Program Director  
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#### The University of Texas at El Paso

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# CRYPTO-JUDAIC HISTORY OF THE BORDERLANDS

**Center for Inter-American and Border Studies** – Josiah M. Heyman, Director and Mark Jurado, Research Associate

**Temple Mt. Sinai**

Rabbi Benjamin Zeidman  
Sally Parke, Executive Director  
Mindy Escobar-Leanse, Education Coordinator  
Emy Laats  
Noel Hollowell-Small, Sisterhood President, Temple Mt. Sinai Sisterhood

**Congregation B'nai Zion**

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Diane Oberman

**Chabad El Paso**

Rabbi Levi Greenberg  
Dina Hamicha, Kosher Caterer

**Mt. Franklin Insurance**

Bill Carvajal, President

**Los Portales Museum**

Marysol Benton and Rene Fraire, Docents

**San Elizario Genealogy Association**

**El Paso Mission Trail Association**

Shelby McCue

**Ysleta Mission**

**Socorro Mission**

Magda Loya

**Paso del Norte Hotel**

Management and Leadership, Stuart Meyers, Denise Austin

**Destination El Paso**

Valerie Garcia, Stephanie Lara, and David Varela

**City Beat Magazine**

Ray Mesta, Director  
Romaree Herbert

**El Diario de El Paso/Juárez**

Emanuel Velez

**Cinewest**

Isaac Arntstein

**Consul General of Mexico in El Paso**

Mauricio Ibarra Ponce de Leon

**Honorary Consul of Spain in El Paso**

Martha Vera

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Seth Ward, Conference Program Chair and mentor  
Diane Mock, Treasurer  
Stan Hordes, Founder and mentor

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Miriam Rosenblum, Musician

Larry Lesser, Professor, Songwriter and Singer  
Arturo Cuellar, Genealogist  
Cesar Carrasco

*Awesome Volunteers*

Jeri Hallberg  
David Varela, Tour Guide  
Alex Sosa  
Dora Roe  
David Sabal, Photographer  
Angela Beagle  
Richard Beagle  
Rebecca Carrasco  
Marielle Hoadley  
Cesar Carrasco  
Alia Garcia-Ureste  
Jose Del Rio  
Thomas Krapin  
Chelsea Kidd



L to r, Angela Beagle, Richard Beagle, Blanca Carrasco, and Diane Mock



Registration tools



Conference bag



Violet Showery, Temple Mt. Sinai Sisterhood Vice President, and Corinne Brown at film night.



# Welcome SCJS Members, Speakers & Special Guests



L to r, Nadia Schowaikei, Erol Amon, Blanca Carrasco, and Isaac Amon



Welcome from Conference Chair Blanca Carrasco



Emcee Isaac Amon



SCJS President Rosa Marina Siegel

## Conference photos by David Sabal



Silvia Hamui Sutton, Keynote Speaker, and Ezra Cherem Behar

Kudos to our keynote speaker, Silvia Hamui Sutton, the Stanley M. Hordes Distinguished Scholar Lecture, for her brilliant talk and her support. And to Jillian Glantz for the Sosin-Stratton-Petit Address to Advance Scholarship in the Crypto-Judaic Arts, with her film Remember My Soul.



Jillian Glantz, Filmmaker



Isaac and Dr. Stanley Hordes



Sharon Leon and Blanca



Mr. and Mrs. Ricardo Villarreal.



Freddie and Diane Mock



Dennis and Loretta Worthington

# Information • Entertainment • Fellowship • Connect

# CRYPTO-JUDAIC HISTORY OF THE BORDERLANDS



Nadia Schowaike and Erol Amon



Richard and Angela Beagle



Marla Cohen, Executive Director of the Jewish Federation of El Paso & Las Cruces, and husband Salvador Mandry



Registrar Extraordinaire Violet Showery, Temple Mt. Sinai Sisterhood Vice President



Mauricio Ibarra Ponce de León  
Consul General of Mexico  
El Paso, Texas



Martha Vera  
Honorary Consul of Spain  
El Paso, Texas



Emy Laats and Blanca



Amy Aronson



Lillian Modak and Corinne Brown



Carla Sciaky

Kudos to the Mauricio Ibarra Ponce de León, Consul General of Mexico, and Martha Vera, Honorary Consul of Spain for sharing their thoughts with us.



L to r, Isaac Amon, Hely Schowaike, Nadia Schowaike, Erol Amon and Rabbi Stephen Leon, front



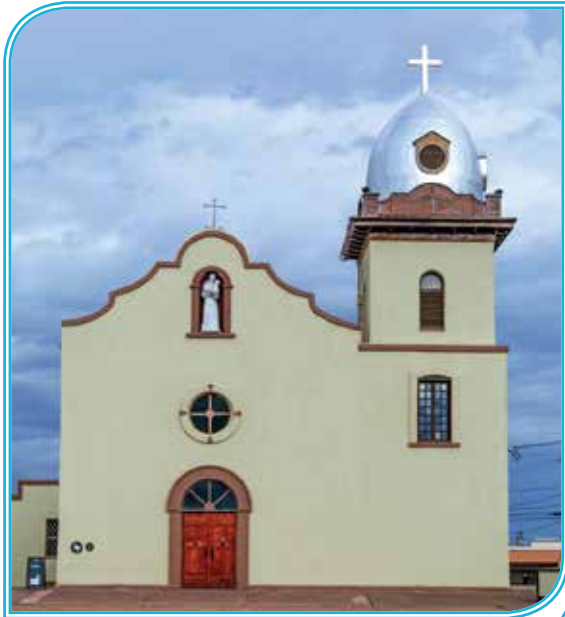
El Paso Convention Complex



El Paso

tion • Memories

# Pre-Conference Event – El Camino Real Trail Tour



All aboard the bus! First stop, Ysleta Mission, est. 1680. Above right, Shelby McCue, Director, Mission Trail Association. Right, David Varela, El Paso historian told this story – and so much more.



Next stop, Socorro Mission, est 1680. Right, closeup of intricate ceiling lattice.



Our guide, Magda Loya Maureira

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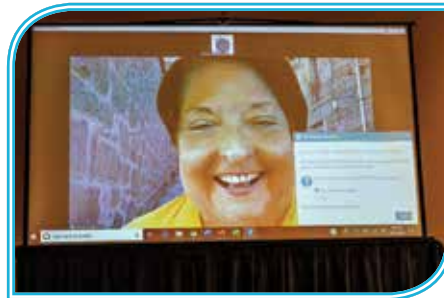
Last stop, Los Portales Museum in San Elizario that curated a special exhibit about crypto-Jews to honor SCJS – and hosted lunch. A lovely respite to close a fabulous tour!



Museum features the painting, "The Storeroom" by Diana Bryer (center), which was the cover of HaLapid, Spring/Summer 2017.

## Pre-Conference Event – Genealogy Workshop

Genie Milgrom, at right, could not make it due to COVID-19, so tuned in on Zoom. Later, we shared the trailer for her beautiful film, *Between the Stone and the Flower*. People were mesmerized!



A big hand to genealogist Arturo Cuellar from Family Search, at left, who enthralled us with research in Mexico.



tion • Memories



# Heritage, History ...



Rabbi Stephen Leon and Cantor Mindy Escobar-Leanse, Music & Religious School Coordinator



Our beloved Rabbi Stephen Leon added spirit and soul to every event. Above, the Havdalah and chanting the Prayer for the State of Israel, with Cantor Mindy.

Many thanks to Temple Mt. Sinai Sisterhood and President Noel Hollowel-Small, our film night hostesses.



Corinne Brown introduces Jillian Glantz, Sosin-Stratton-Petit Address to Advance Scholarship in the Crypto-Judaic Arts, and her film, Remember My Soul.



Stav Appel discusses his work, The Torah in the Tarot



# Information • Entertainment • Fellowship • Connect





# CRYPTO-JUDAIC HISTORY OF THE BORDERLANDS



*“Thank you very much for including me in the fabulous conference in El Paso. Even though I was nervous about*

*speaking in front of such a large and accomplished audience, I thoroughly enjoyed meeting so many fascinating people. We loved the hotel, the bus tour, the food, the entertainment, and of course, the presentations. I know that so much work goes into making it all look so effortless. You should be very proud of this wonderful success.”*

**— Ronit Treatman,  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**



*At closing, SCJS President Rosa Marina Siegel led attendees in a festive belly dance.*



*“From the moment I started researching the history of our region to create a special event, I not only enriched my life with information, but also with the love and openness I experienced from the many people who offered their support.”*

**— Blanca Carrasco**



*David Varela, left, in discussion with Jay Sage.*



*A special visit from Spanish lawyer and immigration expert David Ciriano and wife Magda, offered extra input.*



*Technical assistance was abundant. Abraham Gross and Seth Ward rose to the challenges.*



... Education ...



Rosa and Blanca



Blanca and Isaac Amon



Abraham Gross and Carla Sciaky



Jay Sage moderates panel: "Issues In Ancestry"



What a great conference. I enjoyed it so much. Even with my hurting foot. You are all so special. Thank you for always being so supportive of me. I want you to know how I appreciate you. — Elisheva Irma Diaz Los Angeles, California



Darla Berman, center



Panel: "New Spain — Mexico and New Mexico," Mark Schneegurt, above photo, left.



Seth with Amy Aronson



Panel: "New Spain — Mexico and New Mexico"



Seth Ward with Leonard Stein, via Zoom from Israel



Marcia Fine and Rebecca Wartell



Panel: "The Conversa Experience Through a Gendered Lens"



Teresita Lozano



As always, interaction is welcome



# CRYPTO-JUDAIC HISTORY OF THE BORDERLANDS



Alia Garcia-Ureste



Panel: "El Paso Heritage"



Peter Svarzbein



Dialogue with Aila, and David Varela



Elisheva Irma Diaz



Panel: "The Wide World: Crypto-Jewish Phenomena in Unexpected Places"



Rabbi David A. Kunin



----- Panel: "Freedom, History, and the Modern World" -----



Panel: "The Crypto-Jewish Experience: Up Close and Personal," with Art Benveniste (far left)



Maria-Luisa Ornela June



Ricardo Villarreal

SCJS provides events that allow its members and guests to stay connected and appreciate fully the academic research underway worldwide about the amazing history of our people.

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El Paso



# Judy Frankel Memorial Concert

Another casualty of COVID, our musical superstar Robyn Helzner also could not make it, but the multi-talented Hal Aqua with Miriam Rosenblum and Carla Sciaky presented the best of the group The Lost Tribe. Carla was already a presenter and Hal and Miriam flew in from Denver! What a rescue!



Best of The Lost Tribe



Hal Aqua



Carla Sciaky



Emcee Corinne Brown



Miriam Rosenblum



## Sales



Temple Mt. Sinai Sisterhood on-site gift shop



The Silent Auction was well received and netted small-but-mighty contributions for future SCJS conference attendees.

# Information • Entertainment • Fellowship • Connect



# Welcome Reception and Mariachi Fiesta

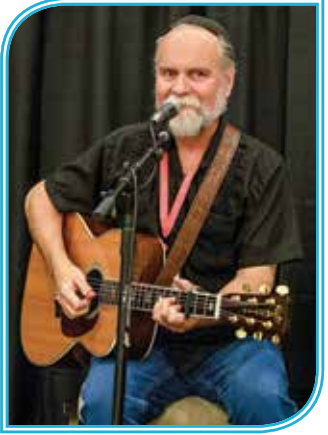
**Mariachi Los Pasajeros and Ballet Folklorico Orgullo de mi Tierra de Elena Vargas**



Brilliant costumes, choreography, vocals and instrumentals highlighted the opening event!



## More Music



Bill Radcliffe



Larry Lesser



Strong, free-spirited women break into a spontaneous dance fest.



Larry, Bill and Rabbi Leon sing a sweet closing in song.



# ... Enjoyment!



Rabbi Leon deep in conversation



Busy walk-in registration



Fellowship, networking and laughter



More attendees arrive



Isaac, Rosa Marina and Diane Mock

I loved this conference and I cried when it was over!  
— **Lillian Modak**  
**Black Mountain,**  
**North Carolina**



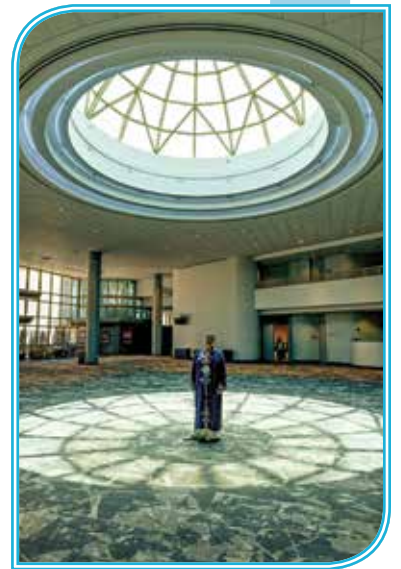
Renewing friendships



Consul Martha Vera, Rabbi Leon, and Abraham Gross



Daniel Carey-Whalen, Mark Schneegurt, and Peter Svarzbein



Blanca in the spotlight



A "moment"



Bill and Yoli Radcliffe, and Marcia Fine



Eugene Sierras and Daphna Sage



Avi Gross and Reid Heller



Deep in conversation



Questions posed and answered



Mother and daughter share joy

## So Long from El Paso — Join us again in 2025 in Los Angeles





Sharing stories



Making new friends



Jessica Lebos (2nd from right) and her "family" with Dr. Lawrence Kanter (far right)



Bidding farewell



Anticipating the next conference (2025)



Rabbi Stephen Leon



Rio Grande Style



"The New Mexico Besties"



Nan Rubin and her assistant



angeles!

## Los Angeles Here We Come!

Circle the month of August 2025 as SCJS plans for the next in-person 35th Annual Conference in Los Angeles, California. (That might also mean any of its suburbs.) We are all so excited to think we can meet on the West Coast – so much history there and home to many of us!

The planning committee is chaired by SCJS board member Elisheva Irma Diaz, with assistance from our longtime member Art Beneveniste, our most recent conference chair Blanca Carrasco, and of course, our program chair Seth Ward. The theme, venue and exact location are all forthcoming and will be confirmed in 2024.

We invite any and all SCJS member to get involved.

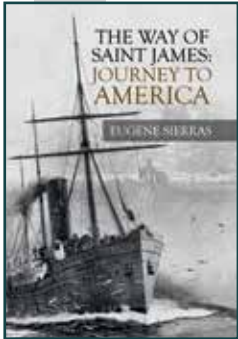
Simply contact Elisheva at [elishevairmadiaz@gmail.com](mailto:elishevairmadiaz@gmail.com).



2025 • LOS ANGELES

## The Way of Saint James: Journey to America

By Eugene Sierras  
Trafford Publishing 2019



It is possible that Arizona author Eugene Sierras has created a new literary form. You might call his engaging book a family biography, but it is not quite a biographical memoir because much of it is imagined. On the other hand, it is more like narrative non-fiction, where this author has traced a matrilineal history recorded in the family annals, but fictionalized

in part, many scenes to close the gaps. In the end, the form is irrelevant because this book is as good a read as any novel, rich with detailed research about the life of two medieval Jews with origins in Spain, their hidden lives as Catholics, and their courageous journeys to freedom in the New World — to the United States of America and Los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, to be followed by their descendants.

The two men, Mihail Gurevich and Baltazar de la Vega, (mid-18th century), both actual figures in Sierras' own family of ancestors, make that journey under peril. Mihail (his adaptive Russian name) crosses greater Europe to settle in Bohemia, and eventually makes his way to New York; while Baltazar leaves Spain as a young man to eventually become part of a greater family in Mexico via Veracruz.

The mysterious title, *The Way of Saint James: Journey to America*, refers to the famed road that pilgrims in Spain walk — the mystical road, the *El Camino Santiago*, also known as the “Way of Saint James.” The destination is nothing less than the Santiago de Compostela Cathedral, built in the 800s and rebuilt after a fire in 1075, where it is said the remains of St. James The Greater, the apostle, were buried after his martyrdom in Jerusalem.

The title of the book serves as a metaphor for the quest of each man, both of whom wore the cloak of Christianity well and survived the persecution that befell so many others like them. Each man was a unique product of the culture and society in which they were raised and both chose to venture forth, accepting whatever challenges and risks life presented to them. They each traveled

a long road from persecution to freedom. The circumstances of their histories have allowed Sierras to deeply explore the differing religious philosophies behind the two faiths and portray, in the case of Baltazar, how a studious and engaging young Spaniard, revealed to be a Duke as well as a cousin of Cristobal Colon (Columbus), talented in military arts and languages and in love with theology, managed to preserve his Jewish roots while professing to be a devout and learned Christian.

Like a good doctoral thesis, this work is heavily footnoted for reference and offers a glossary for religious, military and ritual terms in Spanish and Hebrew. Sierras' obvious love of research and his own background in the US Navy serves him well, especially in the scenes involving travel by ship; each passage drawn in glorious detail. Said Sierras, “When describing how a wooden sailboat got underway from a pier, it took me two hours of reading several different references just to write a four- or five-line paragraph.”

Initially, credit must be given to Sierras' father who was a serious genealogist and passed the family research on to his son. He knew where the two men started from and where they ended. Various references hinted at the rest. The preface in fact, is worth the price of the hardcover book, as Sierras explains why and how this work came to be.

*The Way of Saint James* is an absorbing and inspiring story by an author who has come to terms with his family's rich and varied past. His style is polished, the prose artful. The story flows and each chapter is introduced by a proverb from the Spanish/Jewish past. Little gems one and all.

Archival photos form a center portfolio. If these remarkable people did not actually exist, I would certainly want them to.

— CORINNE JOY BROWN

Eugene Sierras was born in Tucson, Arizona. He attended local schools and the University of Arizona. After graduation he was called to active duty with the United States Navy. He received his commission as Ensign, USNR, and served on various ships and aircraft squadrons. He spent a total of eight years in fighter squadrons before being posted to several shore commands and staffs. After retiring from the Navy, he returned to Tucson and completed a career with the Arizona Department of Public Safety as a civilian employee assigned to dispatching and licensing duties. He currently resides in the place of his birth, Tucson. 📍

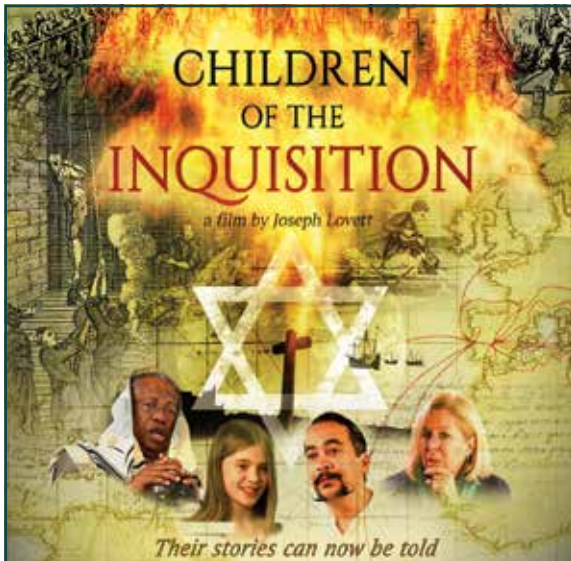




## Children of the Inquisition Goes Mainstream

**C**hildren of the Inquisition is beginning a five-year contract with the National Educational Telecommunications Associations which distributes to over 300 independent Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) stations across the country. Local PBS stations were offered the program in October with the options to broadcast the full-length version or to air it in two one-hour episodes. We hope they will broadcast the film several times over the next five years.

Our community outreach has been going very well since our 2019 premier in Seattle. This past summer, we had our first screening and panel discussion in a Catholic venue – the Archdiocese of New York’s Sheen Center for Thought and Culture. We are excited for the discussion of this history through more interfaith venues and know that this one will encourage others.



*Children of the Inquisition* ([www.childrenoftheinquisition.com](http://www.childrenoftheinquisition.com)) is now available for community screenings. Like us on [facebook.com/childrenoftheinquisition](https://www.facebook.com/childrenoftheinquisition); follow us @COIproject.

All contributions are welcome and tax deductible through our not-for-profit, A Closer Look, Inc. ([www.acloserlook.org/donate](http://www.acloserlook.org/donate)).

Joseph Lovett  
 Lovett Stories + Strategies  
 17 Vandam Street, NYC 10013  
 Cell: 917-921-8691 • [www.lovettproductions.com](http://www.lovettproductions.com)

## “Landing Day” Ceremony in Lower Manhattan Celebrates the First Jewish Community in the US

Condensed and adapted from a story by Julia Gergely, September 15, 2023 for JTA.

**I**n mid-September, a small group of people convened near the entrance to the Staten Island Ferry’s Whitehall Terminal to celebrate a ship that had arrived on its shores centuries before. The gathering was the 369th anniversary of the arrival of the first Jewish community to the United States in 1654. New Yorker Howard Teich, the founding chair of a group called the Manhattan Jewish Historical Initiative, hopes to create greater awareness of that event. That year, a group of 23 Sephardic Jews arrived on the shores of New Amsterdam (New York), the Dutch colony located on the island, creating a dazzling legacy of Sefardic Jews for years to come. Today a commemorative plaque called the Jewish Tercentenary Monument honors their memory.

Along with speeches and music, which included Ladino and Hebrew versions of “*Shalom Aleichem*” and “*Ein Keloheinu*,” attendees also heard a short history of the Jewish arrival in New Amsterdam from a historian at the Lower East Side Jewish Conservancy.

Like so many immigrants to New York City who came after them, the Jews who landed in Manhattan in 1654 were fleeing persecution. Specifically, they were escaping the Portuguese who had conquered the Dutch colony of Recife where Jews had been living, and who instituted the Catholic Church’s Inquisition. Eventually, the small community stayed in New Amsterdam and established the Mill Street Synagogue, the first congregation in the United States. It eventually became Congregation Shearith Israel, or the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, now located on West 70th Street. The “Landing Day” ceremony hopes that Jews in the city will gather every year to celebrate their culture and accomplishments.

To read the entire story go to [www.crescentcityjewishnews.com/a-landing-day-ceremony-in-lower-manhattan-celebrates-the-first-jewish-community-in-the-us/](http://www.crescentcityjewishnews.com/a-landing-day-ceremony-in-lower-manhattan-celebrates-the-first-jewish-community-in-the-us/)

# The Flutter

.....  
 RICARDO VILLARREAL, 2020

Persecuted, exiled, yet again  
 The ocean carries them with its wind  
 In their land of exile  
 They behaved as expected  
 While secretly keeping that which always protected.

With each generation came more isolation  
 But, the flutter whispers far and wide  
 Causing a stir in those with blood ties.

They sense a call, but see no trace  
 As the flutter is felt, but not yet embraced  
 But slowly, it grows in heart, bone, and space,  
 Revealing itself as the Spirit that shows us our place.

As the Spirit finds its family's heart  
 It calls them back to their family's start  
 It says, *do not lose that which your family cherished*  
*As exile was taken so that it would not perish*  
*Your ancestors are calling you here in the present.*

They say, *hear us, and do not forget*  
*We traveled the oceans without regret*  
*So the Spirit we carried would be yours to protect.*

*Keep it sacred, nurture it and know*  
*You are who you are because it's in your soul.*

*Remember, we left Sepharad so today you would know*  
*We always expected you,*  
*so our people's Spirit would continue to grow.*



RICARDO VILLARREAL is from Corpus Christi, Texas, and now lives in Davis, California. He earned his PhD in advertising from The University of Texas at Austin. He has a passion for music, for history in general, and especially for discovering his family history.



# Flight

.....  
M. MIRIAM HERRERA

*"In each generation, a person must envision herself as if she personally came forth from Egypt." —Haggadah*

Although inspired by the 20th century Holocaust, this poem by **MIRIAM HERRERA** evokes the pain of anyone torn from their homeland in search of a new life. The sentiments and images expressed must have been as true in Inquisition era and Expulsion Jewish history as they were in the 1940s — and today.

I imagine you lining up in Shanghai,  
this day waiting for rice, not death,  
A charred tree limb, slouching on lines  
to freight trains, boxcars, cattle cars.  
Shedding mementos, clothes, shoes, jewelry, body hair, modesty kinship,  
longing—selfhood.  
Alive to witness liberation, you appealed for refuge:  
"Palestine. Palestine or the crematorium."  
As of one mind, a multitude of orphans flooded the harbor  
and hardened the gatekeeper's heart.

Winter clung to life.  
Songless birds tucked crowns into plumage.  
We prayed the worst was over when icicles lost their blades  
and snowmelt watered the barrens,  
aching to nudge awake the world. Adrift  
in a land of forgetting, earth fell into random orbit.  
For you, the sun yielded shadow and the moon, smoke.

We fixed our eyes skyward, yearned to see wild geese flying in v-formation—  
Like trumpet choirs heralding redemption.  
Spring gained a foothold, yet you nursed the urge for going.  
Perhaps you wished for all to be mindful of  
the ambivalent sky, clear of flash or whirlwind,  
for you to catch a sovereign flight?

The wind cried out, Look up!  
Your wings dusted off shame for good,  
as ecstasy rushed through me.  
I whispered  
May you reach the sanctuary of home  
And remember the breath of ease,  
the arms of safety.  
May you find the gates of compassion—  
open.



# Huevos Haminados

.....  
CORINNE BROWN

With a nostalgic nod to the late Dr. David Gitlitz, historian, academic, author and SCJS mentor, I sought his published wisdom for our food story this month. Turning to his remarkable book, *A Drizzle of Honey – The Lives and Recipes of Spain’s Secret Jews*, co-written long ago with his brilliant wife, Linda Kay Davidson, I wondered if he could explain the mystery behind the cooked eggs ever-present in the many varieties of Sabbath stews we have featured in our pages. The quest led me even further to *The Sephardic Kitchen* by Rabbi Robert Sternberg, and finally to *Sephardi Cooking* by Copeland Marks.

The Gitlitz explanation included a reference to a prominent family that once lived in Zaragoza, Spain following the Expulsion in 1492, but who summered in a mountain town nearby. “There they would often drop by the home of a former-Jewish weaver whose family made the most impressive lunches on Saturdays, discretely behind a high courtyard wall. There they often tasted of a Jewish stew that featured red eggs; they drank of their red wine and joined in their songs of grace after the meals.”

Author Copeland Marks explains that the eggs prepared in this colorful way are always referred to as Jewish eggs since no other culture he knows of prepares them in this manner and he has found them from Izmir to Istanbul to Greece, Turkey, Morocco and India.



The word *hamim* or *hamin* is used in Baghdad and Calcutta to indicate that the dish is being prepared for the Sabbath. “Eggshells,” he said, “are porous and absorb the flavors of the medium in which they are cooked. The longer one cooks them at a very low heat, the softer they become.

Note: The second recipe herein is from Salonika wherein the outer shell of the egg itself becomes dyed a rich maroon color and the inner egg white also takes on some of the color. These are elegant, served with salads, summer drinks or connected with a ritual such as Passover. (Do we now wonder where dyed eggs came from at Easter time?)

“Eggs,” said Gitlitz, “are often cited in connection with the Sabbath, with funerals, with Purim and Passover. *Huevos haminados* were a favorite dish of *conversos* of that time in Huete (Castile, Spain) who prepared them by boiling eggs with onion skins, olive oil and ashes, imparting a vermilion color and delicate onion flavor to the eggs. In Soria, in central Spain, *conversos* prepared eggs similarly by boiling them in clay pots with onion skins. This is still a favorite dish of Sephardic Jews of Turkey who follow the same recipe.

Either way, it appears one does not need a Sabbath stew to enjoy this special treat.

# Pedro de la Caballeria's Vermilioned Eggs

## From *A Drizzle of Honey*

### INGREDIENTS

Loose yellow or red onion skins  
(about six cups)  
12 white eggs  
½ cup white vinegar

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a large non-reactive pot, place half the onion skins, then add the eggs and the rest of the onion skins. Pour in the vinegar, add water to completely cover.
2. Slowly bring the water to a boil over medium heat and then turn down the heat to very low. Cook over low heat for one hour.
3. Take the eggs out of the pot. With a spatula, gently crack each egg once or twice. This allows the dye process to penetrate the egg whites. Return the eggs to the water. Continue to cook over very low heat for another two hours.
4. Remove the eggs from the water. Drain. Cool. Refrigerate.
5. Peel the shells and wash the eggs in cold water just before serving. Refrigerate. Store vermillion eggs no more than 24 hours.



## From *Sefardi Cooking*

### INGREDIENTS

6 eggs, at room temperature  
1 tsp salt  
⅛ tsp pepper  
½ tsp tea leaves  
½ tsp coffee grounds  
3 or 4 onion skins for color (red onions)  
1 tsp corn oil  
1 tsp vinegar

### INSTRUCTIONS

Put everything in a pan and cover the eggs with water. Bring to a boil, cover the pan, reduce the heat to low and cook for at least five hours, preferably six. Add water now and then as it evaporates. Then drain, rinse the shells and refrigerate. Remove the shells and serve as desired.

*Note — This dish may also be made in a crock pot left on low for a total of 12 hours, or overnight in a 175 degree oven.*





SOCIETY FOR CRYPTO-JUDAIC STUDIES

# KANTER LECTURE SERIES

LAWRENCE & KATHY KANTER  
PHILANTHROPIC FUND OF THE  
JCF OF NE FLORIDA

## SCJS Launches First On-line Lecture Series to Great Success

### The Torah in the Tarot with Stav Appel

With thanks to the Lawrence & Kathy Kanter Philanthropic Fund of the JCF of NE Florida, the new SCJS lecture series on Zoom got off to a great start on Sunday, November 26 with are our first featured speaker, Stav Appel. Stav's remarkable search into the connection between Tarot cards and hidden Jews riveted attendees at the recent 33rd Annual SCJS Conference in El Paso.



**STAV APPEL**  
North Salem, New York  
stav.appel@gmail.com

"The Torah in the Tarot," presented the lens-shattering 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 revealed to be a secret vessel for Hebrew letters, Torah stories, Judaic ritual objects and Jewish holy days.

Using slides in the compelling visual presentation, Appel explained how the comprehensive and systematic depiction of Judaica in the Jean Noblet Tarot reveals the oldest known version of the Tarot de Marseille to be an artifact of crypto-Judaism and an unrecognized masterpiece of cryptography and world religious art.



The recognition of intentional Judaic imagery in the oldest known version of the Tarot de Marseille 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.

Stav Appel is a data scientist who manages an independent consulting firm which helps business clients find actionable insights concealed in large data sets. He has an MBA from the Yale School of Management and a BA from SUNY Binghamton. He is the author of the 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. He maintains a popular Instagram account @torah.tarot with over 23,000 followers. More information can be found at [www.TorahTarot.com](http://www.TorahTarot.com).

## Blanca Carrasco

The Texas Jewish Historical Society asked Blanca Carrasco to be part of a round table discussion in October where she shared her history as a crypto-Jew. It was an honor!

Thanks to Larry Lesser, Blanca was invited to share her journey as a descendant of crypto-Jews who settled in New Spain after the Edict of Expulsion at the Texas Jewish Historical Society Conference in Houston. She was able to connect with Nancy Ruscher Katz who was a presenter at the SCJS conference in August and was part of the session as well as Cengiz Sisman who she had the pleasure to meet and hear the results of his research on Sabbatai Zevi.

Blanca was also excited to see Jillian Glantz discuss her journey of research, writing, filming and producing *Remember My Soul*. Jillian was the SCJS Sosin-Stratton-Petit Scholar at the conference in August; and to connect with Joyce Davidoff representing El Paso.

“My trip to Houston,” said Blanca, “also allowed me to visit with my beloved family members Esteban Rodríguez, Yolanda Hidalgo, Nancy Morales, Bella Guardafaros, Zena Beagle Kassam and Aryn Kassam. I had an amazing time. Thanks to everyone for the opportunity to be together!”



**BLANCA CARRASCO**  
El Paso, Texas  
[epjf.bcarrasco@gmail.com](mailto:epjf.bcarrasco@gmail.com)

## Corinne Brown

Corinne Brown has been invited to write an article about the Paso del Norte Hotel for *Western Art & Architecture Magazine*. She thanks the 33rd Annual SCJS Conference for that connection and opportunity.



**CORINNE JOY BROWN**  
Denver, Colorado  
[corinnejb@aol.com](mailto:corinnejb@aol.com)



## MyHeritage Adds 43 Million Historical Records in September 2023

In September 2023 MyHeritage published 43 million records from 43 historical collections from Belgium, Canada, France, Lithuania, New Zealand, the UK, and the US. The records include birth, marriage, death, divorce, burial, obituary, incarceration, and naturalization notices. Many of the collections also include images.



## Los Angeles Sephardic

.....  
MARK BENNETT

I grew up in Buffalo, New York in an entirely Ashkenazi community where being Jewish and speaking Yiddish were synonymous. Sephardic Jewry was just a sad footnote to history. But when I read the footnotes and references in my prayer book, a different story emerged. Years later when I lived in Los Angeles, the Sephardic/*converso* history became more apparent. Finding Stars of David jewelry in an east Los Angeles *mercado* was commonplace.

A Hispanic woman I knew named Ayala, while working in Hollywood, was addressed by an Israeli in Hebrew. She was in shock and asked why he spoke to her in Hebrew. The Israeli answered that he thought she was Jewish given her name. (Is the wealthy Ayala family of the Philippines of Sephardic heritage?)



I knew another Hispanic woman who, while a little girl in East LA, was with her mother buying produce from the truck of a Jewish vendor. He told the mother that her daughter looked Jewish. The little girl did not know what he meant and asked her mother. She answered that several generations ago her ancestors intermarried with Ashkenazi Jews in Santa Fe, New Mexico. While I am sure her mother was truthful, it also seemed like a convenient way to hide a Sephardic background.

The mayor of Los Angeles appoints three ceremonial vice mayors: a Black, a Hispanic and a Jew. That tradition also yields a Protestant, a Catholic and a Jew. When Tom Bradley became mayor he made the three appointments but unknowingly appointed a Hispanic community leader who turned out to be Sephardic, so the Catholics were embarrassingly left out. I do not remember how it was resolved, but the situation speaks for itself.

## News about Isaac Amon

Isaac Amon was recently appointed as an adjunct professor at Washington University Law School and announces the debut of his website, [www.isaacamon.com](http://www.isaacamon.com). Congratulations!



## Master List of Books



**BETH CHERNOFF**  
Philadelphia,  
Pennsylvania  
[bec411@hotmail.com](mailto:bec411@hotmail.com)

**B**eth Chernoff has finished the beginning of our ongoing bibliography of works on crypto-Jews. Bravo and hallelujah! With this major task accomplished, now keeping it up-to-date only requires adding new works as they are discovered or published. This work-in-progress will be posted to

our website, [www.cryptojews.com](http://www.cryptojews.com), by the end of this year. Thank you, Beth!





# Ellen Grace Aires-Trujillo

**E**llen Grace Aires-Trujillo, age 71, passed away peacefully Saturday morning, June 17, 2023 at her home in Denver. She was born March 5, 1952 in Longmont, Colorado, daughter of the late Trinidad “Benny” Aires and Grace Madrid-Aires.

Ellen is survived by her devoted husband, SCJS member, attorney, and much-loved musician, Lorenzo Trujillo;

beloved daughter Kristina Aires-Sanchez (Tommy Sanchez); bonus sons Javier Trujillo (Maria Diaz-Trujillo) and Lorenzo Trujillo Jr. (Jennifer Dreispul-Trujillo), brothers Benjamin Aires (Analee Aires), Lawrence “Larry” Aires (deceased), and Daniel “Dave” Aires (Gloria Aires); sister Carol Ramirez (Louie Ramirez); sister-in-law Karen Guzman; grandchildren: Brandon Sanchez, Ethan Sanchez, Gianna Sanchez, Mark Diaz, Aaron Diaz (Erica Guerrero), Lourdes Trujillo, Eliana Marie Trujillo, Noah Lissak, Zachary Lissak, and several great grandchildren. She was a member of the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception. Ellen enjoyed every aspect of life, helping others, giving back to her community, setting the foundation for qualities of a strong woman, and inspiring others. Spending quality time with her family was something Ellen greatly cherished.

During Ellen’s life, she faced many hardships. However with her strength in her faith, Ellen never succumbed to these challenges, earning herself a very successful life. While a single parent, Ellen earned a BA from University of Colorado-Boulder and a JD (Juris Doctor) from the University of Denver’s Sturm College of Law.

Ellen’s most proud accolade includes a fierce passion to help others. Her commitment to social justice led her to use her law degree as an attorney at Colorado Legal Services for over 30 years, representing low-income individuals with family,



*Ellen and Lorenzo Trujillo with Grandkids*



*Ellen Trujillo*

housing, health, and elder issues. Working with Children’s Hospital, she was instrumental in developing Colorado’s Medical Legal Partnership program, addressing the social determinants of health. She actively engaged in political causes and served on several boards and advisory committees, including the Judicial Performance Commission, Colorado Latino Age Wave,

*Adelante Mujer*, Sturm College of Law Alumni Council, Latina First, and the Denver Public Library’s Hispanic Acquisition Committee. In 2021, Ellen received an award from the Cesar Chavez Peace and Justice Committee of Denver for community members and organizations that follow Chavez’s ideals of nonviolence in obtaining justice for all people. Ellen’s passion for cultural preservation and education drove her contributions to *Hilos Culturales*, promoting the

Indio-Hispano cultural traditions of northern New Mexico and southern Colorado.

Memorial services were held on June 27, 2023 at Word Alive Church in Thornton, Colorado. The Mass of Resurrection was held on June 28, 2023 at the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Denver.

Ellen will be greatly missed by many loved ones, as well as the Denver community she impacted and touched.

Please consider making a contribution in Ellen’s name to the Aires-Trujillo Scholarship of the Colorado Hispanic Bar Association [www.chba.net/donate/donate-to-the-chba-foundation/](http://www.chba.net/donate/donate-to-the-chba-foundation/)

*(Please note, this is for the Aires-Trujillo Scholarship of the CHBA and is not affiliated with SCJS.)* 🙏



# HAPPY Holidays

"Sometimes, a flame can be utterly extinguished. Sometimes, a flame can shrink and waver, but sometimes a flame refuses to go out. It flares up from the faintest ember to illuminate the darkness, to burn in spite of overwhelming odds."

—Karen Hesse, *The Stone Lamp: Eight Stories of Hanukkah Through History*

*Wishing light & love to everyone everywhere during this season.*

## Order Back Issues of *HaLapid*

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

All back issues are now available ONLINE. Current issue posted after next publication. Just one more benefit of membership - so join or renew now! [www.cryptojews.com](http://www.cryptojews.com)



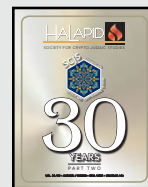
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Autumn/Winter 2022



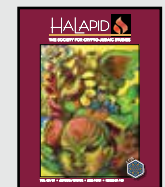
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Autumn/Winter 2021



Spring/Summer 2021



Autumn/Winter 2020



Spring/Summer 2020



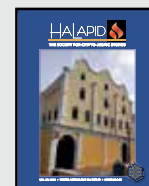
Autumn/Winter 2019



Spring/Summer 2019



Autumn/Winter 2018



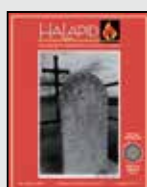
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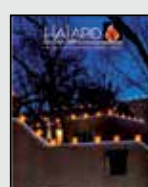
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Autumn/Winter 2016



Spring/Summer 2016



Autumn/Winter 2015



Spring/Summer 2015



Autumn/Winter 2014



Spring/Summer 2014



# 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 SCJS 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, SCJS 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](http://www.cryptojews.com), has archival status; scholars and interested individuals may access hundreds of articles and papers from past issues of *HaLapid*. It also features stories and news of SCJS 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 continuing 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 wish 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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Membership benefits include: Our journal *HaLapid*, and our online newsletter *La Granada*.

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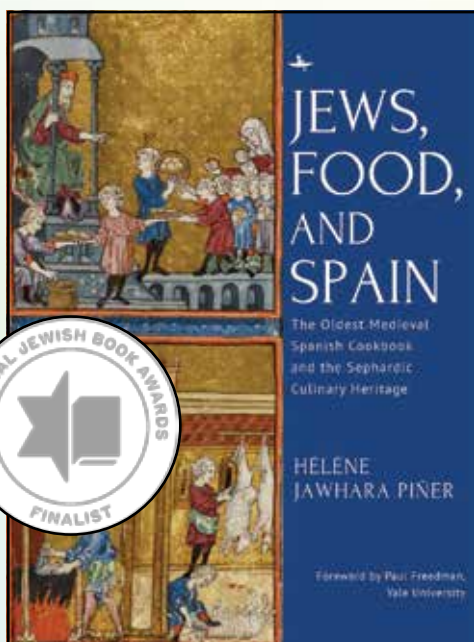
Tudo se ilumina  
 para aquela  
 que busca  
 a luz



All is  
 illuminated  
 for those  
 who seek the light

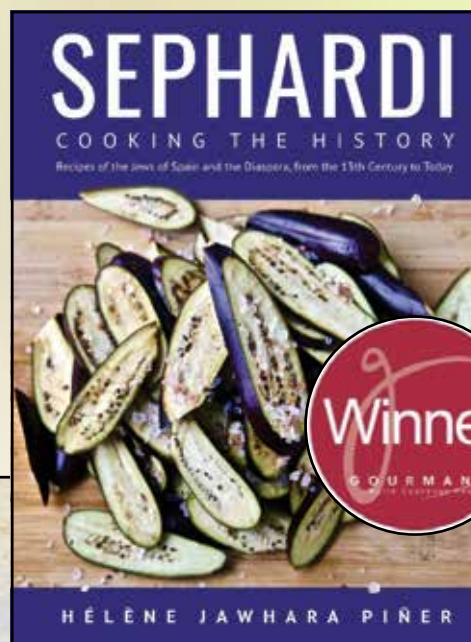
- Avram Ben Rosh -

# “To eat is to remember”



**Hélène Jawhara Piñer** holds a doctoral degree in Medieval History and the History of Food. Her main interest is the medieval culinary history of Spain through inter- and multi-culturalism, with a special focus on the Jewish culinary heritage in Arabic.

You can find her recipes in *Sephardi World Weekly*, *Tablet Magazine*, *The Forward*, and S&P Central's newsletter. She gives live historical cooking classes for the show “Sephardic Culinary History with Chef Hélène Jawhara Piñer,” available on *Chaiflix*.



“In *Jews, Food, and Spain*, Hélène Jawhara Piñer invites us into the medieval kitchens of Muslim Spain, where she uncovers compelling evidence of several unknown, distinctively Jewish culinary practices that over the centuries have been integrated into Spanish cuisine. Her meticulous research into the foodways of Spain's Sephardim will be eye-opening to all those with an interest in the food, history, and culture of the region.” — *Darra Goldstein, Food historian and founding editor of the journal Gastronomia.*



“Can you tell if someone's Jewish from how they prepare their food? Can you tell a Sephardi from an Ashkenazi by what they are eating? Did major Jewish thinkers, like Maimonides, have anything to say about food, apart from discussing *kashrut*? Hélène Jawhara Piñer spent years researching such questions and now offers readers a tasty Sephardi buffet in her book *Sephardi — Cooking the History*. Some 50 recipes of the Jews of Spain and their Diaspora, from the 13th century onward serve as a framework for her answers.”  
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