



HALAPID

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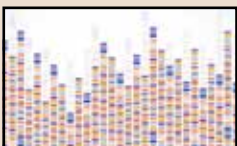


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FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Thanks, Marina

My term as a president of SCJS is ending in June and I was asked to write a farewell letter. Coincidentally I arrived in Israel just 24 hours after Iran's attack. That made me think: Could this very well be a real farewell letter from everything, as my life may be at risk?

Let me tell you, after looking at the stories of my personal heroes like Doña Gracia, Luis Carvajal el Mozo, and Joseph Lumbroso, seeing firsthand the overall resilience of the present-day children of Israel, I am not afraid at all. The mission of SCJS that inspires us so much — dedication to the research and dissemination of the history of crypto-Jews of Iberian origin — must continue.

I am so proud of the accomplishments made during my term by a team of devoted SCJS board members, sponsors, members, and volunteers. Our membership has grown, we have enriched our relationship with the Latin American audience, many changes have been made to modernize SCJS' critical internal processes and lastly, we had our first face-to-face conference since the pandemic. The El Paso, Texas Conference was a resounding success due to Conference Chair Blanca Carrasco's hard work. We are delighted to know she has been elected our next SCJS president and we extend a big welcome to this important position.

I thank you all for these interesting two years and I am making a promise from across the sea: to support Blanca and the future endeavors of SCJS. This year in Jerusalem and next year, God willing, I will see you at our in-person conference in 2025 in Los Angeles.

Shalom!

Rosa Marina Siegel
Rosa Marina Siegel



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BLANCA CARRASCO
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Welcome, Blanca

It is with great excitement that I reach out to you as president of the SCJS Board of Directors for the years 2024-26. After contributing to the Society over the last two years

in my role as chair of the virtual SCJS pre-conference in 2022, followed by the 33rd SCJS Conference held in El Paso, Texas in 2023, and currently as vice president of membership, I am confident that I can make a great contribution to SCJS as president and am delighted to help realize our future dreams.

As many of you know, I have a proven record of accountability for projects that have been placed under my leadership, as well as developing and implementing innovative solutions that have improved SCJS' mission such as the new online Kanter Lecture Series. I enjoy contributing to a strong culture of teamwork that aligns well with the Society's goals and values and, as a proud descendant of crypto-Jews, am honored to lead such a prestigious organization as we move forward in the academic world and beyond.

I believe my leadership skills, coupled with a strong commitment to high ethical and professional standards, will allow me to make significant contributions to SCJS as your president. I can hardly wait to get started.

Sincerely,

Blanca Carrasco
Blanca Carrasco

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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FROM THE
EDITOR

Our rich and diverse journey



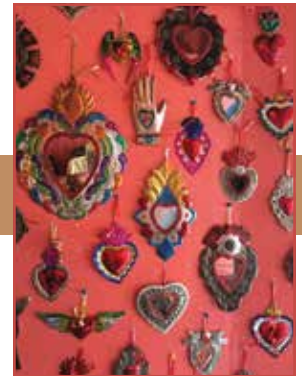
CORINNE J. BROWN
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The history of the Jewish people seems to matter more now than ever and that includes the Sephardic journey and the story of the crypto-Jews and *conversos*. No one can argue that we live in unprecedented times and knowing who you are is important. This is why the contributors to our SCJS journal mean so much. Each and every one of them brings something meaningful to our readers, be it based on research or family narratives. I am more than grateful to share these stories with you. In fact, I am honored.

In this, my 20th issue as editor, the offerings are rich and diverse. We hear again from Carlos Larralde and his remarkable crypto-Jewish ancestors in the Texas region. Writer Esther Astruc in Israel continues her sleuthing and has discovered a genealogical gem. Doug Schar sheds light on how crypto-Jews disappeared in Colonial America, and so much more.

You will meet our next SCJS president and read about past and upcoming presentations in our Kanter Lecture Series. Discover new reading material and poetry that will make you pause. Read slowly and savor what is here. I know I say this with every issue, but this edition might be the best one yet.


Corinne Joy Brown, Editor



ABOUT THE COVER

One summer while vacationing in Toronto with family, we spent an afternoon browsing stores and galleries in Old Town where, nestled among historic buildings and churches, we found a myriad of vintage and bohemian shops with products from all around the world. A wall in one store was covered with flaming hearts and other typical Southwestern *milagros*. The collection stopped me cold. What were they doing up in this northern city in another country?

Upon closer look, my eyes found the delicate *hamsa* amidst all the Catholic imagery. There it was. Hidden in plain sight – as *conversos* also often are.

I took this picture to preserve the moment and have been waiting for the right time to share it. I hope you enjoy it as much as I do. – **Corinne Brown**

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.



Genealogy Reveals New Insights From Babylonia to Benvenistes

ESTHER MALKA ASTRUC

A little-known historical fact is that Charlemagne, the Frankish king, brought in a Jewish sage, a “Nasi” descended from King David, from Babylonia where most of the Jews resided in the late 800s. Known as Makhir Natronai (and by the Frankish name he adopted, Thierry), he was to rule over the Jewish communities in the south of France in return for a favor the Jews did for him.

The king forced him to take a second wife, Charlemagne’s aunt Aude. The sons and grandsons of this marriage followed the ways of Torah and considered themselves Jews, so we might assume Aude converted to Judaism. Through a genealogy tree of them I saw in the book, *When Scotland was Jewish*, I realized to my surprise that those names were on my family tree as well through my Alden ancestors who descended from British kings. One in particular, Henry II, married Ailenor of Aquitaine who descended from a long line of nobles in the south of France.

When I traced Ailenor’s ancestors back through their line of French nobility and inserted these names on our family tree, I discovered they led back to the sage Makhir Natronai and his Frankish wife Aude. I was hit by the realization that it appears our family descends from this sage — who was of the line of David! This was amazing in itself, but there were more surprises yet to come.

Recently, thanks to a *Chabad* article about the convert Bodo (Elazar), a priest in the court of Charlemagne’s son Louis, I was motivated to search for more information about Makhir Natronai and his descendants. The knowledge that we have about him comes from Jewish historian Arthur J. Zuckerman who researched medieval monastery and Jewish records of the time period learning

how Makhir was brought to rule in the south of France (A Jewish Principality in Feudal France). Another researcher summarized it and posted it on Wikipedia (a good thing because the original text costs \$300).

I read this summary and was blown away. First of all, I learned that Bodo was actually motivated to convert because of the striking and inspiring Jewish persona of Makhir’s son Willem (also known as Isaac the Jew), in Louis’s court. Other people of the court were led to convert as well. Alarmed, the Church then outlawed conversions to Judaism. This was the 800s — long before the Inquisition.

I read that Willem was a frequent visitor in the court — as was his father Makhir in Charlemagne’s court — because of the role he had inherited as the Nasi, or autonomous Jewish leader. Makhir and his descendants ruled over Toulouse, Narbonne and other Provençal cities, as well as the areas in Catalonia called the Spanish March which included Barcelona.

These cities had been wrested from Moorish control during Charlemagne’s campaign to free the south of France and Catalonia from Muslim rule. Makhir and his descendants played a major role in these conquests, battling independently and alongside Charlemagne, to win control of these lands. The rule of the Nasi Makhir Natronai and his descendants over these areas lasted 140 years until his great-grandsons serving in this role, were unfortunately killed.

This leads me to the second incredible thing I discovered. Following the death of the last of Makhir’s heirs (from his Frankish wife Aude), the descendants of his first, Jewish-born wife from Babylonia — who were prominent and learned Jewish sages — took on the



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Esther Malka Astruc is a retired nurse from the US who is fulfilling her lifelong dream of living in the holy city of Tzfat, Israel. Raised in the Midwest, she converted to Judaism as a girl and only later discovered what her grandmother had kept hidden: her family is actually descended from crypto-Jews of Catalonia and Portugal. Now she has made it her life’s work to assist descendants of the anusim who wish to reconnect to their Jewish roots and also serves as a Spanish translator for a conversion program based in Jerusalem.

role of Nasi over the Jewish communities of Toulouse and Narbonne. Zuckerman is convinced that these sages went on to become the beginning of the Benveniste family — known as Nasi — the prominent Sefardi family of Narbonne and Barcelona.

I had already suspected this possibility back when I was searching among the names of the Benvenistes that my daughter Bruchie traced and inserted on our MyHeritage genealogy tree. (My children are descended from the Benveniste family of Provence and Barcelona through their father.) I already suspected they originated in Babylonia and now it seems there is a pretty good case for this explanation of how the Benveniste family came to be called Nasi, and for the Babylonian origin of the names of the early founders of the family. Now it all made perfect sense.

This finding is so remarkable. It means, that through an improbable twist of Divine Providence, I, who am descended from Makhir’s second wife Aude, just “happened” to marry into a family who are descendants of the first wife from Babylonia.

And thus a huge circle closes after more than 1,000 years! 🕯️



Roman Garcia

The Confederate Crypto-Jewish Entrepreneur

.....
CARLOS MONTALVO LARRALDE



Roman Garcia during his last years. He used his beard to hide his aging face. This entrepreneur understood regional politicians well and knew how to organize and how to lead. To Garcia, focusing on economic power protected a family from poverty.

Always austere and self-composed, the sharp-featured Ramon Garcia dressed like a gentleman, combing his hair straight back. To those with whom he did business, he preferred to be called Roman. Born around 1805 along the Lower Rio Grande, he stood tall and proud, a businessman with an easy-going manner. He was lean and hard-muscled, exuded authority and handled people with skill. With a keen expression and piercing eyes, he rarely revealed what he was thinking. Self-protective, he compartmentalized his life, relying on ingenuity and daring. Roman treaded lightly, believing that politics only created conflict. He was talkative when it came to horses and widely respected for acts of charity.

Like others among my crypto-Jewish relatives, Roman's ancestry came from vigilant merchants and peddlers who lived in Colonial Mexico. Historian Richard E. Greenleaf documented various crypto-Jews in the 1500s who were entrepreneurs targeted by the Inquisition. To avoid persecution in Spain, my ancestors came with the Jewish colony of Luis de Carvajal who established Monterrey. They stayed through the darkest of times. Oral history claims that we had a Jewish soldier in our family tree during the 1700s who was also known as Ramon Garcia. Author Seymour Liebman wrote, "Jews came into New Spain as soldiers and merchants" due to the policy of the Bourbon King Charles III.



Roman took his family relative, Maria, as his wife. Crypto-Jews often married into one another's families. Retaining a dignified composure in public, this reclusive and melancholy woman never recovered when two of her children died of fever. She immersed herself in intricate needlework, expecting her servants

to perform the household tasks. Their daughter, Francisca Garcia, who married a neighbor, Carlos Esparza, also my ancestor, was a fair-haired lady with slanting, dark eyes. She had no sense of humor but never raised her voice in anger. She enjoyed playing cards and insisted that women should get into politics, vote and have careers, shocking many. Others were delighted with her frankness. Her beloved brother Juan, enjoyed farming. The family maintained some Jewish traditions by eating tortillas without leavening and goat dishes instead of pork. They also indulged in chocolate-filled, braided bread in the mornings, a custom among Jews in New Spain.



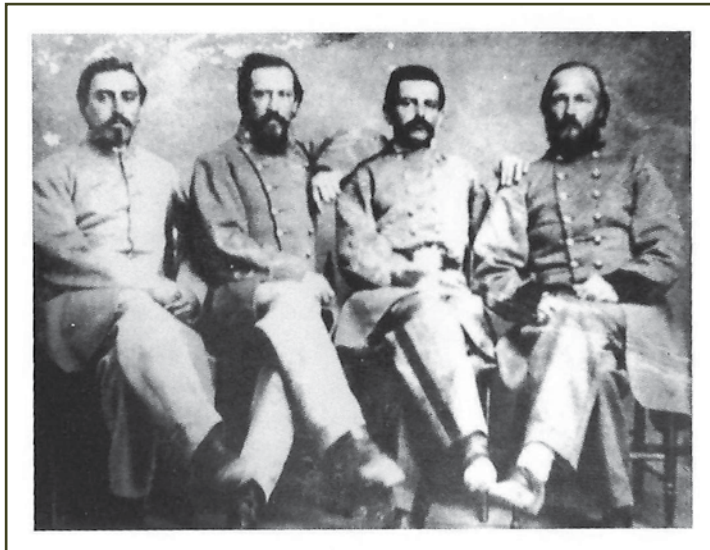
Francisca told our family that in the early 1900s, Roman's faith was based on Old Testament stories and that he prayed with outstretched arms, or with the left hand over the eyes and the right hand over the heart. This custom was popular in 16th century New Spain. Handwritten family prayers in Spanish were cherished from generation-to-generation, some dating from the 1600s. Many fragments had snippets of Hebrew that reflected the original writing.

Dr. David M. Gitlitz who researched Mexican crypto-Jewish prayers, wrote that "repertoires found in crypto Jewish communities, such as those in Mexico in the 1640s, were enriched by the fact that some of these Jews resided in Orthodox

Jewish communities in Europe." A form of prayer that existed among some of our family members was similar to those that Leonor de Caceres of Mexico recited before meals in 1601: "Lord God, true creator, may your favor never fail even in the uninhabited deserts."

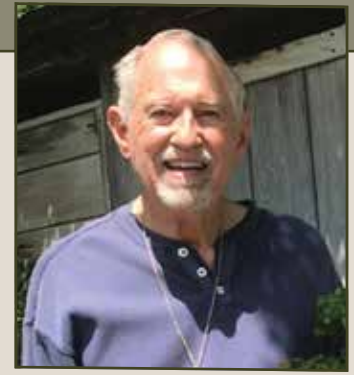
These prayers resonated since my family lived in a dry terrain with thorny bushes and trees in what is now modern Mexico and parts of Texas. Another familiar prayer was one recited in 1624 when Tomas Trevinode Sobremonte declared to the Mexican Inquisition that "the true law was that which God had given Moses in the desert, and that God was not playing a child's game in which he would first give one law and then another."

According to Gitlitz, the crypto-Jew was out of touch with "the subtleties of



L to r: Refugio Benavides, Atanacio Vidaurri, Cristobal Benavides, and their friend John Z. Leyendecker. These Confederates defended Laredo, Texas from Union attackers and remained friends of Roman Garcia.

Jewish theology and the complexities of Jewish observance." Like some of my ancestors, they questioned the divinity of Jesus, believing that the Messiah had not come. Scholar Seymour Liebman wrote, "The theology of Mexican Jewry



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was not profound, being the tattered fabric salvaged from persecution and anti-Semitism." Living in a remote region, Jewish theology was not a priority, but staying alive and avoiding extinction was. This was accomplished by having large families. A popular proverb in the Lower Rio Grande was "To be a dead Jew was tragic. To be a Jew without having children was criminal."



Roman Garcia lived in an area dominated by Anglo cattle barons who were the biggest landowners. They manipulated the Texas Rangers who were brutal



middlemen and controlled Latino, Black and marginalized White workers. When a laborer stood for his rights, he faced the possibility of death by a single shot to the back of the head. These barons avoided politics and controlled the state government. As a cautious policy, on February 9, 1860, Roman received permission from a man known as Meffin Kennedy, partner to the powerful local landlord Richard King, to continue operating a steamship on the Rio Grande.

Like enterprising regional Jews, Roman farmed and focused on the steamboat industry beginning in the 1850s. "For the most part, Texas Jews were literate, sober and driven to prove themselves," wrote historians Harriet and Fred Rochlin. Roman knew that the Rio Grande was one of the longest rivers in North America. This essential water route started from the mouth of the Gulf of Mexico and ran more than a thousand miles to the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. Numerous light-craft vessels were always in use. To be successful as a river pilot, constant maneuvering, luck and endless physical energy was required to transport and unload cargo. Riverboats transported large-scale merchandise such as manufactured products, clothing, furniture and crates of canned food.

Roman thrived as a convoy captain with his son Juan when the South withdrew from the Union and triggered the American Civil War from 1861 to 1865. Roman's business blossomed on the Lower Grande bordering Texas and Mexico. Part of the antebellum American South, towns like Matamoros and Brownsville that faced each other across the river, served as the leading Confederate ports since the Union blocked the South with its naval forces.

As the Civil War raged on, Roman defended the Confederacy with sheer will, commitment and relentless energy. He and numerous Latinos joined

the Confederacy, believing that the Confederate government would guarantee their basic civil rights and property assets. The Union neglected to do so. Also, the war opened business opportunities for Latinos to make money in handling cotton or "white gold" in Mexican seaports. Cotton remained steady revenue to the Confederacy for the European market. On May 24, 1862, Roman was granted a passport proving his allegiance to the Confederacy, issued by Deputy Pro Marshal William Turner. Seeing that Roman could handle business in Mexico, he wrote that he could "transit in and about Cameron County until otherwise ordered." The passport also allowed him to transport Confederate soldiers and keep the regional economy functioning. With a firm sense of duty, Roman kept track of Confederate ordinances when conveying Confederate Latino troops and military supplies. Turner also allocated this passport to Roman when conducting business in Mexico, especially when it benefited the Confederacy. For good luck, Roman wore amulets, a Mexican-Jewish tradition since the 17th century.

Staying updated on the war, Roman was repairing a vessel when he met a few independent Latina or female steamboat captains, a group sadly erased from history. In particular, he respected the indomitable Captain Anito. An expert shot, her hobby was "fancy shooting." She disguised herself as a man demanding acceptance on her own terms. Sharp and witty with words, she knew what to say and when to say it. A kinship of business spirit bonded Anito and Roman. They compared notes about river currents and skills of boat-handling. Since

railroads were few until 1904, they were part of the essential Rio Grande transportation system between many ports.

Strong and decisive, Roman and Anito functioned as part of the hot-blooded breed of pilots that maintained the



Known as Al, Roman Garcia was a Brownsville, Texas, merchant. He remained faithful to the Confederacy to the bitter end.

more challenging aspects of river travel, staying calm when encountering war conflicts. They avoided unsanitary and overcrowded steamboats. Great losses occurred when a heavy-hulled and under-powered riverboat sank or broke down. Clearly, smoke-stack boats kept commerce alive. These became part of the economic development of Matamoros, Laredo and other towns. Up and down the river, one could hear the noise of the transports' ceaseless vibration and smell the stench of smoke and engine oil. >>>

Another serious threat of river travel was the possibility of explosion. Riverboat engineers could only guess how much horsepower they had or how to gauge steam pressure with crude safety valves. Roman, Anito and other captains never forgot tragedies such as the one on the Mississippi riverboat *Pennsylvania* in June 1858, when a boiler eruption killed dozens of people. Further risk occurred when a boat sank to the bottom, with mud and sand filling it so rapidly that salvaging machinery or cargo was impossible.

Roman and Anito both knew that criminals roamed the countryside and were well-armed, living off robbery, extortion, kidnapping, and the black market. These two captains were well-armed, preventing gangsters from boarding their ships. Roman never forgot how the steely Anito killed several pirates with her cherished rifle. It was vital to guard the cargo and military supplies as far as Laredo. When they could, these captains also encouraged the transport of Confederate divisions on their boats.

unstable, most of it printed on reused or poor-quality paper. Within a short period, 72 different types of Confederate currency created a chronic dilemma for Roman and other businessmen since it fluctuated daily. The economy suffered more when each Confederate state, county and bank printed their own money. All this created an economic nightmare and a depleted economy. Trying to maintain a well-ordered community, merchants like Roman knew how to acquire Mexican gold and silver coins to pay their debts and stabilize their enterprises. As for the currencies, they were worthless by 1865 when the war ended. But Roman and Carlos kept some of the bills as souvenirs and later, I inherited them.

The Civil War took untold numbers of lives. Roman hated how war brought death and suffering. As an act of respect, he hired teams of men to bury the dead strewn across the fields in the unbearable summer heat. Most of the dead were buried in shallow graves ravaged by rain and wind. Scavengers, desperate for clothing, money, or weapons, left bodies exposed. The graves were so shallow that skeletons or fragmented bodies reappeared that were not completely decomposed. After Roman provided funds to bury the dead, he delivered food to many widows out of compassion. Historian Gitlitz traced this very crypto-Jewish tradition to written testimonies from the Mexican Inquisition, such as those recorded by Juana Rodriguez in 1642.

When the Confederacy crashed in 1865, rural South Texas remained isolated from the rest of the country. Roman contacted crypto-Jewish brothers Refugio and Cristobal Benavides who were Confederate officers, still wearing their striking grey uniforms turned tan or “butternut” with shining brass buttons. They compared notes on the bloody fighting that took untold lives and damaged property. Angry and disappointed, they faced

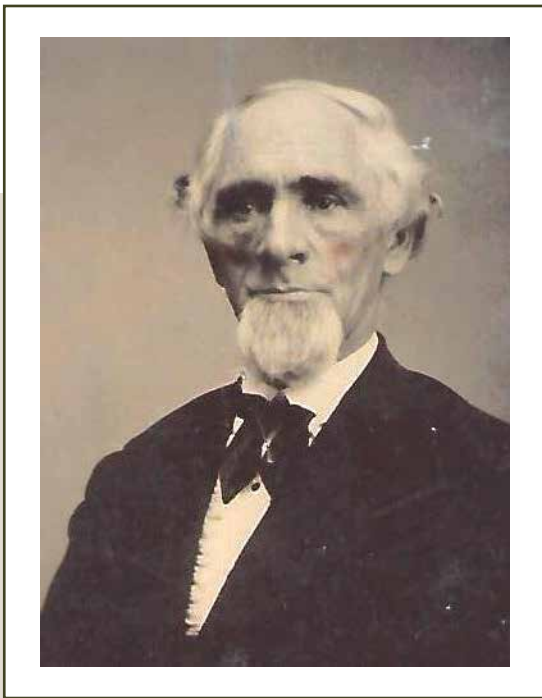
Seeking relief from the war, Roman and Anito often went to the heavily guarded Matamoros and Brownsville areas. The towns blazed with gaslight and had numerous brothels and dance halls with pianos jangling all night. While Anito lounged in a saloon with her cigarettes, drinking whiskey and gambling, a desolate Roman strode around town seeking the welcome of bare-bosomed ladies of negotiable affection.

As the war dragged on, Roman, his son Juan and his son-in-law Carlos Esparza marketed their farming products. Courageous and committed, Roman was determined that our family would not be financially broken or without resources. Also, the crypto-Jew Juan N. Cortina,

a community leader who promoted civil rights of Latinos, encouraged Roman and Carlos to recruit reliable spies who kept track of Yankee activities in South Texas. They were the most successful in recruiting women with keen observational and charismatic skills.

Roman faced the problems concerning Confederate currency issued in 1861 to finance the war. It had to be repaid in coin two years after the war ended. It remained

To add to their challenges, transporters often encountered savage guerrilla fighting or attacks by Yankee patrols along the Lower River with soldiers attacking the vessels. Ever cautious and pragmatic, Roman always tied his craft to a landing at night rather than mooring in midstream.



A zealous Ramon (or Roman) Garcia was dedicated to his steamboat enterprise during and after the Civil War.





A niece of Roman Garcia, Marcela Garcia married an Anglo Confederate merchant some years later after the war ended in 1865. Since she passed for white, there were few interracial, legal or social conflicts. She remained a low-key respectable figure and her children appeared white. In time, her descendants assimilated into the Anglo world.

defeat but were not crushed, relying on over two centuries of shared tradition and survival. No one could take that from them. For that reason they felt, if they stuck together, they would never be defeated. Along with the rest of the Latino community, they chose to preserve the old ways of life and in time, a new generation would fill the gaps caused by the carnage.

Roman, Juan and Carlos could deal easily with authority or iron-fisted merchants. Like others in their community, they helped salvage a fractured society thanks to good business skills, an easy-going manner and their inexhaustible spirit. For all their success, these Latinos still lacked acceptance in a white, Protestant/Anglo world. They endured the casual snubs and slights they experienced, keeping to themselves. To expose their Judaism would have only generated more discrimination. Their self-discipline helped them conduct business while living in an area governed by ruthlessness where only a privileged elite enjoyed a high standard of living.

Merchants like Roman and Carlos retained their assets. Through hard work and intelligence, Roman and his son Juan kept their essential export business going after the Confederacy was defeated.

Successful, Roman focused on banking while Carlos constructed a splendid Victorian home with a wide porch facing the street.

Roman concentrated on agriculture since he owned land on both sides of the Rio Grande. On September 4, 1872, he received rights to a well providing water needed for his extensive farming. Soon his health started to deteriorate and he died around 1878 holding the hand of his faithful Alma, a longtime friend, supporter and investor in his steamship company. Given a respectable funeral, Roman's legacy and his many steamboat procedures were remembered along the Rio Grande. These rules remained long after his death until the 1910s when the railroad reduced the steamboat trade.

Up until today, my relatives reminisce about the dashing Roman Garcia dressed in a long coat, dark trousers and a top hat, conducting himself with a strong sense of place and personal value in a memorable era during the 19th century. In this select biography of just one of our crypto-Jewish Texas ancestors, I hope I do justice to these remarkable men and women who are almost forgotten. 🕊

Warmest thanks for their generous gifts in 2023-2024

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Crypto-Jews Disappear in the American Colonies

.....

DOUG SCHAR



The historic Coming Street Cemetery in Charleston, South Carolina

On a recent tour of the historic Coming Street Cemetery in Charleston, South Carolina, the second oldest Jewish graveyard in the United States, I walked through a veritable who's who of Colonial Sephardic Jews.

The families buried at Coming Street Cemetery share a fantastic history. They were forced to convert in 15th-century Spain and Portugal, lived there as Catholics for a century or more, left the Iberian Peninsula, and fully reclaimed their Jewish identity in London, Amsterdam and the New World. The surnames found at this cemetery can be found in the Sephardic cemeteries in Barbados, Jamaica, Savannah, New York, and Newport. Names like Cardozo, Carvalho, D'Costa, De la Motta, De Leon, and more.

Lee Kamman, the docent giving us the tour of the cemetery, had something very intriguing to say. He has given tours to families who had only recently discovered that their Colonial American ancestors were Jews and came to see their graves. This got me thinking. How many Americans with Jewish roots in the early colonies are unaware of their Jewish ancestry?

The phenomena of crypto-Jews disappearing in Central America, Mexico or the Colorado valleys has gotten a lot of attention. The crypto-Jews who disappeared in the 13 American colonies have not received as much interest. I decided to investigate. It turns out, quite a few crypto-Jews did come to the colonies and

did disappear in the colonial world. My research revealed at least two distinct waves of crypto-Jews made their way to the English colonies and disappeared.

The First Wave: The Seriously Secret Jews

In theory, between 1290 and 1656 Jews were not permitted to reside in England. I recently created a database of all "Registered Aliens" who lived in England between 1350-1656. I analyzed my list of 102,000 names, where they lived, where they went to "church," or didn't go to church, what they did for work, who they married, and where they were buried. Through this analysis, I concluded London was home to several crypto-Jewish communities throughout the 366-year

ban on their existence. They were, by necessity, seriously secret Jews.

My research reveals Jewish “Italians,” “Spanyards” and “Portingales” came to London in waves that lined up with troubles befalling Iberian Jewry. Not surprisingly, during periods of persecution more Iberian Jews appear in London. When times were good, fewer Iberian Jews made their way there.

When Spanish and Portuguese Jews arrived in London, they registered themselves as members of the French Church, the Italian Church, the Dutch Church, or of “No Church.” They displayed little allegiance to any of these churches and flipped between them. They baptized some children and did not baptize others. They worked as musicians, goldsmiths, precious gem cutters, physicians, and merchants. No matter what their main profession, they tended to trade with the greater *converso* world. They lived in the East End of London, most usually in the Tower Hamlets Ward, in Stepney, Bethnal Green, and Shoreditch. They married amongst themselves and were buried together.

The London Italian Church?

Though these secret Jews joined a variety of churches, or were of “no church,” by far the most popular church amongst them was the London-Italian Church. It was the spiritual home of many a 16th-century secret Jew. And what an odd church it was! In 1568, only 25% of its members were Italian. Its first pastor was the converted Jew Michaelangelo Florio. A later pastor, Antonio del Corro (1527-1593) came from Seville, had a Spanish Jewish surname, and preached in Spanish. A *converso* preacher preaching in Spanish to an audience of *conversos*?



Emilia Bassano (1569-1645)



Peter Rycault, Sephardic Jew and member of the London Italian Church (more at Schar's website).

The “Italian” Court Musicians

Some of the Tudor secret Jews arrived as musicians. In preparation for his fourth marriage, Henry VIII (1509-1547) told his ambassadors to seek out the best musicians in Europe for his court. The desire to find good musicians was so great, origins were often overlooked. The first musicians recruited were the Jewish Bassano brothers. Others would soon follow.

Many of these musicians were Spanish Jews whose families had made their way to Italy and once there, re-invented themselves as “Italian” musicians and traveled to England where they made, played and traded musical instruments in London. The musicians stayed after Henry’s death and continued to provide music for Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1602), and James IV (1602-1626).

The London musical families include Antonia (alias Moyses), Bassano, Comy (alias Comes, Commb, Combre, Coimbra), Daman (alias De Man, De Ammano, Amman, Man, Della Man), Lupo (alias Abimelech, Lux), Maiohn (alias Majon), Maria (alias Cossin, Cuson, Cusin, Cassin, Albert), Segar, Tedesco, and Vicenza (alias Kellim, Kenner, Kenneth, Hithcoke). These musicians lived with each other, married amongst themselves, acted as witnesses for each other wills, and collectively tended to the communities’ widows and orphans. Most of them belonged to the Italian-London Church.

The Tale of Six Violinists: The Bassanos

One cannot discuss the music producing crypto-Jews of 16th-century London without mentioning the “Italian” Bassano family. The Bassanos were Jewish. The question is: Italian Jews or Spanish Jews living in Italy? Nineteen Bassanos appear in the old Jewish cemetery in Venice (San Nicolo on the Lido). At the same time, Bassan was a Jewish name in Spain and Bassano a confirmed Sephardic name in Tunisia, Greece, Egypt, Syria, Turkey.

The first Bassanos in London were the sons of Jeronimo Bassano, a Venetian Jewish physician, teacher, author-heretic, and musician. The heretic part may be the reason the sons, Gasparo (Jaspar. 1508-1577), Alvise (1510-1554), Anthony (1511-1574), Zuane (1512-1579), Giacomo (1518-1566), and Giambaptista (Baptista, 1511-1576) moved from Venice to London in 1539. Once there, they became the most prominent musical family in the Tudor period and married into other secretly Jewish musical families. The other crypto-Jewish musicians playing of the Tudor court are an interesting bunch. Here are a few.

The Tale of Two Violinists — and 15 Names!

Frances of Vicenza came to London in 1543 to replace the crypto-Jewish violinist Romano of Milan who lost his life after being accused of being a practicing Jew. Frances changed his name frequently; his aliases included Frances Kellim, Kellem, Kener, Kennyt, Kenneth, Francis Francisco, and finally Francis Hithcoke. *Kinnor* is the Hebrew word for stringed instrument. *Kelem*, the Hebrew word for instruments in general.

Ambrose Lupo, another violin playing London crypto-Jew also had quite a list of aliases. He began as Ambrose of Milan but by 1559 he became Ambrose Lupo. Between 1567 and 1576, he went by Ambrose Luck, Lucki, Lux, and Lucksor. A will revealed his real name, Almaliach, a version of Elmaleh, the name of a well-known Spanish Jewish family found around the Mediterranean after the 1492 Expulsion.

From Court Musicians to Colonists

The secret Jews of London's move to the colonies begins when the court musician Ludovico Bassano (1542-1593) married Elizabeth Damano (1572). Elizabeth was the daughter of the crypto-Jewish court musician William Daman (alias Guigielfmo Damano). The union produced Elizabeth Bassano (1593-1630) who married Albiano Lupo (1574-1626). Albiano Lupo was the grandson of Ambrose Lupo, Elizabeth Bassano was his great granddaughter. They were uncle and niece. The pair traded their life in the English court for the Virginia colony in the early 1600s.

Records indicate Albiano arrived in Virginia on a ship called the *Swann* in 1610. Elizabeth followed him six years later. Albiano was granted 350 acres by the crown and Elizabeth was granted 50 acres. The crown gave immigrants 50 acres for every indentured person they brought and Albiano brought five servants, all from the Alien Registry.



DOUG SCHAR
Great Falls, Virginia
dougchar@aol.com

Douglas 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.

Albiano died in 1626. The widow Lupo married John Chandler (1599-1658) in 1627. Elizabeth bore Chandler at least three children, Robert William Chandler II, John Chandler II, and Mary Chandler. Elizabeth Bassano Lupo was buried at St. Johns Church Cemetery in Hampton, Virginia in 1635.

Her son, Robert William Chandler II (1627-1669) married Elizabeth Davis (1629-1661). Davis is another English crypto-Jewish surname. The couple had upwards of eight children who populated the Virginia colony with Christian Chandlers.

Crypto-Jews have the habit of marrying other crypto-Jews. This was as true in the American colonies as it was elsewhere. Robert Chandler II (1700-1764) married Sarah Billeboe (1700-1766). Sarah was the daughter of a crypto-Jewish "Huguenot" Jean-Jacques Billbeau (1675-1735) alias Billeboe, Billbeau, Bilibo and Bilboa. This marriage produced seven Anglican children, Joseph, Nancy Ann, John, Willian, Joel, James, and Elisha.

There is more. Philip Lupo (1582-1668), the goldsmith brother of Albiano, arrived in Virginia in 1621 aboard the *George*. However, he came alone. He left behind his wife, Mary Comes, and his children. The Comes family (Commes, Combre, Coombe) were crypto-Jewish court musicians founded by Coimbra born George and Innocent. Phillip did not stay, returning to London in 1624.



However Phillip Lupo II (1605-1670) did return to Virginia and established a family. His daughter, Marie Lupo (1625-1689) married Thomas Royal (1611-1709). Thomas' parents were Thomas Ryall (de Real, 1595-1645) and Eleanor Falcon (1606) — both Sephardic surnames from the London Alien list. Through their sons (Phillip III, James, and Albiano) the Lupo family would live in Virginia through present day.

The Violets

Sarah Damano (1570), another daughter of William Damano, married the Antwerp-born musician Pierre Vyolet (1570) in 1594. Once married, they moved to crypto-Jewish friendly St. Katherine Cree, a neighborhood favored by London crypto-Jews and the eventual home of the first legal synagogue in London.

A surprising fact: Their son, Thomas Violet (1609-1662), a goldsmith, criminal, and all-around bad guy, would become one of London's most vocal anti-Semites. As if this was not bad enough, he devised numerous schemes to entrap members of the crypto Jewish community, take their money, and see them deported. An acquaintance said this of him, "Thomas Violet has a name too sweet for so foul a carcass."

Sarah Damano and Pierre Vyolet had another son, Peter/Pierre Viollett II (1620) who was less vile. Their grandson Peter Villett III (1652-1739) immigrated to the Maryland colony as an indentured servant. There he married another London alien, Cecelia Barber. This marriage produced many children including Peter Villett IV (1697-1748). The name eventually morphed to Willett, a well-known name throughout the southern colonies.

The first wave of London crypto-Jews had a good reason to make their way to the English colonies. At a minimum, in London they faced discrimination as aliens and were taxed at a high rate. At a maximum, they risked their lives if their ancestry was discovered. America, with its offer of free land and end of alien status, was a good option. Once in America, it appears all their descendants disappeared into the colonial Christian world.

The Second Wave: The Legal Jewish Immigrants

The second wave of Sephardic Jewish immigration to the colonies occurred after Jews were re-admitted to England in 1656. Once it was legal for Jews to reside in England, many *conversos* became practicing Jews in London. They set up businesses, opened a synagogue (Bevis Marks), and then sent family members to the other English colonies, Barbados first, followed by Jamaica, and then the 13 American colonies.

This wave was different from the first. These crypto-Jews arrived at the colonies as practicing Jews. Their time of hiding was over!

The Hays-Touro Family

Two of the most famous Sephardic families in the English colonies would be the Touro and Hays families. Indeed the first synagogue in America, the Touro Synagogue, was named after its first rabbi, Isaac Touro (1738-1783). An Amsterdam-born Sephardic Jew, Isaac married Reyna (Malka) Hays (1743-1787) in 1773. The couple married

in an elaborate Jewish ceremony at the Newport synagogue officiated by Rabbi Isaac Karigal, the first rabbi to visit the American colonies. So in a sense, their marriage might have been the first legitimate Jewish marriage in America. This colonial family had four children, Abraham, Rebecca, Judah and Nathan.



Judah Touro (1775-1854)

Meanwhile in New York, Moses Michael Hays (1739-1805), Reyna's brother, married Rachel Myers (1738-1810) and had six children, Judah, Judith, Sarah (Sally), Rebecca, Catherine, and Slowey. And this is



Moses Michael Hays (1739-1805)

where things get complicated. Judith Hays (1767-1844) married her first cousin, Samuel Myers (1755-1836). At the same time, Judith's sister, Sarah Hays (1772-1832) married Samuel's brother, Moses Mears Myers (1771-1860). So two sisters married two brothers. All cousins.

Four of the New York Hays-Myers children, Judith, Sarah, Catherine, and Slowey moved from New York to Richmond, Virginia. The unmarried sisters (Catherine and Slowey) and the two married sisters (Judith and Sarah), all maintained homes close to one another other.

Gustavus Adolphus Meyers (1801-1869), son of Judith Hays and Samuel Myers, met a free woman of color working in the house of his aunt, Sarah Hays named Nellie Forrester (1800-1873). The two had a romantic liaison and on February 1, 1823, their son, Richard Gustavus Forrester was born. The extended Sephardic family raised Richard as their own. Eventually, Gustavus sent Nellie and Richard to Canada so his son might receive the education denied mixed race children in the slave south.



The first synagogue in America, the Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, was named after its first rabbi, Isaac Touro (1738-1783).

In the meantime, Catherine Hays maintained a close friendship with her cousin Judah Touro (1775-1854). Judah had moved from Newport to New Orleans to expand the families import/export business. Judah had a common-law marriage with a free woman of color, Ellen Wilson (1800-?). The union produced a daughter, Narcissa (1822-1883). In 1830, Judah sent Narcissa to be raised by his good friend and maiden cousin Catherine in Richmond. Judah wanted Narcissa to be closer to a larger Jewish community than what existed in New Orleans.

In 1836, Nellie and Richard Gustavus Forrester returned from Canada and lived with his great aunts, Slowey and Catherine Hays. In 1840, a marriage was arranged between the cousins Richard Gustavus Forrester (Hays) and Narcissa Wilson (Touro).

This clan of Sephardic Jews did not condone slavery and gamed the system in every manner known to keep Richard and Narcissa and their children safe. A double house was built by Samuel Myers, Richard's grandfather, to accommodate the spinsters and the Forrester family. The house was located on the very fashionable Broad Street, one block away from Monument Avenue. And what a family it was — Narcissa and Richard Forrester were parents to 23 children!

Richard and Narcissa had a house to live in and, when their elderly aunts, Catherine and Slowey died, they left their fortunes to them. What became of these 23 mixed race Sephardic children? Based on available records, children Lucretia, Richard Henry, Richard Gil, William Manning Taylor, Katherine, and Arthur Gratton, lived as people of color, were classified as mulatto, married persons of color, and became members of the African-American Christian community.

As for the remaining 16 children? Unknown. After the Civil War, Richmond became a difficult place for people of color to live and many left. While some of Richard and Narcissa's children chose to live in the African-American world, some may have chosen to live in the white Christian world, or the Jewish world. There are documented cases of mixed-race Sephardic children ending up in in the elite Sephardic community in New York.

The second wave of colonial crypto-Jews ended up in all manner of colonial families. Some married white Christians and entered the white Christian world. Some married African-Americans and entered into the African-American Christian world. Some married Jews and remained Jewish. Some married white and African-American Christians and their descendants lived in the Jewish colonial world.

Full Circle

I end where I began. Today, many people, white and black, with roots in the 13 American colonies, descend from crypto-Jews. Some of these ancestors arrived at the Colonies as secret Jews. Some arrived as practicing Jews. But as the centuries passed these crypto-Jews disappeared into the general population. Many people do not know their ancestors were early American Colonial crypto-Jews.

To quote Aviva Ben-Ur, in *Sephardic Jews in America, A Diasporic History*, "Malcolm Stern's thorough genealogical research of the 1950s revealed so many Christian branches grafted onto the trunks of Colonial Jewish family trees (some 40,000 individuals) that it made sense to title the first edition of his book *Americans of Jewish Descent*." 🌐





THE SEPHARDIC DIASPORA: THE NLI COLLECTIONS

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NATIONAL LIBRARY OF ISRAEL

The National Library of Israel is a rich repository of Sephardic and crypto-Judaic information available to anyone who is interested. In this and the following few issues we will highlight some of the material you might find useful in researching the Jews of Medieval Spain, the Diaspora from Iberia, Rabbinic responses following the Expulsion, and more. Available online and in person, the new library building opened last fall amidst the chaos of October 7th. Its new expanded location houses treasures of the Jewish people for everyone to experience. Of particular interest to me when I visited was the ancient map collection. The staff speaks English throughout and is eager to help you.

— CORINNE BROWN

Expelled Jews and their descendants wandered and then settled in numerous countries, assimilating into existing communities or setting up new congregations. They established their new abodes in the Balkans, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, and the Land of Israel. Subsequently, many arrived in America and Europe. These Jews continued to speak Ladino and maintained their outstandingly rich customs and deeply rooted traditions, which contributed significantly to the culture of their newly-adopted homelands. Judaism has benefitted immensely from the contributions of Sephardic-Jewish

sages, authorities on Jewish law, commentators, poets, scientists, and philosophers.

The National Library of Israel has collected numerous historical materials on the Jewish expulsion from Spain. The rich compilation chronicles and



Just a part of the vast collection.

elucidates stories of Sephardic Jews, their extraordinary creativity, their political structures and their community life. The items in the collection shed light on the circumstances of the Expulsion, the lives of the *anusim* and the challenges faced by Sephardic Jews while assimilating into various communities around the globe. The Library's collection originates from diverse periods and locations. It comprises books and manuscripts, religious and secular literature, prayer books, articles, and studies, as well as poetry and prayer recordings in Ladino.

PRE-EXPULSION SEPHARDIC MANUSCRIPTS

The Spanish Jewish community produced a wealth of manuscripts dealing with a variety of subjects before its expulsion in the late 15th century. Many of these manuscripts can be viewed online on the Library website, www.nli.org.il. Listings below may have several examples of the same.

Moreh Nevochim

Guide for the Perplexed, Hebrew translation
14th century

Sefer Ha-Ma'lot (Medical), circa 1320

Resposna, Asjer Ben Yechiel, 1350

As formulated by the Rosh

Chidushei HaRashba

Talmud commentary, 13-14th century

The Torah, Masoretic text with Hebrew diacritics, 13th century

Grammar essays, Hebrew 1225, Book of Prophets, Masoretic text with Hebrew diacritics

More Nevochim, Guide for the Perplexed, Hebrew translation, 14th century

Mishneh Torah by Maimonides

First 40 pages embellished with gold leaf

Grammar Essays, Hebrew, 1225

Book of Prophets, Masoretic text with Hebrew diacritics



The Mishneh Torah by Maimonides



More of The Mishneh Torah



Closeup - Medieval Sephardic manuscript



National Library of Israel, brand new home in Jerusalem



Esther's Scroll from 16th-century Spain





2024 Online Mini Conference Sunday October 27

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And more.

The event includes a short general
meeting for all attending.

Watch *La Granada*, SCJS on FaceBook,
and your mailbox for more details.

2024 • ONLINE

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. 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 and new president 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
elishevairmadiatz@gmail.com.



2025 • LOS ANGELES

SEPHARDIM IN THE ARTS FILM

Genie Milgrom Film Odyssey Continues

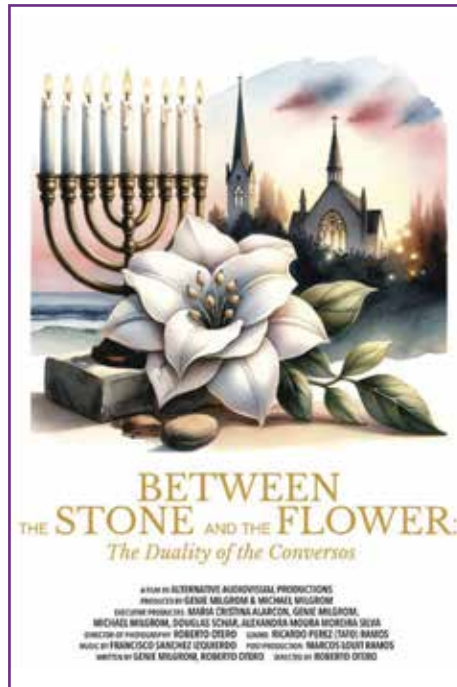


GENIE MILGROM
Miami, Florida
www.geniemilgrom.com

The story of the crypto-Jewish experience has finally been brought to thousands through one individual's riveting story thanks to Genie

Milgrom and her brilliant biographical film *Between the Stone and the Flower*. Professionally produced and filmed, Genie narrates a journey through time and history covering her search for her family's origins in Cuba, following Fermoselle, Spain, all the way back to the time of the Spanish Inquisition. Genie's search has led her to Spain and Portugal and even to the Vatican where she had a personal audience with the Pope Francis.

The film opened and continues to present to sell-out audiences at film festivals (see below). Her booking schedule is as impressive as her stamina, since she and husband Michael appear personally at every one. From Miami to Brussels, Belgium;



Screenings to Date

- Miami Jewish Film Festival
- Punta Del Este, Uruguay Jewish Film Festival
- Brussels, Belgium Parliament Private Screening
- Judy Levis Krug Boca Raton Jewish Film Festival
- Mexico City Jewish Film Festival
- Sacramento Jewish Film Festival
- Boston Jewish Film Festival
- Sousa Mendes Foundation Santa Cruz Film Festival
- Albuquerque, New Mexico

from Mexico to California, Genie helps bring her own story to life. "What is so amazing is the feedback and the questions I receive following the screenings," said Genie. "I continue to face enthusiastic crowds who are interested in this subject."

If your community is looking for a riveting experience, this film is available for bookings through Genie's website, www.geniemilgrom.com. Watch *La Granada* for updates on screenings near you.

Genie Milgrom immersed herself in the search for her family past and along the way, documented her journey in several books starting with *My 15 Grandmothers*, *How I Found My 15 Grandmothers*, *Pyre to Fire*, and *Recipes of My 15 Grandmothers*. All have English and Spanish versions and have received several awards. She is the past president of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Miami, past president of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies, having served with both for 8 years. She is the president of Tarbut Sefarad in Fermoselle and is a senior advisor to the Jewish Heritage Alliance and the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies.

Genie also writes for several online sites including www.esefarad.com and has her own blog at the *Times of Israel*. Genie has written notable academic, peer-reviewed articles for the *Journal of Spanish, Portuguese and Italian Crypto Jewry*, *HaLapid*, and others. Her work has been showcased in the *Jerusalem Post*, *The Miami Herald* and publications around the world. She was awarded the State of Florida Genealogy award for her outstanding achievements and advances in this pioneering work. She was also recognized with the Medal of the Four Sephardic Synagogues in Jerusalem, a most prestigious honor. 🕯️



Genie and her husband Michael with the Bagpipers from Portugal's Miranda region. They sing in Mirandese, a language spoken at home by Genie's family.



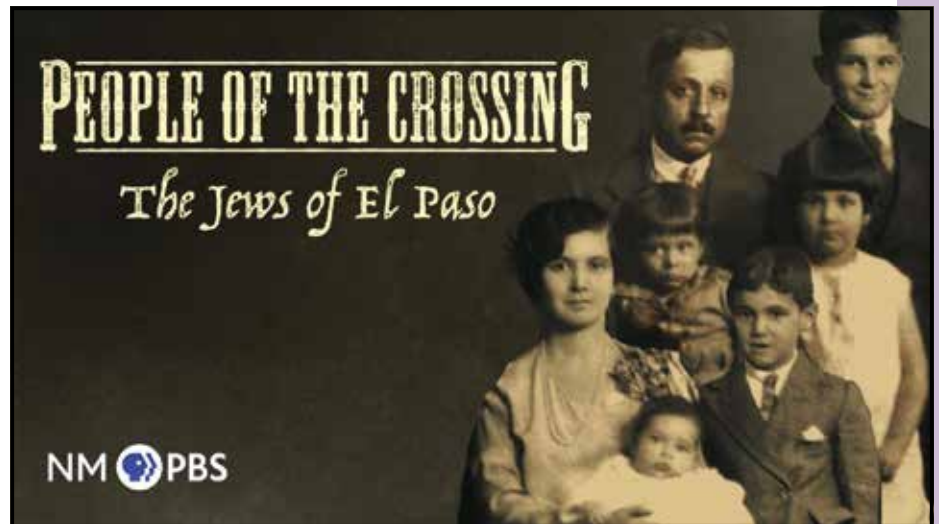
SEPHARDIM IN THE ARTS

FILM

Isaac Artenstein is not technically a historian, but he might as well be. Among his many films are three jewels of cinematography that bring his sharp focus on the history of Jewish life in the American Southwest to audiences everywhere, including via the Public Broadcasting Service. His first collaboration with Paula Schwartz is their stunning history of the Jews of New Mexico, *Challah Rising in the Desert*, a heartwarming and educational look at five eras of Jewish life, from Colonial times through the Las Alamos Atomic Era, up to today. Like the strands of a *challah* woven together, they rise to form a unified whole resulting in the diverse communities of Jewish people up and down the state who enrich life there.

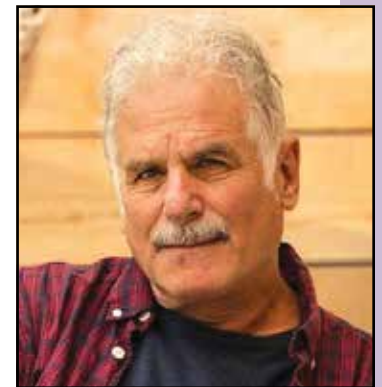
Artenstein then took a closer look at the story of the crypto-Jews of New Mexico in *A Long Journey*, profiling a number of individuals who are familiar to us through SCJS, including our own Blanca Carrasco. Some may know Charlie Carrillo, a *santero*. The film opens with rancher Tim Herrera herding cattle across the New Mexico desert, an unforgettable long shot.

One of Artenstein's latest effort debuted this past winter in El Paso, Texas, with *People of the Crossing*, a multi-layered portrait of a Texas Jewish community on the border with Mexico and told through family stories relating the history, culture and customs of this important gateway between continents, people and languages. Its narrative includes El Paso's early history as a rough and tumble town before Jewish merchants and politicians helped make it a viable place for commerce and civic life. Descendants of Jewish pioneers, and community and spiritual leaders share their stories about the unique aspect of Jewish El Paso

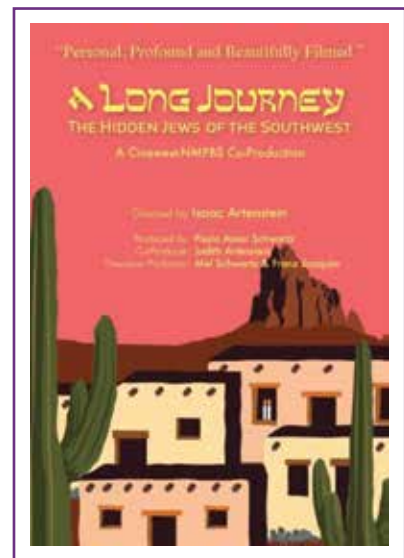
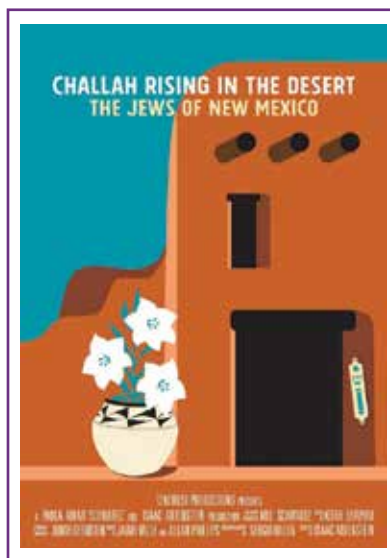


and the multicultural and multilingual nature of its Jewish congregations. History, photographs and film footage richly illustrate the testimonials, along with compelling cinematography (from land and air) that highlights the city's geographic location at the foot of the Franklin Mountains and on the banks of the Rio Grande. The film is currently available for viewing on PBS.

— C.J. BROWN

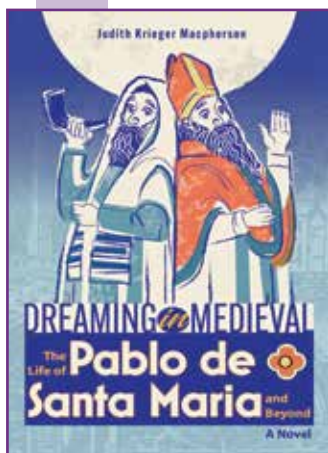


ISAAC ARTENSTEIN, DIRECTOR
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Dreaming in Medieval: The Life of Pablo de Santa Maria and Beyond

By Judith Krieger Macpherson
Authorhouse 2023



survive, particularly if it included retaining any shred of Jewishness at all.

One individual whose survival by conversion shattered a family and launched a Jew into the heart of the Christian world was Solomon Ha Levi, the chief rabbi of Burgos, a city in the kingdom of Castile, Spain. In 1391, following anti-Jewish riots throughout the land, the rabbi converted to Christianity and became a priest. From then on he became known as Pablo de Santa Maria. This move required abandoning his children and dividing his family, as his wife Yehudit chose not to convert.

Before long, he is appointed Bishop of Burgos and enters the realm of court politics and Church hierarchy. A deeply reflective and philosophic man, he is plagued by doubt over his conversion and feels remorse over the life he left behind. He regrets terribly his painful choice. Thanks to a series of Yehudit's fervent dreams and Pablo's inner monologues, they continue to share their thoughts and views as they both grow older, maintaining a safe distance from the rising tide of anti-Semitism in a poignant story that spans decades. They both watch their adult children cope with the assimilation and loss of identity as well as a constant search for safety as descendants of Spanish Jews. In one of their final dreams, Yehudit, at the age of 102, beseeches her husband, already passed from this earth, to walk the streets of Burgos together in the moonlight, her love for him undimmed.

The riots, pogroms and effects of the Edict of Expulsion, the Spanish Inquisition and the mass conversion of Spain's Jewish population upon the Jewish psyche in the 14th through 16th centuries must have introduced a special kind of trauma. Both the rabbinic response and that of the average individual brought enormous challenges. One literally had to discover a new way to live and a different way of thinking to

The dreams and tender dialogues between husband and wife offer a painful view of the world collapsing around them. The fate of the family is divulged in the lives of their children, especially daughter Miriam who attended both parents' bedsides at their deaths.

If anyone ever wondered what it might have been like or what emotional price was paid, this exquisite novel based on extensive research offers a glimpse into a time and place with qualified understanding.

Best of all is the completely unexpected closing chapter in which the author herself and her husband prowl the archives of Spain for the writings of Pablo de Santa Maria and make clear the reality of this story. It raises the question as to whether or not art imitates life or life imitates art. In this case, it does both. I think Pablo would be honored. >>>

About the Cover of Dreaming in Medieval

Annette Power, Graphic Designer

During our first meeting, Judy Macpherson shared with me how the book came to be, the history of the Jews in Spain and Rabbi Solomon Ha Levi's conversion and how his whole life, as well as that of his family changed. She brought some wonderful reference images, books and album covers to share with me, one being an image in the style of 1960s printmaking that became a great source of inspiration.

I went online, did more research on the history of Jews around the 14th century, and Paul of Burgos, etc. I found more images and paintings to use as inspiration for color, design and symbols. It was important to Judy that we show the duality of the main character Pablo de Santa Maria, both as a rabbi and also as the priest and the bishop he became.

I presented Judy with several concept drawings, showing different versions of how we could combine the two aspects of his character. Judy liked the version of the two back to back. I then designed the digital illustration, using textures and offset lines to give it that look of 1960s printmaking, including some identifying religious symbols of Judaism and Catholicism. The background shows the Burgos Cathedral where Pablo de Santa Maria was active as Paul of Burgos.

Creating an image to fit the story of this book was a very rewarding process. I thoroughly enjoyed collaborating with Judy and researching all the historical visual elements, styles and colors possible in order to conceptualize a cover that would align with her vision of the novel. I am so excited to see her work reach a larger audience!

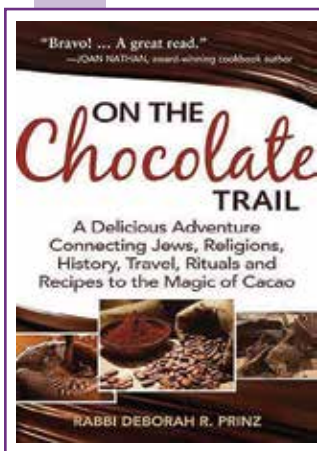


Judith Krieger Macpherson wrote her doctoral thesis on the life and times and writings of Pablo Santa Maria. The novel was written to share his unique story with anyone seeking more information about the plight of Jews in Medieval Spain. Fluent in Spanish and well-versed in Hispanic literature, Macpherson is a retired professor living in Southern California. She clearly has a passion for life and a big heart. An insightful book with fresh material, tenderly told and well-crafted. — **C.J. BROWN**

The Chocolate Trail Revisited

By Rabbi Deborah Prinz
Jewish Lights Publishing, 2013; 2nd Edition, 2018

Excerpted in part from an article in *New York Jewish Week* by Deborah Ringler, JTA (*New York Jewish Week*)



The Spring/Summer 2019 issue of *HaLapid* ran a review about *On the Chocolate Trail: A Delicious Adventure Connecting Jews, Religions, History, Travel, Rituals and Recipes to the Magic of Cacao*, a delightful book by Rabbi Deborah Prinz. Rabbi Prinz attended the SCJS conference in Denver in 2019 and sold out of her amazing book.

The book tells of a fascinating discovery — how Jews in France are credited with importing the chocolate trade there. Jews in Spain had perfected this amazing food into all manner of treats; it is even recorded that those imprisoned in the jails of the Inquisition were often kept alive by cups of chocolate brought by their families. Prinz believes that Sephardic Jews, “probably engaged with chocolate soon after the first European contact with it, which is said to have occurred during Columbus’ fourth voyage (1502-1504).”

A congregational rabbi at Temple Adat Shalom in Poway, California at the time of her discovery, Prinz was stunned. This information changed her life, inspiring her to explore the trail of chocolate from the New World to the Old and from there, to the American Colonies. A second edition of the book was published in 2018 with additional chapters.

Last December an exhibition, “Sweet Treat: Chocolate and the Making of American Jews,” opened at New York City’s Central Synagogue detailing the rich history of Jews and chocolate in America. Based upon Prinz’s years of research, the exhibit shed light on some of the key Jewish players in the Colonial-era chocolate trade, including Aaron Lopez, a Sephardi immigrant, merchant and slave trader who became one of the wealthiest men in Newport, Rhode Island, and who gave chocolate as part of his *tzedakah* food packages to poor members of the Jewish community. He also helped build the historic Touro Synagogue, which today is owned and overseen by New York’s Congregation Shearith Israel, the oldest Jewish congregation in the United States, also known as the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue.

Also featured in the exhibit is the Gomez family, leaders of New York’s Jewish community and major donors to Congregation Shearith Israel. Readers will remember the well-researched and fascinating article by Andrée Aelion Brooks on the Gomez Mill House, the residence of this distinguished family, featured in *HaLapid*, Autumn/Winter

2021. They too, were involved in the chocolate trade. Prinz writes that Rebecca Gomez, widow of Mordecai Gomez, may have been the only Jewish woman in the chocolate business in the late 1700s.

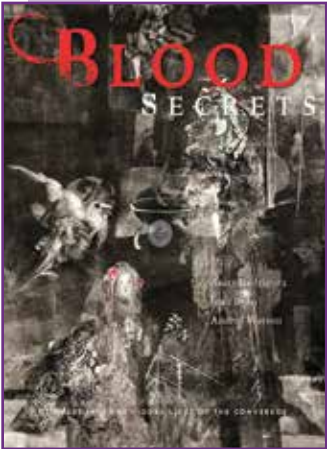
The NYC exhibit also touched on more recent Jewish chocolate entrepreneurs in this country, of which there were many. As a whole, the exhibit, which closed in February 2024 presented a comprehensive look at the long history of both Jews and chocolate in America. According to Prinz, looking at American Jewish life through the lens of chocolate helps us “understand the resiliency of Jews exiled from Spain and then immigrants from the Holocaust as they sought freedom, acclimated to new settings, and found new business ventures in America. Our ancestors overcame persecution and oppression, in part through chocolate. Their chocolate endeavors in America from its earliest days remind us that Jews were part of the founding of our country.”

— **C.J. BROWN**

Andrée Aelion Brooks’ research can be found in the jointly authored book titled *The Remarkable Life of Luis Moses Gomez* by Jonathan Schorsch/Andrée Aelion Brooks, and Ruth K. Abrahams, editors, Flint Mine Press 2021. This lavishly illustrated 38-page booklet, covers the life of Luis Moses Gomez, Sephardic immigrant to New York in 1702. Gomez rose to prominence as a businessman, owned acreage in the Hudson Valley, and left a legacy of the Gomez Mill House, a synagogue, and a web of business enterprises from construction to chocolate-making.

Blood Secrets: Glimpses into the Hidden Lives of the Conversos

By Anita Rodriguez
Joan Ryan
Andrea Watson
3:A Taos Press, 2024



Free verse might be the perfect medium to tell the haunting stories in *Blood Secrets: Glimpses into the Hidden Lives of the Conversos*, a powerful compendium featuring the work of two New Mexico poets, Joan Ryan and Andrea Watson, and a talented storyteller and artist, Taos resident, Anita Rodriguez. Inspired in part by that state's vivid history combining Spanish

Colonial settlement, hidden Jewish ancestry, and richly diverse Catholic and Indian culture, what lies in these pages will speak to anyone seeking understanding, identity or ancestry.

The book is divided into three voices. Widely published poet Andrea Watson enters into the world of a medieval hidden Jewish woman and a modern New Mexico citizen in “Rena/Reina,” a series of poems filled with wistful images and cultural remnants of the life the Jewish ancestors lived before the Inquisition and thoughts by one of their descendants. Twenty-two elegant poems grace the pages with powerful emotion and vivid imagery. Likewise, Taos resident and prolific poet Joan Ryan in “The Chosen” explores a culture, time and place with insightful clarity and beauty, to include the modern day discovery of the BRCA gene mutation. Her descriptions of Medieval Spain suggest that she has somehow traveled through time to explore the secrets, habits and customs that defined the difficulty of *converso* life. As described on the book’s jacket, “the two poem-sequences each juxtapose a family living through the Inquisition with contemporary Christian descendants living in the New World, creating compelling characters in Rena, Reina, Lia and Magdalena.”

Anita Rodrigues, featured in *HaLapid*, Autumn/Winter 2015 detailing her remarkable *nichos* inhabited by traditional New Mexican skeletal figures, grew up in Taos in the 1940s. Her segment

of *Blood Lines*, “In Search of History - A Personal Journey,” reveals her keen appreciation for the many-layered cultural history of New Mexico, and the traumas and healing its people experienced over centuries. Said Rodriguez within her essay, “The story of the crypto-Jews finally crystallized something obvious for me. It was not the cause, but it was the thing that pushed it to critical mass and illuminated the ubiquity of our xenophobia, our cross cultural, unwritten law of impenetrable secrecy...”

No matter how much you know or think you knew about crypto-Jews, this remarkable book is like a light in a world filled with encroaching darkness. Its poems demand to be read by people of all faiths, and to be heard aloud. (One can only imagine such a reading.) The English language is elevated by these three voices whose combined skill is deeply inspirational. This collection would make an exquisite gift to anyone who shares the journey

— C.J. BROWN



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Memory
Bracelets
2024
Collection

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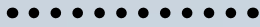
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Anita Rodriguez



Section from “In Search of History: A Personal Journey”



ANITA RODRIGUEZ
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Dreaming in geologic time, the landscape of the Chihuahua Desert conjures up imaginings of mystery, memory, and power, provoking mirages peculiar to poets whose ancestors came and went this way, back and forth, for centuries.

Do animals and people unknowingly follow primordial migration routes drawn by magnetic arteries throbbing in earth’s belly?

Do underground rivers of crystals pull creatures like me and my ancestors across this brutally beautiful landscape like innocent iron filings on a huge blue map?

Does this desert remember being an ocean?

Does it recognize my blood from countless pilgrims, each generation driven by microscopic

historical dramas across the ancient and indifferent dirt?

Does this dirt remember how many pairs of sandals it wore out on the 2,000 miles from Palenque’s Yucatecan jungles to Paquimé’s Chihuahua Desert?

Does it remember the Potchteca traders’ feet and the merchandise they carried to and from the corners of Central America and beyond?

Turquoise beads, live macaws, Pacific marine shells, copper bells and amulets, ceremonial axes, spindle whorls, ceramics.

Back and forth along this road, this elite class of Nahuatl-speaking traders, hydrologists, spies, architects controlled and supplied the Aztec markets of an empire. They left in their wake, from Palenque to Chaco, T-shaped doors, ball courts, flagstone-covered aqueducts and their gods’ names — Tlaloc, Quetzacoatl, Xioe and Totec — and the words chile, tamale, posole, zoquete, quelite, atole, from Chaco back to Palenque, walking, two thousand and five hundred miles, wearing the ancestor of the modern huarache, the humble Mexican peasant’s shoe whose soles are made from the same Mexican rubber as my tires, wearing out on this same highway.



Andrea Watson



ANDREA WATSON
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Make of This Altar...

Once the room of stitchers,
bother me to press against the hidden
door behind my father’s books,
two touches of latch to the room
that knows.

The covered window—
curtains fashioned of sad
absence of starlight.
I know the path
to the cabinet,
spools wrapped in silver thread,
needles in the green case,
darning egg, slips of fabric,
oils from India, and on the shelf
the silver goblet.

Now I am the soundless latch.
Help me to take down tallow
unlit, then lit. This gathering of flesh
and silence. Father pours a *revi’it* of wine.
Mother offers braids of bread.
Whispered prayer.
Breathing in the bidden.
Breathing out forbidden.

— *Poem in the Voice of Rena*



Confluence of Faith
eu creo o que creo

She: who is
soul burying
must not show
the altar hidden
in the darkest corner
of the deepest house

each ark of night
she is a broken star
candles lit against
shuttered rooms santos
turned to face the wall

sometimes she sweep
the house the wrong way
duendes hidden in corners

blessed sunset of the sixth
day bowls of lavender
adafina in a copper pot
bread and wine tradition

At her door the Virgin
but with parchment
scroll furled inside
mystical words to touch

beyond the blood flame
of the *auto da fé* secretly
daughter of twelve tribes
prays to Dio

She who lives to be reborn
Reina: whose name is song.

She: who is
soul carrying
does not know
the cabinet still holds
generations of prayer
in a *Kiddush* cup

each arc of day
she is a mended sun
ghost hands guiding her
to light tallow candles
yet never knowing why

sometimes she weeps
in her house of whispers
shadows form unbidden

trust her to bless the day
of her only rest *hamin*
twice cooked in gold broth
wafer and wine communion

At her door *la Virgen*
with relics and roses
unfurls her beauty
magical hands to heal

beyond the blue-tipped
flame of another world
daughter of thirteen stones
prays to Dios

She who lives within a dream
Reina: whose name is queen.

...A Secret Prayer

Rumored to be *un trastero* or *un costurero*—
fashioned of hands blessed by God.

From carving board to carving, four doors
with intricate tracery, sunbursts yet unforeseen
clouds, braid-work frieze at top or below,
mortice and tenon joints, simple and strong.

Let me imagine a hidden world inside.

In one drawer, needful things—
glass beaded pins, needle case of bone,
leather thimble or eyelet awl, lucet
for circles of lace.

In another, all things prideful—
linens folded and laced with valerian,
amphora's scented oil, tasseled silk,
small pearl buttons, silk scarf loomed twice.

And in one hidden drawer, a locket.

I like to think this cabinet is benediction,
transported from house to house, room
to room, always placed with daughters,
and their daughters, then and now,

a vault of heaven upon this modest earth.

— Poem in the Voice of Reina



SEPHARDIM IN THE ARTS

POETRY FROM BLOOD SECRETS



Joan
Ryan



JOAN RYAN
Taos, New Mexico
Joanrya n64@gmail.com

Bread of Affliction

Angelina de Leon, Spain, 1503

In haste, I roll and prick coarse rounds to bake unleavened, like the bland white wafers placed upon my tongue in the chapel where I kneel, as we *conversos* must to live here in Leon.

These flat breads are made in haste, in memory of the flight — and to evade Maria's glance as she carts in wood or lights our fire. For zealous eyes are everywhere, and our common foods — a simple stew with mint or chard, or the green-gold oil we've pressed since desert times — betray us. A servant's word, a neighbor's whiff of saffron or cilantro, is all it takes to bring us in.

In Aragon, the king's own minister was seized for eating chickpeas at his Friday meal. He went into the fire. So why, for this dry bread, will I, Angelina, risk the flames, when so easily I bend my knee, and have each child sprinkled at the font? I only know the smell of egg and honey comforts me. It was my mother's and her mother's way.



Upon Leaving the Call of Girona

In the good years, our family lived well in this city, as traders in wool or grain, butchers, tanners, dyers and silversmiths, translators, poets and printers of books, enjoying the king's protection — as long as we stayed in our well-boarded houses for Holy Week when students would gather on church roofs to pelt us with rocks.

We lived on here in comfort, even after the law confined us to the dark narrow streets of the Call — with azure skies above us and, in spring, the perfume of orange trees wafting over the high stone walls — except, of course, for plague years when peasants could not be prevented from rising against the poisoners of wells.

Cut off from our trades, we managed, as collectors of rent and taxes, to keep our children safe in our homes — when clerics weren't inciting our neighbors against the killers of Christ. And even in the year of the massacres, when the Jews of Seville were slaughtered and the Call of Cordova was razed, all but forty of our people survived.

But now — the Edict is clear — we must leave this Call before August when our quarter will cease to exist, heading — I know not where — with only a handful of sapphires hidden in linings and hems. And yet, as I walk out the door, I turn the old key in its lock, remembering that here in Girona, a Jew could live well — when a Jew could live in Girona at all.

BRCA Anomaly

Even earlier than you'd imagine, long before the conflagration spread from embers of the *judería* in Seville to *auto da fé* and expulsion. No, back even further — before the Diaspora brought the children of Judah and Benjamin to Granada — in the years when Herod's Temple stood on the Mount in Jerusalem, not yet burned by Vespasian's legions, and the Court of the Women thrummed with music and dance, the mutation occurred. You might call it a copying error — no more than a typo — as a germ cell divided, the random change of one gene on the 17th chromosome of an egg or sperm that helped form a Hebrew child. A small deadly allele that makes breast cells less able to repair DNA damage, the genetics counselor explained, passed down to descendants for centuries — even to daughters of New Mexico's high mountain villages, baptized and confirmed, whose first sign of this ancient heritage is only a nodule the size of a rosary bead.



Introducing Nani Vazana

From the Hispanic Cultural Society

Noam “Nani” Vazana is one of the only artists in the world who writes and composes new songs in the endangered Ladino (or Judeo-Spanish) language, a very archaic form of Castilian Spanish spoken by Sephardic Jews living mostly in Israel, the Balkans, North Africa, Greece, and Turkey. Ladino, which traveled to these areas with Jewish communities expelled from Spain in 1492, is very nearly extinct in many places. Nani’s work captures the spirit of this ancient, matriarchal language and culture and propels it into the 21st century with socially

pertinent lyrics addressing themes such as migration, gender, and female empowerment.

Nani’s soundscape is a bridge between tradition and modern life, capturing the sounds and smells of the marketplace and fusing them with surprising instrumentation and raw vocals reminiscent of flamenco. Nani’s album “Ke Haber” ranked #13 on the European World Music Charts. She represented the Netherlands at the EU Music Festival in Vietnam and has performed all over the world, including at the Kennedy Center, BBC Radio 3, the London Jazz Festival, and the Jodhpur RIFF festival in India. The NPO network in the Netherlands, where

If you love music sung in Ladino, tune in to the compositions and worldwide tours of Nani Vazana, an accomplished award-winning musician whose musical styles range from haunting Sephardic inspirations to modern jazz. Raised in Israel but at home in Amsterdam, she is truly part of a wider musical scene, in part because she speaks and sings in several languages.

Fans in Colorado were recently treated to two house concerts and a performance in the city of Boulder. I attended one hosted by Hal Aqua (El Paso conference musician) and it was mind-blowing.

Nani is the consummate performer. If you are looking for new thrills in Ladino especially, check out her website, www.nanimusic.com, and videos on YouTube. Turn up the sound. You will be glad you did. Because she travels frequently, we hope we can bring her to one of our conferences.



A multi-talented new artist!



Nani during a recent house concert

she now lives, released a mini documentary about her musical work. Nani is a professor at the London Performing Academy of Music and the Jerusalem Music Academy. She chairs the Amsterdam Artist Collective and founded Why DIY Music and Nova Productions.

— CJB

www.nanimusic.com
and
www.youtube.com



Newest album

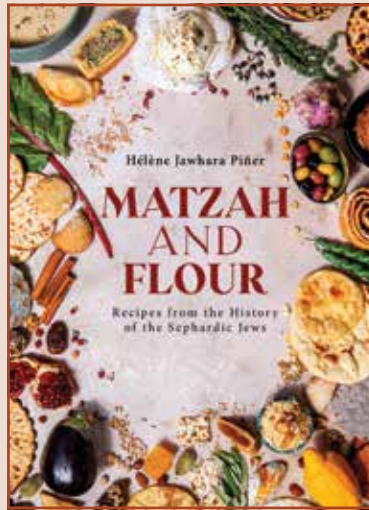


Bernal and Alvares

Breadcrumbs and Swiss Chard Frittata

.....
HÉLÈNE JAWHARA PIÑER, PHD

French chef and food historian Héléne Jawhara Piñer never ceases to amaze food lovers everywhere. Her expertise in Jewish and Sephardic cooking produces the most beautiful cookbooks on the subject. Enjoy this recipe and take a look at her newest release, *Matzah and Flour*, offering more of her culinary research and talent.



2 cups chopped Swiss chard (only the green leaves; use spinach leaves as a substitute)

½ cup (60g) breadcrumbs

4 tablespoons olive oil

1 small spring onion (green and white parts), diced

2 cloves garlic, minced

½ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon black pepper

2 tablespoons flour

3 large eggs

¼ cup (15g) cilantro, chopped

2 tbsp olive oil

1 tbsp olive oil, to pour over the dish once it is done



Wash the green leaves of the Swiss chard, dry and chop finely. In a large bowl, combine chopped Swiss chard and breadcrumbs. Set aside.

Heat olive oil in an oven-safe skillet over low-medium heat. Add the diced onion and minced garlic. Sauté until the onion becomes translucent and the garlic is fragrant, about 5 minutes. Add the Swiss chard and breadcrumb mixture to the skillet with the onions and garlic. Stir well to combine, and add the 2 tbsp olive oil.

Preheat your broiler. In a small bowl, whisk together the salt, black pepper, flour and egg until smooth. Pour this mixture over the Swiss chard mixture in the skillet. Stir as you pour it in to ensure everything is evenly coated. Cook on the stovetop until the egg thickens.

Transfer the skillet to the preheated oven and broil for about 3 minutes, or until it is set and the top is golden brown.

Remove from the oven and let it cool for a few minutes. Sprinkle with the diced spring onion and the chopped cilantro, and slice into wedges or squares and serve warm. You can leave it in the skillet as well.

Serve with a green arugula salad as a side.

BOOK AVAILABLE AT: Amazon — https://www.amazon.com/dp/BOCVB33V4Q?ref_-cm_sw_r_cp_ud_dp_IAFRK8W8AE6ID7JR99GS
Barnes & Nobles — <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/matzah-and-flour-h-l-ne-jawhara-pi-er/1144843092?ean=9798887195445>
Academic Studies Press — <https://www.academicstudiespress.com/search-results-grid/?keyword=jawhara>



SOCIETY FOR CRYPTO-JUDAIC STUDIES

KANTER LECTURE SERIES

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



Kanter Lecture Series Brings New Energy to SCJS

Last fall when we assembled for the 2023 conference in El Paso, no one even imagined that a newcomer to our midst, a retired cardiologist from Jacksonville, Florida, would underwrite a lecture series for us. Dr. Lawrence Kanter had made a donation to SCJS once before, but this time he had a better idea.

He suggested the money would support a lecture series but it had to have his name attached to it. It was just the nudge we needed to get a program in gear. With access to talent and scholarship, we began to reach out.

This year we opened with the lecture, “The Torah in the Tarot” by Stav Appel, followed by a fascinating lecture about Santa Estera (Queen Esther) by Ronit Treatman. Because she broadcasts in both Spanish and English, Ronit is helping us reach a much wider Hispanic audience.

In May, our longtime member and friend Irene Shaland brought us “The Hidden History of Jewish People on the Islands of Madeira and Azores and the Unsolved Mystery of a Sefer Torah.” And coming up this summer, Isaac Amon presents a brilliant lecture on the Founding Fathers and the Inquisition.

Our viewership is increasing and we are more than thrilled since our speakers are giving their time at no charge; reservation donations are going toward the 2025 SCJS Conference budget.

So mark your calendars — we will give you plenty of advance notice — and tune in. Make your Sunday mornings extra special with the most outstanding speakers on subjects related to crypto-Judaic research everywhere.



Ronit Treatman and Queen Esther



RONIT TREATMAN
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During the March Kanter Lecture, viewers were treated to a presentation by Ronit Treatman on “The Crypto-Judaic View of the Biblical Queen Esther.” For our Spanish speaking attendees, the lecture was given twice; in English and in Spanish, a half hour apart.

The *magilla* or story of Queen Esther is held close to the hearts of many crypto-Jews of Iberia and Latin America. Ronit discussed the symbolic resonance that Queen Esther and her hidden identity had for these communities. In this lecture, she also discussed how syncretism transformed Queen Esther into Saint Esther, and Purim into the Fast and Feast of Saint Esther. >>>



KANTER LECTURE SERIES

Ronit further reviewed the observance of the Fast and Feast of Saint Esther as found in the Inquisition files of Mallorca in an actual case study, and discussed her personal field research into the current existence of the phenomenon of Saint Esther in the Southwestern United States. This research included the tradition of *santeros' retablos* of Saint Esther, including actual pieces of artwork by famed New Mexico artisan Charlie Carillo.

Ronit is a popular voice in many Jewish publications. She was born in Israel and grew up in Ethiopia and Venezuela. After serving in the IDF Foreign Liaison Division, she studied international business administration in the US. A mom with three children residing in Philadelphia, she became a writer, editor and ultimately, president of *The Philadelphia Jewish Voice*. Also a teacher and communicator of experiential, family-based Jewish practice, Ronit created the website "Hands-On Jewish Holidays" plus a book by the same name, now in five languages. A frequent contributor to various publications, she has presented at conferences worldwide.

"Santa Estera (Queen Esther)" by Ronit Treatman has been viewed online close to 500 times! Look for it on our SCJS YouTube Channel.

Irene Shaland: Madeira, Azores and a Sefer Torah



IRENE SHALAND
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In May, Irene Shaland, world traveler, author and expert on Jewish history presented "The Hidden History of Jewish People on the Islands of Madeira and Azores and the Unsolved Mystery of a Sefer Torah."

Irene, a book writer and Jewish historian, guided us through the exploration of two Portuguese autonomous regions in the Atlantic: Madeira and Azores. With

their mild climate, dramatic waterfalls and mountains, both archipelagos are popular tourist destinations with over five million visitors arriving annually. Few tourists however, know that two islands of Madeira and nine islands of Azores have a hidden Jewish history, and the archipelagos tightly guard their secrets.

Still under the radar for most historians, the Jewish presence on the islands spans the entire length of recorded history beginning with their discovery by the Portuguese in the 14th and 15th centuries. It is even thought that the explorer who discovered Madeira, Joao Zarco, was of the crypto-Jewish ancestry.

Irene also discussed the unsolved mystery of the ancient Sephardic Torah with an Ashkenazi cover. First given by a local man to an American Jewish officer serving on the US Army base on Terceira Island of the Azores, the Torah reappeared 40 years later on Sao Miguel Island inside a sea cave.

We were also treated to a virtual visit to the synagogues and Jewish cemeteries in Madeira and Azores as Irene delved deeper into the archipelagos' hidden Jewish history.

COMING UP

Isaac Amon: The Inquisition and the Founding Fathers



ISAAC AMON
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As the annual birthday of America, Independence Day, approaches on July 4th, we felt this lecture to be most appropriate.

For the Kanter Lecture on June 30, Isaac Amon presents "Religious Freedom, the Inquisition, and the USA."

In 1791, the Bill of Rights – the first 10 Amendments – officially became part of the United States Constitution. The First Amendment

enshrined liberty of conscience in America's nascent governing framework. Yet this astonishing moment in human affairs was the culmination of centuries of struggle for genuine religious freedom. The arrival and presence in North America of Spanish and Portuguese Jews (including *conversos*) changed the course of history. The founders of the American Republic invoked the Inquisition in their correspondence and in debates over procedural protections afforded to criminal suspects. Their famous letters to Spanish and Portuguese synagogues assuring Jews of religious



freedom was in contrast with the Inquisition, still operating well into the 19th century. Leading figures in these synagogues in New York, Newport, Savannah, and other places had directly experienced the Inquisition. In New Orleans, Isaac Monsanto was expelled from the city by the Spanish in the 1760s for being a hidden Jew – religious freedom was unavailable there until the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Experiences of the Inquisition’s persecution of *conversos* across time helped enshrine the core principle of religious liberty in the United States.

Dr. Isaac Amon, an attorney, is Director of Academic Research at Jewish Heritage Alliance, a cultural and historical nonprofit

dedicated to preserving and promoting the legacy of Sefarad (Jews of the Iberian Peninsula). He obtained JD and LLM degrees in negotiation and dispute resolution and JSD (PhD in Law) from Washington University School of Law in St. Louis. He was a Legal Fellow at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia at The Hague and was Legislative Director at the Missouri Department of Corrections. A descendant of Sephardic Jews who fled Spain in 1492, he writes and speaks on comparative law, legal history, and criminal procedure. He has an abiding interest in identity, memory and legacy. 🕊

CARRYING THE TORCH



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Sharing a Powerful Message

In April, SCJS member Rabbi Elisheva Irma Diaz, BAJS, MTS, DD, presented “The Quiet Flame – Rediscovering the Crypto-Jewish Heritage” to Sharon-Hadassah Metro Los Angeles

Area. Renowned international author, public speaker and lecturer, Rabbi Elisheva spoke about the history of crypto-Jews, what is happening in the movement now, and her own personal journey learning about her Sephardic Jewish heritage

New Film

The film *1506: The Lisbon Genocide* premiered worldwide on April 19, 2024 the anniversary of the massacre 518 years ago.

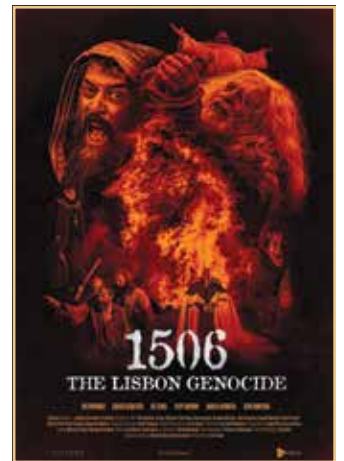
Produced by the Oporto Jewish community, it chronicles the massacre of Lisbon’s Jews, who endured a frightful slaughter at the hands of their non-Jewish neighbors. As many as 3,000 men, women and children lost their lives in the course of three days. There were so many victims the pogromists wanted to burn that there was not enough firewood to fuel the city’s pyres.

David Garrett, a defense lawyer and board member of the Oporto Jewish Community, told JNS that genocide is the correct term to describe the Lisbon slaughter, “both etymologically and legally.”

He said that “genocide can be international, but it also can be national or local. Genocide can kill millions of people, hundreds or even dozens.”

This 20-minute educational documentary is available for free in multiple languages and online platforms.

From Jewish News Syndicate, www.jns.org



Temple Aaron Designated a National Historic Landmark

On December 13, 2023, Temple Aaron in Trinidad, Colorado announced its designation as a National Historic Landmark (NHL) by US Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, the first Native American to serve as a cabinet



secretary. The Spring/Summer 2019 issue of *HaLapid* covered the history and restoration efforts of this magnificent building, a testament to being free in America in the 19th century. Built by Jews who fled Germany due to pogroms and lack of opportunity, some settled in Colorado and in 1883 erected a stunning synagogue in the Oriental style in Trinidad, a mining town near the New Mexico border.

Temple Aaron is one of 16 sites across the country to receive NHL designation in 2023-24. These sites are some of the nation's most historically important buildings and sites, and are chosen for their background, archaeology, architecture, and cultural significance.

"It is important that the places we deem nationally significant represent the historical and natural diversity of the American experience," said Chuck Sams,

director of the National Park Service in Colorado, which administers the NHL program. "These new landmarks further illustrate and expand our country's collective heritage and splendor."

After a rigorous nomination and review process, Temple Aaron was deemed to have national historic significance based on three criteria: 1) its association with the westward migration of Jewish families and individuals from Europe between 1840-



1924; 2) the leadership role of Temple Aaron's founders in the civic life of the community and in its economic growth, in addition to its spiritual or religious life; and 3) the architectural importance of the physical building.

It took more than four years of research, writing, and intensive efforts on the part of many just to complete the application for NHL status. Temple Aaron is grateful to Colorado Preservation, Inc. for sponsoring the nomination under the guidance of the National Park Service-Golden Region staff.

At the official NHL event on March 23, Kim Grant, National Parks Service, officiated and following all the speakers, Astrid Liverman unveiled the plaque citing the designation. According to Neal Paul, Temple Aaron president, some 1600 people now support the community with over 80 member families. Because of its location, Temple Aaron thrives, becoming a home to Jews of every background in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. 🌍

Colorado Public Radio aired a great story about Temple Aaron on "Colorado Matters."

Here is the link to listen from wherever you may be.

<https://www.cpr.org/show-episode/march-27-2024-temple-aarons-historic-achievement-adam-cayton-hollands-happy-place/>



Temple Aaron President Neal Paul (l) and David London, former board member. Both were among the core group who came together in 2016 to save Temple Aaron from an impending sale.

Famous in Istanbul — Blanca Carrasco Reaches New Audiences

Sometimes fame finds us when we least expect it. SCJS member and incoming president Blanca Carrasco discovered what many writers and storytellers have learned — our stories have wings.

A few months ago, Blanca met Cengiz Sisman at the Texas Jewish Historical Society Conference. He extended an invitation to share her journey with members of his community in Turkey over Zoom. The editor of *Shalom Magazine* in Istanbul, Suzan Nana Tarabulus, heard the presentation and invited her to share it for publication.



“I’m very excited to share the January issue of the magazine with my story entitled ‘Who Am I?’ (‘Ben Kimim?’ in Turkish) in its pages with my family and friends, said Blanca. “Never in my wildest dreams could I imagine that sharing my journey from Catholicism into Judaism would open doors to meeting amazing people from many different places, cultures, trades, religions and backgrounds, and that by discovering the correlations between their stories and mine, it would enrich my life in unprecedented ways.”

Blanca added, “I’m humbly grateful for this opportunity, and yet again: never could have imagined my life story featured in a magazine published 6,658 miles from El Paso. I hope that it will inspire people to dig deep into their family roots to enrich their own lives, just as it did for me and my family.”

Rebecca Wartell Lecture in Denver

Jewish scholar and assistant professor at the University of Colorado, Rebecca Wartell, delivered a brilliant lecture to a mainstream audience in Denver on February 21, 2024 as part of Kavod on the Road, a series of lectures geared to seniors. Sold-out attendance at the Staenberg-



REBECCA WARTELL
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Loup Jewish Community Center proved that her topic “Notes from Portugal and New Spain” attracted many from the local community.



In her talk she set the stage with a detailed overview of the period prior to the Edict of Expulsion with a clear timeline, and explored the persecution of *conversos* (New Christians of Jewish origin) by the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions of the 16th century. Based on her current research into Inquisition records and family correspondence, attendees learned about the experiences of men and women accused of secretly practicing Judaism in Portugal and New Spain (Mexico).

Rebecca is headed to Portugal this year to delve further into archival records at the Torre de Tombo in Lisbon, records which reveal much about the individuals, especially women, children and widows who were the most vulnerable and least protected. She has already tracked 500 cases to date and discovered that an equal number of cases were filed against men as against women.

SCJS looks forward to inviting Professor Wartell to deliver an address for the Kanter Lecture Series in the near future.

Isaac Amon in Florida

St. Louis attorney and JHA Director of Academic Research Isaac Amon takes his knowledge of Sefardic history to audiences across America. Many of you met him at our 2023 conference where he both presented and served as emcee.

Dedicated to telling the story of the Jews of Iberia in all its forms, Isaac is drawing audiences everywhere.



Isaac (right) with Dr. Lawrence Kanter in Florida

On February 27, 2024, he spoke at the Jewish Heritage Alliance’s first in-person event at Temple Moses Sephardic Congregation of Miami, Florida. The lecture, “From Inquisition to Genocide: The Untold Story of Sefarad and the Holocaust,” with 75 people in attendance, was graced with opening remarks by Deputy Consul General Mike Driquez, the Consulate General of Israel in Miami. >>>



On February 29, 2024 Isaac spoke at the Jacksonville Jewish Community Alliance (JCA), hosted by Dr. Lawrence Kanter. The same lecture was re-titled “On the Trail of Tears: Sephardic Judaism and the Holocaust.” Isaac will be a distinguished presenter in July at a collaborative event with JHA and SCJS as part of the ongoing Kanter Lecture Series. Watch *La Granada* for details.

Bryan Kirschen and a New Ladino Hub



BRYAN KIRSCHEN
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Interest in learning Ladino online skyrocketed during COVID-19 but according to Bryan Kirschen, a professor of Hispanic Linguistics at Binghamton University and co-curator of the ASF’s New York Ladino Day, there was no national coordinating body to support language learning specifically. Meet the American Ladino League (ALL), a new hub for Ladino language learning and community co-directed by Kirschen along with Hannah Pressman.

Said Kirschen, “In founding the American Ladino League, we are creating a hub that brings together people who already speak or want to learn Ladino, as well as those who are interested in learning about the language and its historic role in Sephardic culture.”

From the American Separdic Federation Weekly, courtesy of the Forward.

Congratulations to Maria-Luisa Ornelas June

One of our newest members, Maria-Luisa Ornelas June, who rocked the El Paso Conference with her bubbly personality and brilliant presentation on flamenco, received a 2023 Community Fellowship from the Texas Folklife Society to document the oral history of flamenco in Houston. Bravo!



Maria-Luisa Ornelas June

Corinne Brown Returns to El Paso

Those who stayed at the Paso del Norte Hotel during the October 2023 SCJS Conference would have noticed it is an unusual and spectacular building. In addition it has a unique and remarkable history. I discovered a magazine I write for, *Western Art & Architecture*, on display in my hotel room and decided to pitch the idea of writing about the Paso del Norte to my editor. They went for it.



In order to get the proper interviews with the hotel manager, the head chef of the steakhouse restaurant, and get the grand tour from hotel historian David Varela, I simply had to return. Thanks to the generosity of Destination El Paso, the city brought me back as a courtesy to get the whole story. I was there for less than 24 hours, but even with a bad cold, I had a great time. Life in the fast lane!

The article, layered with lots of research and filled with great photos, will be published in the June/July 2024 issue on newsstands and online at www.westernartandarchitecture.com.



David Varela, Corinne Brown, Blanca Carrasco, and El Paso photographer David Sabal in the lobby of El Paso Norte.



View of the restaurant 1700 where we were treated to a fabulous dinner.

Welcome Sean Schifano!

Sean, originally from Baltimore, is a public historian and junior archivist working to preserve a record of materials pertaining to descendants of Sephardic crypto-Jews. He is currently an MA student in public history at New Mexico State University and organizer of the Crypto-Jewish Historical Archives (CJHA). Learning exactly where the *converso* settlers went in North America, and where their descendants are now, has proven a worthy challenge.



SEAN SCHIFANO
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Sean has devoted his graduate work to establishing an archival home for past, present, and future scholarship on this subject. In his own words, “CJHA is envisioned as a community archive of records, oral histories, publications, exhibits, multimedia, genealogies, ephemera, and other materials pertaining to *converso* history in the Southwest and Northern Mexico, including guides to holdings at other institutions.”

As part of this project, Sean has offered to collate, process, and curate the SCJS records and files for inclusion in New Mexico’s State Records Center and Archives (SRCA). His addition of these and other materials will accompany the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society’s archives already there, as well as the papers of SCJS co-founder Dr. Stanley Hordes.

Naturally, labor and procurement of archival-standard materials require funding. Sean is attempting to cover costs through available grant monies. (Organizational and private support are more than welcome, of course.) We are thrilled to have Sean on our team and look forward to his further involvement.

Nan Rubin Donates Treasured Photo Art

Earlier this spring, one of our founding members, Nan Rubin from Las Cruces, New Mexico, reached out to SCJS with a very generous offer. She was moving out of state and decided to de-access some of her art collection.

“One of my prize possessions is an original photograph by Frederic Brenner, the French photographer who created the movie, *The Last Marranos* (1991) about the *marranos* in Belmont, Portugal. I met Frederic when I was living in New York, and he gave me the photograph as a gift for some work I did. I thought about who would appreciate this photograph and realized that someone in SCJS might be very interested in acquiring it. I’d like to donate it for you to sell, either at a silent auction, or we could just put a price on it and see if anyone would be interested. I have attached the professionally framed photograph with dimensions. The image reflects a family preparing for Passover. The date is 1992.”



Blanca Carrasco and Nan Rubin share a major gift of cultural value

We graciously accepted the print (now in storage) and intend to find a new home for it at the right price. It has been professionally appraised by the current dealer who represents Brenner in New York. It also came with a book titled *The Marranos*, a collection of his photographs. The print is of considerable value. At the time of this writing the work is being shown privately to some appropriate collectors. If interested in acquisition, contact Blanca Carrasco, epjf.bcarrasco@gmail.com. We promise to keep you posted. 🌍



The Jews of Belmonte, 1992, photograph by Frederic Brenner

READERS' FEEDBACK

Another *converso* descendent?

I've been reading the recent *HaLapid* and realized something that should have been in my Los Angeles Sephardic piece. In 1975 I was shocked to learn that the leading flamenco dancer in LA was Jewish. Today it makes perfect sense.

We once had a discussion about Columbus being a *converso* as many believe. What about the far-out idea that Franco was of *converso* descent? He once wanted to prove that Columbus was Spanish. He refused Hitler permission to march German soldiers through Spain to seize Gibraltar and prevent Allied access to the Mediterranean.

And while he spouted anti-Semitic rhetoric he also allowed thousands of Jews to flee through Spain.

Mark Bennett, Pine Grove, California



Dictator Francisco Franco
1892-1975



HaLapid archive

Many of you might remember Mark Schneegurt and his talk in *El Paso* about the poetry of prisoners in the jails of the Inquisitions and his book on this topic, *Anthology of Religious Poetry from the Mexican Inquisition Trials of 16th-Century Crypto-Jews*. Following the event, he asked if I knew where to find all the early copies of the *HaLapid* newsletter, since its inception in Portugal. To my regret, I actually had no idea. — Ed.

Here is a recent email from Mark:

I was able to recover the digitized archive of the original Basto editions of *HaLapid* from the late 1920s. The entire set of 156 issues is now in my computer. Thanks. (Mark promises more about this for a future article.)

Mark Schneegurt, Wichita, Kansas

Thank You!

Your continuing membership and donations make it possible for SCJS to advance our mission. We are all active participants in this important field of study. We thank each new and renewing member — you know who you are — and look forward to a bright future!

Dues Increase in July

The SCJS Board has determined that — for the first time in 10 years — annual memberships at all levels will increase by \$10 effective July 1, 2024.

Rising costs have touched us all, including SCJS operations as well. The bulk of our expenses are for publishing, mailing and conferences. All of these services have more than doubled since our last membership increase in 2014.

We need your support. A standard membership is still only \$45 per year (soon to be \$55). Help us continue growing into a world of crypto-Judaic education and outreach as we encourage more individuals to explore this fascinating topic. Questions? Email Membership VP Blanca Carrasco at epjf.bcarrasco@gmail.com.

**Please join or renew your SCJS membership now
before rates increase this July!**



YOU MAY NOW DONATE STOCKS TO SCJS

Contact Treasurer
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Understanding the Big Picture

Part One

.....
WITH PERMISSION FROM AND THANKS TO WWW.SEPHARDICU.COM

Genealogy, the study of one's ancestry and family lineage, is a captivating journey that unveils the hidden narratives of generations past. For Sephardic Jews, this journey becomes an exploration of an intricate tapestry that stretches across continents and epochs, revealing the vibrant history and diverse heritage that define their identity.

The Sephardic Diaspora: A Historical Odyssey

The foundation of Sephardic genealogy rests upon the monumental events that shaped the Sephardic Diaspora. This term refers to the dispersion of Sephardic Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, specifically Spain and Portugal, following their expulsion during the late 15th century. This dramatic exodus marked a turning point in Sephardic history, propelling communities towards new lands and cultures.

The expulsion decree, issued by the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella, forced Sephardic Jews to leave behind their homes, belongings and ancestral connections. The journey that ensued

would forever alter the course of Sephardic identity. In their quest for refuge and opportunity, Sephardic Jews embarked on an odyssey that would span North Africa, the Middle East, the Ottoman Empire, and beyond.

Diverse Communities and Distinct Identities

Understanding Sephardic genealogy involves recognizing the evolution of distinct Sephardic communities that emerged in response to the Diaspora. As Sephardic Jews resettled in various regions, they interwove their traditions with the cultural and religious landscapes of their new homes. This intricate fusion gave birth to diverse Sephardic identities, each infused with unique flavors and colors.

In North Africa, Sephardic communities established themselves in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. They brought with them the Ladino language, a Judeo-Spanish dialect that became a linguistic vessel of their heritage. In the Ottoman Empire, cities like Istanbul and Salonica became havens for Sephardic Jews, where Ladino thrived alongside a rich blend of customs from the East.

Genealogical Significance of the Sephardic Diaspora

The Sephardic Diaspora serves as the backdrop for Sephardic genealogy. Tracing one's Sephardic roots requires delving into historical records, documents and oral traditions that illuminate the paths of migration and settlement. Archives and libraries around the world house a treasure trove of information, offering insights into birth, marriage and death records, as well as immigration and census data. The migration patterns of Sephardic families mirror the migration of communities as they spread across regions. Sephardic genealogists may find records detailing the movement of their ancestors, shedding light on the routes they took and the destinations where they arrived. These records unveil stories of resilience, adaptation and the perseverance of a people determined to maintain their heritage despite geographical challenges. >>>



A Continuation of Identity

The quest to understand Sephardic genealogy is not solely an intellectual endeavor; it is an exploration of identity and continuity. By unearthing the threads of their family history, individuals gain a deeper appreciation for the struggles and victories that have shaped their identity. The narratives of Sephardic ancestors become sources of inspiration, reminding descendants of the strength that resides within their lineage.

In a world characterized by rapid change and shifting cultural landscapes, the study of Sephardic genealogy offers a profound sense of rootedness. It provides a bridge across time and space, connecting Sephardic individuals who share a common history and heritage, even if they reside in distant corners of the globe.

Honoring the Past, Shaping the Future

The study of Sephardic genealogy is more than a retrospective journey; it is a contribution to a living legacy. By delving into historical records, connecting with distant relatives, and preserving oral traditions, genealogists ensure that the stories of Sephardic Jews continue to resonate with future generations.

Each name uncovered in the archives and each story pieced together becomes a mosaic of Sephardic heritage. It is a tribute to the resilience of a community that has navigated through challenges and thrived across continents. The efforts of genealogists and researchers echo the resilience of their ancestors, a testament to the enduring spirit of Sephardic identity.

In conclusion, understanding Sephardic genealogy is a voyage through time and space, a journey that unveils the threads

that bind generations together. It is a tribute to the Sephardic Diaspora, a celebration of diverse identities, and a commitment to preserving a heritage that continues to flourish. As individuals delve into the annals of their family history, they become storytellers, weaving their narrative into the grand tapestry of Sephardic heritage.

The Sephardic Jewish experience is a remarkable journey that transcends time and space, encompassing a story of resilience, cultural fusion, and global impact. The Sephardic Diaspora, a phenomenon born from the crucible of persecution and expulsion, paints a vivid portrait of a people's unwavering spirit in the face of adversity. In this exploration of the historical background of the Sephardic Diaspora, we delve deeper into the origins, destinations, and enduring legacy of this transformative chapter in Jewish history.

More next time! 🌐

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

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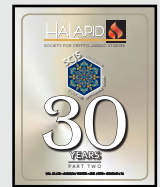
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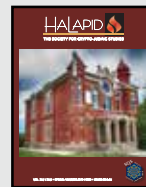
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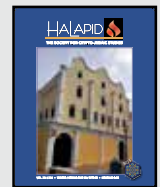
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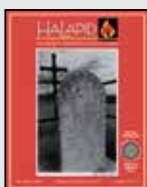
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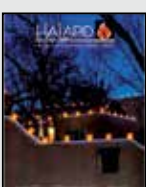
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Through your support of our studies of the history, cultures, arts and current status of crypto-Judaism in the United States and throughout the world, we continue our mission of nurturing a global organization for those researching the history of crypto-Judaic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

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A Jewish Tour In Southern Italy Awaits You!

Rabbi Barbara Aiello of Sinagoga Ner Tamid del Sud offers tours in southern Italy for anyone searching for their Jewish past. This immersion into the history of Jewish life in Calabria (the “toe” of the Italian “boot”), uncovers the little-known history of ancient Jewish settlements in this area. **Jewish or not, your past may await you!**

Many families consider combining a Bar or Bat Mitzvah celebration in the Calabria synagogue followed by a three-day tour of ancient Jewish sites.

Rabbi Barbara combines a participatory synagogue service with a tour of Jewish sites, culminating in a visit to the Ferramonti Concentration Camp where Italian soldiers and local villagers saved 4,000 European Jews.



Appointed Italy's first woman rabbi in 2004, Rabbi Barbara continues to serve as Italy's only resident modern, liberal rabbi. She serves as a spokesperson for Pluralistic Judaism – a movement that deliberately blurs denominational lines and extends the hand of Jewish welcome to Jews of all backgrounds.

Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, she is the daughter of a liberator of the Buchenwald concentration camp. She holds an MS from George Washington University and received ordination from The Rabbinical Seminary International and the Rabbinical Academy in New York City where she was recently awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity for her 25 years in the rabbinate.

"I am grateful to serve our Jewish *meshpucha* in ways that are exciting and exhilarating," says the rabbi. "From helping an Italian family discover their Jewish heritage to sharing memories with seniors, many who are more than 100 years old, allows me to fully engage in *L'dor v'dor* – that special Jewish experience of “from generation to generation.” From the United States to the Italian “boot,” these wonderful people continue to enrich my life."

As founder and director of the Italian Jewish Cultural Center of Calabria (IJCCC), Rabbi Barbara's works to help *anusim* (ancestors who were forced to convert from Judaism) discover and connect with their Jewish roots. The IJCCC staff helps lost Jews determine the Jewish roots of their surnames, extending the hand of Jewish welcome to Italians and Italian Americans seeking more about their Jewish heritage.

For details on Spring and Fall
2025 tours, please email
Rabbi@RabbiBarbara.com
(Tour space is always very limited.)
and visit www.RabbiBarbara.com

