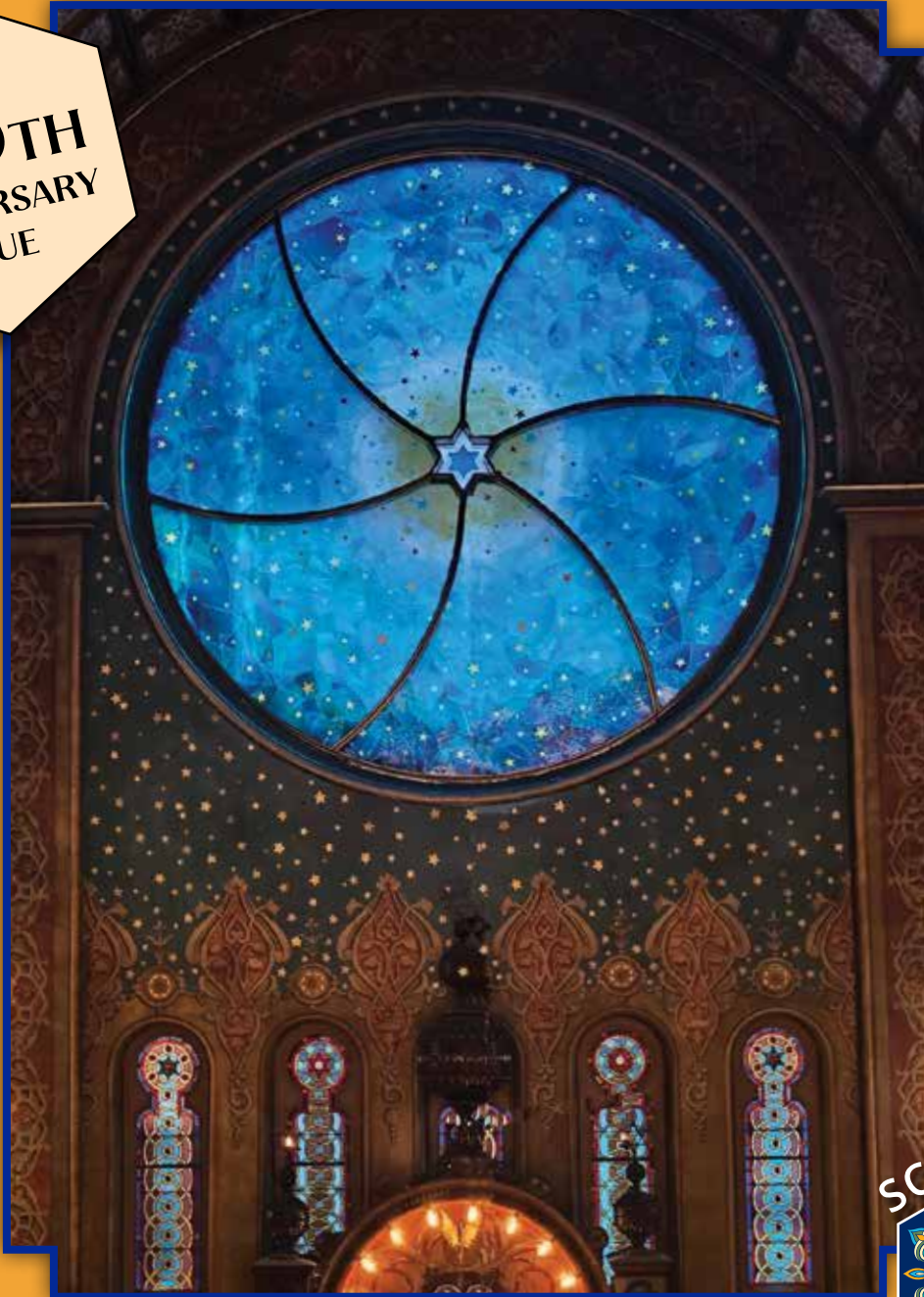




# HALAPID

SOCIETY FOR  
CRYPTO-JUDAIC STUDIES

**35<sup>TH</sup>**  
ANNIVERSARY  
ISSUE



VOL. 68 / 69 • AUTUMN / WINTER • 2025 / 5786 • ISSUES 49 / 50



AUTUMN / WINTER • 2025 / 5786

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#### CONFERENCE CO-CHAIRS

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**Blanca Carrasco**

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**Nancy Katz, PhD**

#### JUDY FRANKEL

#### MEMORIAL CONCERT

**La Señora by**  
**Michelle Green Willner, DMA (ASCAP)**

#### PRE-CONFERENCE

#### GENEALOGY WORKSHOPS

**Genie Milgrom**

#### FILMS

**Genie Milgrom's Between the Stone  
and the Flower**  
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#### SPECIAL PERFORMANCE

**Kol Sephardic Choir**

PLUS INFORMATIVE PANELS, GREAT FOOD, NETWORKING AND FELLOWSHIP

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## FROM OUR PRESIDENT

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

**HALAPID** is the biannual publication of  
The Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies,  
a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.  
[www.cryptojews.com](http://www.cryptojews.com)

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### EDITORIAL POLICY OF HALAPID

Contributions from writers all over the world are edited for grammar, spelling, typographical errors, and length. Content embedded in family memories may or may not be historically accurate; we reserve the right to edit material and correct obvious misstatements or historical errors. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of SCJS or *HaLapid*. Articles from *HaLapid* may be reprinted with permission only.

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

**W**e did it, and it was great! It has been a couple of months now since we hosted the 35th Annual SCJS Conference at Temple Tifereth Israel in Beverly Hills and I still talk about it with my friends and family. Having the opportunity to work closely with the Temple's rabbi and directors, our amazing committee members, financial supporters, volunteers, presenters and participants, authors, scholars, musicians, and people in the Jewish community of Los Angeles and afar, has left an indelible mark on my mind and heart. Once more, the mission and vision of SCJS reached

out to many and placed itself in front of people who perhaps have not heard about crypto-Jews and their descendants as something that merits attention as it connects us with them in more ways than ever. This issue of *HaLapid* will show you vivid examples of what I just mentioned. For those of you who attended the conference, I hope it brings beautiful memories, and for those of you who could not make it this year, may these photos get you excited to attend our future conferences. You will not leave the same after attending, I promise you!



**BLANCA CARRASCO**  
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During the conference we launched a call for nominations to join the board and are working with people interested in participating. Right now, I would like to present two new board members who will be joining us starting in 2026. We are thrilled and honored to have Ronit Treatman find time in her busy schedule to join the ranks of SCJS, and we welcome a very passionate scholar and *primo* Chaplain David Gonzalez Guajardo. We look forward to collaborating with them for the betterment of SCJS. You will find more information inside this issue and more members will be introduced as we move forward. If you are interested in becoming a board member, send a short biography and letter of interest to Corinne Brown at [corinnejb@aol.com](mailto:corinnejb@aol.com).

And just as the conferences allow us to come together — as family, to make, renew, and strengthen friendships — we continue to research and unfold the history that we so passionately share. Let me take this time to thank you for your continuous support and for answering the call every time we reach out. We are here because of you, and we do all that we do because of you. May your lives be blessed abundantly, today and always!

Wishing you a beautiful holiday season and a wonderful 2026.

*Blanca Carrasco*  
Blanca Carrasco, President

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





## The field continues to evolve

**S**till processing the windfall of information and the abundance of new faces and friends from the conference, I find it is almost hard to keep up. For those who went to Los Angeles, this small, more intimate gathering was a whirlwind of lectures, films and music, graced by some of the best food in town. From my position, I was gathering resources and names throughout, amazed at the wealth of new information and the people delivering it. As I approach my 12th year as editor, I am forever renewed by the evolution of this field of study and the new leaders bringing it to the forefront.



**CORINNE JOY BROWN**  
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As some of our longest-held members age gracefully, it is encouraging to know they are supported by exciting new voices. SCJS is more than an organization; it is a family. Meanwhile, I find I must stagger the information

to print in *HaLapid* — there is so much. Hearty thanks to all the contributors, today and in the past.

In this issue, enjoy another look at the history of our magazine with brand new data from Mark Schneegurt. Discover another crypto-community leader in 20th-century Texas who became a legend in her own time from Carlos Larralde. Read a poignant collection of memories by Chana Rosalinda Méndez Gonzalez and her crypto-Jewish family; discover a Sephardic prayer from Ronit Treatman, and much more. Take a look at our upcoming Kanter lecture series calendar and plan your coming year with us in mind.

Wishing you all happy holidays. Please pass along issues of *HaLapid* and urge others to join.

Cheers,

*Corinne J. Brown*

Corinne Joy Brown, Editor

### A PASSING OF NOTE

**Crispin Rendon**  
1950-2025



*Crispin Rendon*

**F**ormer Agricultural Biologist at California Department of Food and Agriculture from Riverside.

A widely respected and tirelessly dedicated researcher and speaker, Rendon was considered a very generous, brilliant, funny, enthusiastic and particularly a *primo* to many members of south Texas and northeastern Mexico genealogical societies and groups. Rendon tracked 40 generations of his family and as contributor to [www.somosprimos.com](http://www.somosprimos.com), published numerous volumes of genealogies of Mexican families.

He has left a huge void in the lives of many. May his memory be a blessing.



*Eldridge Street Synagogue, New York*

**F**or no other reason than its sheer beauty and the fact that Jewish life flourishes around the world, this issue's cover is the rose window of the Eldridge Street Synagogue built in 1887 in New York City's Lower East Side. We hope it inspires you as it did us. Photo by Colorado high school student Karen Gerecht. Street view from Wikipedia.

The synagogue was designed by Peter and Francis William Herter in the Moorish Revival style. The Eldridge Street facade includes a rose window, plus finials on the rooftops. The main and largest space is the sanctuary, which includes two levels of seating, a Torah ark and a central *bimah* (raised platform). The lower level has been converted to galleries. A modern-day museum focuses on history and culture, and a small number of worshippers continue to hold services there. Over the years, the synagogue has received architectural commentary and has influenced the designs of other local synagogues.





## Welcome New SCJS Board Members

As terms expire and lives change, so does the SCJS board wane and grow. We are thrilled to welcome two new board members whose terms officially begin in May and who will be invited to board meetings during this coming semester. We are honored to accept the time and talents of Ronit Treatman and David Guajardo. Each has special talents to help us reach the wider crypto-Judaic community.



**RONIT TREATMAN**  
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**CHAPLAIN  
DAVID GONZALEZ  
GUAJARDO**  
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chaplaindavid@aol.com

### Ronit Treatman MEMBER-AT-LARGE

**R**onit Treatman was born in Israel, and raised in Ethiopia and Venezuela. After serving in the Israel Defense Forces' Foreign Liaison Division, she studied International Business Administration in the United States. She was a stay-at-home mom of three children for 10 years, residing in Philadelphia. When her youngest child started school, she became a writer, editor and ultimately, president of the *Philadelphia Jewish Voice*. During this period she also created the blog and website, "Hands-On Jewish Holidays," and administered many social network communities focused on studying Judaism. She has lectured and presented at conferences around the U.S. on topics ranging from engagement with the descendants of *anusim* (forced converts to Catholicism) to kosher locusts. As a result of her own DNA discovery that revealed a personal connection to Spain and the Inquisition, Ronit became very involved with outreach to the successors of Jews from Iberia. She wrote a book, also called *Hands-On Jewish Holidays*, that was published in English, Spanish, Catalan, and Portuguese especially for this community. Due to demand, she also published Hebrew and Russian versions of the book. She was invited to be the director of

Reconectar, an organization that focuses on reconnecting the descendants of Spanish and Portuguese Jewish communities with the Jewish world at-large. Her writing is the distillation of ideas that have been percolating for many years, drawing from her professional research, her multinational upbringing, and her experience raising her own children.

### Chaplain David Gonzalez Guajardo MEMBER-AT-LARGE

**C**haplain David Gonzalez Guajardo has a Master of Science in Jewish Studies from Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership in Chicago. He has equivalency for a Masters of Divinity from the Association of Professional Chaplains and is now Board Certified. Originally from Monterrey, Mexico he has lived in the U.S. for 30 years and taught himself English. He has presented his research projects at the Texas-New Mexico Hospice Annual Conference, the 20th and 35th Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies Annual Conferences, the 39th and 40th Texas Hispanic Genealogical and the Texas A&M Sephardic Heritage Symposiums. His works can be found at [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu) in Genealogical and Historical Conferences in San Antonio and Dallas. ☺

## Me'Am Lo'ez

## Bringing Torah and Commentaries to the People

RONIT TREATMAN

**M**e'Am Loez is one of best known publications in Judeo-Spanish. It is a commentary on the *Tanakh* written in Judeo-Spanish in 1730 by Rabbi Ya'akov Khuli. The title was inspired by the verse, "When Israel went forth from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange speech, (Me'Am Loez), Judah became His holy one, Israel His dominion." (Psalms 114:l).

In 1492 the Catholic monarchs of Spain issued the Alhambra Decree, ordering all the Jews in their territories to convert to Catholicism, leave or be killed. Sultan Bayezid II of the Ottoman Empire invited the Jews to live under his rule. Many Sephardic Jews accepted his invitation and relocated to Constantinople and Salonica. They brought the Spanish language with them.

After about 200 years of living in the Ottoman Empire, Sephardic Jews used Hebrew for ritual prayer, but conducted their daily lives in Judeo-Spanish. Communal leaders became concerned that

ordinary Jews could not understand Hebrew. This was shortly after the time of Shabbatai Tzvi and his false Messianic movement. Jewish scholars and rabbis knew Hebrew and could study the Torah. Regular Jews were disconnected from it due to the language barrier. Several Jewish intellectuals concluded that in order to bring the study of the Torah and its commentaries to the community they had to present them in Judeo-Spanish.

One of these learned men, Rabbi Ya'akov Khuli, was descended from a Jewish family that was exiled from Spain. He was born in Jerusalem, where he studied and became a rabbi. He lived in Safed before moving to Constantinople where he was appointed to be a *dayan* — a rabbinic judge in a *beit din* or rabbinic court. He wrote a commentary on the Torah in Judeo-Spanish titled *Me'am Lo'ez*.



Me'Am Lo'ez

*Me'am Lo'ez* dealt with all aspects of Jewish life based on the Talmud, Midrash, and early rabbinic literature. It covered Genesis and most of Exodus. The first books in the series were published



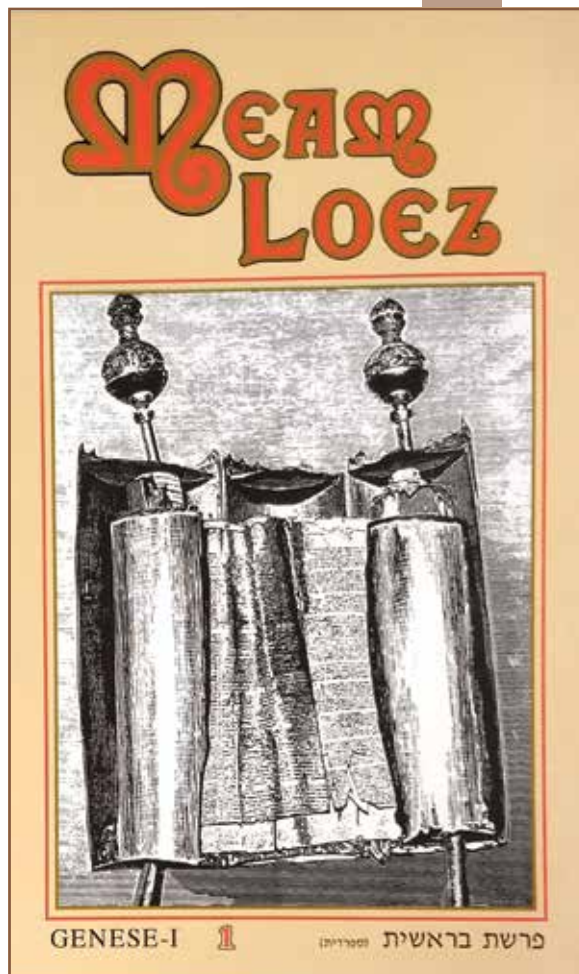
in 1730 and numerous editions followed. The book was designed to enable people to study the weekly Torah portion from it. Families read it at home, study groups gathered to learn from it in coffee houses, and it was taught in the synagogues. Rabbi Ya'akov Khuli died in Constantinople in 1732 and other rabbis from the Ottoman Empire completed his work.

*Me'am Lo'ez* became very popular in the Sephardic communities of Turkey, Morocco, Egypt, and later in Spain after the Inquisition was abolished in 1834. It was widely disseminated, infusing the Sephardic community with new energy and observance. Written like an encyclopedia of biblical and rabbinic learning, *Me'am Lo'ez* included laws, customs and ethical insights as well as classic rabbinic commentaries and interpretations of the Torah.

It appealed to common people because it celebrated modesty and hard work. Rabbi Khuli believed that regular Jews should focus on observing *halacha* (Jewish law based on the Talmud). He valued Kabbalah as part of the legacy of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews. The final edition of *Me'am Lo'ez* was issued in 1897. This was one of the most impactful works ever published in the Jewish community.

The printing of *Me'Am Lo'ez* was the beginning of large scale printing activity in Judeo-Spanish in the western Ottoman Empire. Prior to its publication there were no books in Judeo-Spanish; the language was used primarily to write letters and to keep business records. The most famous publication in Judeo-Spanish, it is considered one of the best commentaries about the Torah. Many Sephardic families would give the expensive set of books as a gift to a new son-in-law. Most of the Judeo-Spanish speaking population was destroyed by the Nazis during the Holocaust. In 1950 *Me'Am Lo'ez* was translated to Hebrew by Rabbi Shmuel Yerushalmi, and in 1980 to English by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan. This introduced Rabbi Khuli's work to the Ashkenazi community. Its translations are given as *bar mitzvah* gifts to this day. You can see part of *Me'Am Lo'ez* in Judeo-Spanish in the National Library of Israel. 📖

[www.nli.org.il/en/books/NNL\\_ALEPH9970I262027I505I7I/NLI](http://www.nli.org.il/en/books/NNL_ALEPH9970I262027I505I7I/NLI)



One book from *Me'am Lo'ez*



#### RONIT TREATMAN

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Ronit Treatman was born in Israel and raised in Ethiopia and Venezuela. After serving in the Israel Defense Forces' Foreign Liaison Division, she studied International Business Administration in the U.S. A stay-at-home mom of three children for 10 years residing in Philadelphia, she became a writer, editor and ultimately, president of the *Philadelphia Jewish Voice*. She also created the blog and website, "Hands-On Jewish Holidays," and administered many social network communities focused on studying Judaism. She has lectured and presented at conferences around the U.S. on topics ranging from engagement with the descendants of *anusim* (forced converts to Catholicism) to kosher locusts. When her own DNA revealed a personal connection to Spain and the Inquisition, Ronit became very involved with outreach to the successors of Jews from Iberia. Her book, also called *Hands-On Jewish Holidays*, was published in English, Spanish, Catalan, and Portuguese especially for this community; she also published Hebrew and Russian versions. Today she is the director of Reconnectar, an organization reconnecting the descendants of Spanish and Portuguese Jews with the Jewish world at-large. Her writing draws from her professional research, her multinational upbringing, and her experience raising her children.



# LUMINARIAS

## Ancient Traditions Eternal Roots



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.....  
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*This entry is only a part of a longer biographical essay. We regret we cannot print the entire work. — Editor*

It is traditional throughout the old Hispanic southwestern U.S. to light luminarias in late December, candles outside people's homes and in front of churches and missions — a custom dating back to the first Spanish settlements in northern New Spain, (today's northern Mexican states and southwest U.S. states).

It is also traditional to make *buñuelos*, a flattened dough fried in oil and sprinkled with powdered sugar or layered with honey, and to bake *biscochos*, pastries that are also part of Sephardic cuisine.

What other Sephardic secrets are contained in the customs of Hispanic Catholic families living on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border?

### 1950s Ysleta, Texas

#### HOLIDAYS

Luminarias are lit in front of the old Ysleta Mission south of El Paso. It is nighttime late December. Lit candles in sand-filled bags radiate their light and beauty. At home, our mother fries sweet *buñuelos* in oil and bakes *biscochos*, anise cookies coated with cinnamon and sugar.

#### APRIL

In spring, as Easter approaches, families prepare *capirotada*, sweet bread pudding. All pieces of bread are gathered and layered in deep pots with cheese, nuts, raisins, slivered coconut, soaked in *piloncillo*, brown-sugar syrup, and slow-cooked. Families send each other *capirotada*. Now there is no bread in anyone's home — it all went into the *capirotada* pots!

#### COOKING

Our mother makes tortillas, mixing water and flour, forming the dough into a ball, rolling it out into a thin circle with a *palote* (wood rolling pin), and rapidly toasting it over an uncoiled *comal* (round iron griddle). Prior to making tortillas or pastries, she carefully sifts the flour, tossing away debris and insects.

When using eggs, she expertly cracks the shell in half, yolk intact, checks the half-shell holding the yellow yolk before flipping it onto the other half-shell so the other side of the yolk is now visible, then whips the yolk in a bowl with the albumen.

For salads, our mother separates each lettuce leaf, immersing it in water with freshly squeezed lemon juice to eliminate insects or worms. Before cooking chicken or making chicken soup, she coats the inside of the bird thickly with coarse kosher salt, then rinses it off thoroughly. For cooking beans or rice, she teaches us to check small batches by hand to ensure they are clean of insects or foreign matter. Outside visitors, seeing the rapid flicking of beans by my mother's swift fingers, ask, "Why does your mother count the beans?"

#### HOUSEKEEPING

Our mother has us sweep indoors daily. Entering one room with broom, dustpan and bin, we sweep the dust into a pile, gather it up, drop it in the bin, pick up broom, dustpan and bin, and begin the process in the next room. It is prohibited to sweep dirt from one room to the next, and absolutely prohibited to sweep from inside the house to the outside!



## BENDICIONES

Before we leave the house, our mother always gives us a *bendición* (blessing), voicing a prayer for each of us: *Que Dios te cuide, te limpie tu camino y te proteja de todo mal*, (“May God guide you, clear the path before you and protect you from all harm”). When making plans, or when someone asks if we are going to an event, she always adds, *Si Dios quiere*, or *Dios mediante*, or *Primero Dios* (“God willing,” or “God permitting,” or “God comes first.”)

At mealtimes, we are instructed to first wash our hands. Sitting at the table, which is always covered with a tablecloth, we thank God before eating and again after eating. At night, before we fall asleep, our mother comes to our bedsides and has us pray, thanking God and asking for protection for us and our family.

## HEALING AND MAL OJO

Our mother, Guadalupe Carrasco Méndez, having studied nursing in Chihuahua, Mexico, becomes our community’s unofficial healer in Ysleta. Neighbor ladies come to her for injections, healing salves and advice. She grows herbs — *yerbabuena* (mint), *cola de caballo* (horsetail herb), *estafiate* (“sacred sage”) — and other healing plants from which she brews teas and makes poultices and healing ointments. Silk tassels from corn (cleaned and rinsed) serve to brew a healing tea. The flowers of the *teresita* (periwinkle) plant are also healing.

She saves the egg albumen from cracked eggs in the refrigerator to apply to accidental burns. Painful wasp or bee stings are immediately treated with freshly-sliced garlic rubbed on the area. When one of us children has *sarampión* (measles) or *víruela* (smallpox), she bathes us in *rosa de castilla* (rose petals of the castile rose) and applies dry powdered oatmeal to our skin afterwards, both of which are very soothing.

When babies develop a rash on their little bottoms, she washes and dries them and exposes them to the morning sun, explaining that the early rays are healing.

On occasion, with a very sick child having *empacho* (indigestion) and diarrhea that doctors cannot cure, she effects a “cure” by rubbing an egg (still in its shell) over the child’s belly, then breaking the egg open in a bowl (yolk intact) and placing it under the child’s crib to absorb *el mal ojo* (the evil eye). She then gently “kneads” the baby’s abdominal area with her hands until the baby expels the piece of rubber balloon or grape skins adhering to the lining of its stomach. All of these healings are accompanied by prayers.

## BARAJAS, TROMPOS, Y CANTOS

In 1952, we move to a house built by our father, Serapio Rivas Méndez, a skilled carpenter and cabinetmaker. The garage becomes his workshop where he makes furniture, wooden toys, puzzles, and spinning tops called *trompos*.

When relatives and family friends come to visit, the men play *barajas* (playing cards). The Spanish word for them is *cartas* but our family and friends always call them *barajas*. The women sit and tell stories, crochet or knit, or prepare food.

We love to hear the *cuentos* (stories) of *Aladín y su lámpara mágica* (Aladdin and the Magic Lamp) with the sonorous words *Ábrete sésamo* (“Open, sesame”), and the songs and stories of *El Cri-Crí*, the singing cricket. We sing and play *Naranja dulce, limon partido* (Sweet Orange, Sliced Lemon).

On birthdays, the family sings a special song to the birthday child or adult, *Las Mañanitas*, a song from Spain describing King David singing these “early morning songs” as the dawn awakened.

>>>



## MY PARENTS' VALUES

Our family is poor by U.S. standards, yet our parents treasure our education. They make sacrifices to send us to Catholic school, rather than the free public school. They want each of us to be *aplicada* (applied), meaning that we are very dedicated to our studies, and they encourage us to excel in school.

When poor persons come to our door, our mother always gives them food. She teaches us that no matter how little we have, we never eat without sharing. When we cross the border to Ciudad Juarez or Zaragoza on the Mexico side of the Rio Grande, she brings coins to give to the poor people of Mexico begging in the streets. *Mis pobres* (my poor ones), she calls them. She teaches us to never make fun of people, whether they are disabled, crippled, mentally slow, or stutterers.

On Friday nights our parents take us grocery shopping. Once when I am three-years-old, on our return home, a candy bar drops out of my little winter coat. My father insists on taking me back to the store, where he lifts me up so I can hand the candy to the cashier. He tells them I took it without paying and he has brought me back to return it. I am filled with shame but learn a very valuable lesson imprinted on me by my father's courageous integrity.

## OUR NEIGHBORS FROM NEW MEXICO

The Francos, our neighbors, speak an archaic form of Spanish. They are from New Mexico where my father has relatives (Ortiz and Lozoya families) who also speak this way. When I learn to read and write English in Catholic school, I apply it to the Spanish we speak at home and with my mother's help, learn to write Spanish. (In school we are forbidden to speak Spanish.) I try reading a large tome my father owns, *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha* written by Miguel de Cervantes in early 17th-century Spain. It is difficult for me; it sounds like the Spanish spoken by the Francos and our father's relatives in New Mexico. Years later I learn that it is the language of 16th-century Spain, brought by the early settlers of New Mexico who chose to remain very isolated and retained this archaic form of speech.

## DICHOS

Our mother and our aunts have *dichos* (sayings) for every situation and occurrence. *Caras vemos, corazones no sabemos*, ("Faces we see, but what is in their hearts, we do not know"). *No hay mal que por bien no venga*, ("There is no bad that does not produce



Rio Grande River

good"). *El hombre propone y Dios dispone*, ("Man proposes, God disposes"). *El que nada debe, nada tem*, ("He who does not have any debts [i.e., has done nothing wrong] has nothing to fear"). *El que presta lo que le es menester, el diablo luego se ríe de él*, ("He who lends what he himself needs, the devil will laugh at him [when he needs it and he does not return it]").

About someone who attributes to others the faults they themselves have, she says, *Cómo vives, juzgas*, ("You judge others with your own faults"). *En su cuero lo hallará*, refers to someone speaking badly about another person (unjustly), whatever they were criticizing, it will come back to them – "In their own flesh" they will find it.

## DREAMS AND FEARS

Our mother has prophetic dreams that come true down to the smallest detail. As a child, I experience a different kind of dreams: recurring dreams of falling endlessly down a bottomless tunnel, dreams of a paralyzing fear of train tracks, dreams of trying to hide.

I love life, colors and nature, the sky and music. I love my family. I love to play and to learn. Yet I also have strong claustrophobic fears, and a great fear of being buried alive; as well as a great fear of being on an operating table, and a fear of nurses and doctors.

Although I am a talkative, expressive, and very active child, I also think deeply about things and am filled with questions that my mind seeks to understand. Questions about the Universe, about people, about why there is injustice and inequality in the world, about God.

And even though I am taught in Catholic Church and school to love Jesus, Mary and the saints, I have a very strong feeling that I only exist because I am a figment or a thought in the Mind of a Very Great Being.

When my mother sees me in my pensive states, she says about me, *Aguas tranquilas corren profundas*, (“Still waters run deep”).

## Chihuahua, Mexico

### OUR RELATIVES

Crossing the Rio Grande annually, my parents take my eldest sister Ilda Esther, myself and Lali (Oralia), and, as our family grows, Lourdes, Maricela, Sylvia, Javier, Angelica, and our baby brother Saúl, to visit.

Chihuahua is my parents’ land of birth. We love our grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins: — the Carrasco, Méndez, López, Ramos, Rivas branches of our family.

We learn of other family traditions. My cousins tell us it is forbidden to have milk with meat. *Te hace daño*, (“It harms you”). Our aunt informs my older sister in Spanish, “If you eat meat, you must wait an hour before drinking milk.”

On one visit, my aunt Tía Socorro asks my lovely eldest sister Ilda Esther if she would like to marry her eldest son, our kind, gentle cousin Ricardo. My sister, startled, replies in Spanish, “But Tía, he is my cousin!” She answers, “This is how it was done: — cousins marry cousins.” In truth, this is prohibited in the Catholic Church, but it is a tradition in our families.

### THE LOST INHERITANCE

On another occasion, my cousins take me to the elite section of Chihuahua City. They point out a mansion surrounded by spacious lawns, gardens and trees. “This mansion belonged to our grandmother when she was a young girl. A crooked attorney swindled our family out of it.” My mother later adds that he also took haciendas, land and cattle that her maternal grandparents had owned in Chihuahua.

### OUR FAMILY INHERITANCE STOLEN FROM US

Along the border, not only are English and Spanish spoken, but several derivations: a “Spanglish” mixture of Spanish and English; *pochó* or *pochismos*, a Spanish slang unique to El Paso and the border region; and the “efe” language, a form of Spanish “pig-latin” spoken primarily by the women to prevent the children (and perhaps the men) from understanding them. And of course, the archaic language of New Mexico, heard along the frontier region.

At home, we also have our own unique words that, as a child, I always assume are Spanish, but which turn out not to be part of the Spanish vocabulary. When someone does something ridiculous or unwarranted, we always exclaim, ¡Mah! ¿Y por qué hizo eso? (What! And why did he do that?) or ¡Mah! ¿Que se creé? (What! What does she think she is?). When one of us accidentally drops something, our mother calls us ¡Lefia! (the only way I know to translate this is something like, “Careless!”). Years later I discover that neither of those terms, *mah* or *lefiá* are Spanish words. *Mah* is the Hebrew word for what. And *lefiá*, it seems to me, comes from the Hebrew root *nafal*, to fall.

Many more episodes in Chana Rosalinda Méndez Gonzalez’s life unfold in the full version of this memoir. For the rest of this remarkable story, readers may contact her by email, [mendez.rosal@gmail.com](mailto:mendez.rosal@gmail.com). 📧



Ysleta Mission — recognized as the oldest continuously operating parish in the State of Texas.



## Crypto-Jews of Porto and Captain Artur Basto

**T**he Jewish community was widely persecuted in Spain and Portugal from the 14th century. The Edict of Expulsion was decreed in 1492, making Catholicism the only legal religion and Jews were forced to convert, leave or be killed. As many as a million Jews fled from places where the Inquisition was most harsh. Crypto-Jews who managed to hide their practices and beliefs were constantly under the threat of arrest, imprisonment, torture, and death by public burning. The Inquisition continued for centuries, formally ending in 1834. If you were a crypto-Jew hiding in the heart of the Inquisition for centuries, how long would you wait before coming out of hiding? When would you feel comfortable building your first synagogue?

The crypto-Jewish community in the areas in and around Porto in northern Portugal remained hidden into the 20th century. These included the crypto-Jews in Porto, Bragança, and the surrounding region. Captain Artur Carlos de Barros Basto entered the scene and changed everything for the Porto Jewish community. A convert himself who found he had Jewish roots, he became Abraham Israel Ben-Rosh. Basto arrived in Porto from Tangier in 1921 and by 1923 was building a Jewish community from the remnants hidden in villages of northern Portugal. By 1929 he had raised enough money to start building the large Source of Light Synagogue — *Kadoorie Mekor Haim* Synagogue — which opened in 1938. Some 9,000 crypto-Jews in northern Portugal “returned” to Judaism. By 2012, the community had dwindled to only 40 families, but there was an influx from all over the world, such that it is now a strong community of 700 families. Basto took it upon himself to teach and train the new Porto Jewish community in the traditional liturgy and practices of Judaism. He produced pamphlets of prayers and rituals, and published a periodical, called *Ha-Lapid (The Torch)*, the namesake of the *HaLapid* magazine you are reading now.

Basto published 156 issues of *Ha-Lapid* from its founding in 1927 to its end in 1958. Originally issued monthly, it became bimonthly after a couple of years, and even less frequent in its latter years. There were subscribers around the world, but the periodical was directed at the Israelite community surrounding Porto. The masthead for each issue of *Ha-Lapid* included the phrase *Tudo se ilumina para aquele que busca a luz...alumia-vos e aponta-vos o caminho*, “Everything is illuminated for those who seek

Basto's *HaLapid* from a  
Century Ago Presents

# Prayers from the Crypto-Judaic Community of Northern Portugal

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**MARK A. SCHNEEGURT, PhD**

Department of History  
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the light... it illuminates you and shows you the way.” While A.C. de Barros Basto is noted as the director and editor of *Ha-Lapid*, more prominent is his chosen name Ben-Rosh. Each issue began with a cover story that was accompanied by a large image. Usually the cover story presented historical content, although some stories involved current events or personalities. There was typically a section, *Vida Comunal*, that relayed news about the Jewish communities of Portugal such as Belmonte, Bragança, Lisbon, and Porto. There was a section, *Terre de Israel*, that gave updates about the Holy Land. Another common feature was *Dos 4 Cantos da Terra*, with Jewish news from the four corners of the world, broadly including everywhere from Italy to the U.S. to Spain and even Africa. Each issue would detail ritual practices, biblical content, or prayers. This would take different forms but was meant to teach the community. Remember that these were hidden pockets of crypto-Jews, without rabbis or training in traditional Jewish practices and observance. Finally, the issues typically included comments on Jewish books or articles in periodicals.

## Locating the Original *Ha-Lapid*

While researching poems and prayers that might be similar to those in Mexican Inquisition trial transcripts, I found several references to texts published in

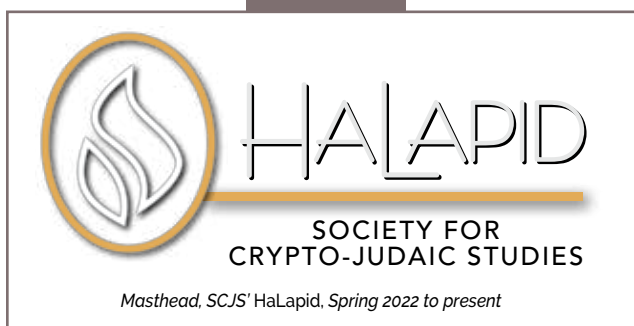


A young Captain Basto and his wife Lea.

## Evolution of the *Ha-Lapid* Masthead



Masthead, last issue of Basto's HaLapid, September 1958 (est. 1927)



*Ha-Lapid*. Basto had canvassed local crypto-Jews to transcribe the prayers in circulation in those communities. The chance to look at those transcripts started my quest. Surprisingly, *Ha-Lapid* did not appear in any easily accessible library. *Ha-Lapid* was not owned by any of the academic and public libraries associated with WorldCat, a worldwide interlibrary lending system (OCLC). My university library was unable to locate this periodical.

At one time I saw that *Ha-Lapid* appeared online as a repository of PDF scans as posted by the Porto Jewish community. However searching for the website in 2023, only led to webpages that no longer existed. Let us recognize that Basto's *Ha-Lapid* is an important historical record of a key crypto-Jewish community rediscovering itself a century after the end of the Inquisition. It was distressing and puzzling that *Ha-Lapid* was no longer accessible to the world. You may have heard that you really cannot delete pages from the internet, that there is a record of everything somewhere. That record is the Internet Wayback Machine, more formally called the Internet Archive today. Snapshots of websites are taken periodically, sometimes including the entire site and other times just some of the pages. The defunct website from the Porto Jewish community had thankfully been preserved. All issues of *Ha-Lapid* were available as PDFs in these snapshots. These issues were greedily downloaded to my desktop computer. >>>





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**D**r. Mark A. Schneegurt is an author, educator, scientist, and entrepreneur. His books range from scholarly works on science, religion, and literature to popular books on The Beatles. He has authored 100+ publications and has made 250+ public presentations of his works. Recipient of awards for teaching and research, Dr. Schneegurt holds degrees from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and Brown University, with professional appointments at Purdue University, University of Notre Dame, and Wichita State University.

What appears to be the entire website was reconstituted from various snapshots on the Wayback Machine — including email addresses for contacts. These emails mainly bounced, with addresses no longer in service, but a protonmail.com address went through. There was no answer for several months, but eventually someone from the Porto Jewish community responded. In the meantime, it seemed that *Ha-Lapid* would not be relegated to hidden archives but should be owned by academic libraries and made widely available. During the search for Basto materials, I discovered that Ohio State University had a collection of them in their rare books section. In addition to publishing *Ha-Lapid*, Basto also published pamphlets that covered the prayers and observances for a number of Jewish holidays and daily practices. He translated

well-known Jewish liturgical texts into Portuguese for the re-emerging Porto Jewish community.

Reaching out to the Ohio State librarians raised some skepticism at first. However, explaining the nature of the periodical and its importance as a historical record sparked their interest. When they heard that *Ha-Lapid* was simply not available from any current source and none were housed in academic libraries, they agreed to add *Ha-Lapid* to their collections. It helped that it was an electronic database, not physical publications. The librarians asked a key question about the copyright and ownership of *Ha-Lapid*. The periodical was not copyrighted. These would be public domain in the U.S. 95 years after publication (or 70 years after Basto's death in 1961), but *Ha-Lapid* was published in Portugal. Needing legal advice, I reached out to Dr. Isaac Amon, who quickly determined that the laws in Portugal were similar.

There remained however, years of issues that were not yet old enough to be public domain. We needed approval from the family of Artur Basto. It just so happened that Basto's granddaughter had been a guest on a webcast from Jewish Heritage Alliance. Circling back to Isaac Amon, who is its director of academic research, we were able to contact Isabel Ferreira Lopes. She thought that housing Basto's *Ha-Lapid* at academic libraries was a grand idea and gave us her blessing. *Ha-Lapid* is now part of the Ohio State collection. Following this path further, *Ha-Lapid* is being added to the permanent online collections at my home institution, Wichita State University. Here we hope to include an OCR (optical character reader)-generated text version of the periodical to make it searchable by keywords and strings, and a machine

translation into English. A further goal is to offer the periodical to other libraries that house Basto materials or large collections for Judaic studies.

Around the time that *Ha-Lapid* was posted at Ohio State, the Porto Jewish community replied to my email query. They planned to revive the *Ha-Lapid* webpages, which they have since accomplished. *Ha-Lapid* is now presented online by the Jewish Museum of Oporto ([www.mjporto.com](http://www.mjporto.com)). Physical copies of *Ha-Lapid* are likely housed at the synagogue in Porto and perhaps the Porto Municipal Library. That public library houses another rare local publication, *Douro Litoral*. This includes transcriptions of local crypto-Jewish prayers and poems, but I have not yet been able to successfully access these. A quest for another day.

## Prayers and Poetry in *Ha-Lapid*

My interest in Basto's *Ha-Lapid* focuses on the prayers and poems collected there, to compare these with those I published in 2020 as, *Anthology of the Religious Poetry from the Mexican Inquisition Trials of 16th-Century Crypto-Jews*. It is a collection of transcripts and English translations of poems found within thousands of pages of trial transcripts from the Carvajal family and acquaintances. Of the 156 issues of *Ha-Lapid* published between 1927 and 1958, 13 issues contain transcripts of prayers or poems. There were others with religious materials, but of a different quality, mainly Portuguese translations of known liturgical and biblical pieces. Basto collected and published about 170 prayers, some short and some quite long.

Four issues in 1928  
contain transcripts found



in a small manuscript he examined from Rebordêlo entitled *Book of Prayers to the Most High God Almighty*. The 99 pages were broken into two parts — one consisted of 72 pages with 62 prayers, and a second part entitled, “Divine Things,” with 21 pieces, mainly more instructional. The book also contains family records, with the last event dated 1848. The prayers covered many topics from prayers for the morning, midday or evening, prayers that are confessional, and prayers for other occasions. There was even a proverb about Jews from the area and a long romance poem for use as a wedding dance. While the prayers resemble certain common prayers or mirror biblical passages, the works seem to be unique to the crypto-Jewish community around Porto.

The two examples below are prayers published in 1928. Throughout the collection there are more references to guardian angels than is typical in my Jewish experiences. Confessionals of various intensity are also common in the collection. Recognizing failures, turning to the Lord (*teshuvá*), and serving the Lord, leads to a better life.

*O' anjo de minha guarda, para mim foste creado para amparo e guardador, peço, por quele que te creou, que minha alma entre aí, ou tu me guies e tu me ampares, é possível saberes o dia da minha E orte, ó anjo bemeventurado, livra-me de todo o mal. Em nome do Senhor Adonai. Amen.*

O my guardian angel, you were created for me to be my protector and guardian. I ask, by the one who created you, that my soul enter there, or that you guide me and guard me. Is it possible for you to know the day of my death? O blessed angel, deliver me from all evil. In the name of the Lord Adonai. Amen.

*Formosurea do Senhor, formosura mais antiga, se não vos tinha amado é porque não sabia a sua santa divina Lei, agora que a sei dou-me por bem satisfeito; não terei outro cuidado senão servir-vos e amar-vos, se ao Senhor servi, ao Senhor servirei dias de lei dar, me dará a mim é a coisas minhas Adonai. Amen.*

Beauty of the Lord, most ancient beauty, if I had not loved Thee, it is because I did not know Thy holy divine Law, Now that I know it I am well satisfied; I will have no care other than to serve you and love you, If I have served the Lord, I will serve Him all the days of the law that the Lord grants me, Grant me what is mine Adonai. Amen.

Three issues in 1929 contained transcripts from two old family manuscripts held by a Porto native, the granddaughter of Perpetua de Costa from Bragança. Basto believed that the handwriting for most of the manuscript was from the 18th century, with more recent pieces toward the end. These prayers seem more liturgical and contain recognizable passages from the *Amidah* for instance. There are more than 20 lengthy prayers in all. An issue in 1932 contained prayers collected from the town of Pinhel. Within these 21 mainly lengthy pieces are confessionals, prayers for daily life and various events, and yearly practices such as baking *matzahs* for Passover. More fanciful prayers are found about flowers or rosemary. Finally, there was a long “Prayer of Habakkuk the Prophet,” yet to be examined for similarities with known pieces.

This next prayer below, published in 1932, is one of the few that is lighter in tone. This particular prayer mentions Passover, which is often observed heartily in crypto-Jewish communities, along with Yom Kippur and Purim, while other holidays are less prominent.

*Oração às flores  
– Assim como vós Senhor creasteis as flores para simboio de alegria, assim vós Senhor dai-me paz e alegria para vos fazer pascoas agradáveis, empregando-nos vossos santos serviços. Amen.*

Prayer to the flowers  
– Just as you, Lord, created flowers as signs of joy, so you, Lord, grant me peace and joy to make Passover pleasant unto you, devoting myself to your holy services. Amen.

Two issues from 1934 contained about 16 pieces from the town of Vilarinho de Mogadouro, as collected by Moisés Abrantes. There are bedtime prayers, various blessings, and confessionals. The longest poem is the story of Jonah. The crypto-Jewish communities seem to have an affinity for Jonah, even observing a little known Fast of Jonah during the Mexican Colonial period. The collection of prayers also references Tobias and Judith from apocryphal books. A 1935 issue has prayers from a *trasmontanas*



(over-the-mountains) area. These were collected in 1927 and include the “Creed of the Maranos” from Bragança. An issue in 1937 continues the collection from Bragança and São João da Pesqueira, with four prayers from Trasmontes. Finally, in 1938 a long prayer from Bragança appears as a Maranos Tradition. Basto pointed out in the first issue of *Ha-Lapid* that *maranos*, or *maranus*, was taken to be from the Hebrew *mar* for sorrow and *anas* for forced, rather than the mispronounced (and not plural) term which is derogatory.

This next prayer, published in 1934, is an example of prayers connected to daily activities or times. The bedtime prayers in *Ha-Lapid* have similarities to common Christian bedtime prayers taught to children.

*Oração para o deitar*  
*Oh! Senhor que dormir quero*  
*a minha alma vos entrego.*  
*Se me dormir acordai-me*  
*Se me morrer alumiai me*  
*com as candeias do Senhor*  
*me alumeim na minha*  
*alma quando dêste mundo*  
*me fôr Amen, Senhor.*

Prayer for Bedtime  
 Oh! Lord, I want to sleep  
 My soul I give to you.  
 If I sleep, awaken me  
 If I die, illumine me  
 With the lamps of the Lord  
 may my soul be lighted  
 when this world  
 I depart. Amen, Lord.

Wherever crypto-Jews lived they developed uniquely personal religious practices. Traditional liturgies were often replaced or supplemented with prayers and songs that grew within that community. Certain refrains appear to have been preserved and spread with communities during their migration, with examples carried from Portugal to Mexico and surviving centuries. However, cosmopolitan prayers and songs do not seem common. Endemism seems to be the norm. It is not surprising that communities in hiding did not transmit their works among far-flung communities.

Here we have explored a small portion of the material in Basto’s *Ha-Lapid*. It is a rich source of information about the crypto-Jewish community in northern Portugal as it emerged from the Inquisition. There are aspects yet to be investigated now that *Ha-Lapid* is readily accessible worldwide.

The author acknowledges the kind assistance of Isaac Amon, Joseph Galron, and Gabriel Mordoch.

*We are honored and privileged to continue the profound vision and legacy of Artur Basto with our version of HaLapid – today and into the future. — Editor* 🕯️



*Happy Holidays*

# Francisca Reyes Esparza

## Defender of a Heritage

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CARLOS MONTALVO LARRALDE, PhD

**I**n 1905 my cousin, Francisca Reyes Esparza was born near Brownsville, Texas along the Lower Rio Grande. Her family settled the area in the 1700s and as an adult, the glowing, brown-eyed Esparza had a passion for history and law. Her roots hailed from the Luis Carvajal relatives who settled in Monterrey, Mexico in the 1500s. She often boasted that “Our Jewish roots reached back to the cosmopolitan cultural city of Cordoba, Spain,” with its huge population of Jews. It was Europe’s most glittering capital: a place where Muslims, Christians and Jews lived, worked, studied and thought. In 1169, the city housed hundreds of learned scholars and a library, established by the Muslim Caliphate, of 400,000 volumes — more than any other library in Europe. Esparza upheld that our ancestors observed certain customs of Judaism with a deep faith to survive oppression.



*Taken by her friend, the popular photographer Robert Runyon in 1919, Francisca Reyes Esparza just completed her career as a spy for militants who supported the Plan of San Diego that strived to have an independent Texas with civil rights. Instead, Texas became more rigid and enforced brutal Jim Crow laws.*

### A Flaming Flapper

An authoritative Esparza attracted criticism with her quick wit and colorful anecdotes. Distrusting matrimony, she held premarital sex harmless and envisioned marriage as a business contract. She despised the life of a housewife and advocated that women keep their maiden names, and challenged a sexist society with its unequal educational opportunity.

During the 1920s, a witty and impulsive Esparza cherished the “flapper” behavior that many people perceived as vulgar — contrary to how “a proper lady should act.” Smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, driving fast cars, and cavorting with boyfriends for casual sex were taboo for ladies. During the Prohibition era, Esparza wore glossy high heels and

posed in photos, with a long cigarette holder dangling from her painted lips, beside her boyfriend, Nacho Rojo. He smuggled Mexican liquor into Texas and owned a saloon in the Mexican border town of Matamoros. There Esparza danced until the wee hours of the morning. Criticized for her unconventional behavior, she responded, “Cut people out of your life if they are bringing you down. No one is perfect. Forgive yourself for a



mistake and get on with your life. Life is a long series of heartbreaks and joys.”

An adaptable Esparza tackled a man’s world of money, business, politics, and power. During the 1920s, she worked for her cherished cousin, the legendary crypto-Jew Judge J.T. Canales. She recalled, “No one could cajole, frighten, or buy him. You can squabble with him or you can cuddle him. But if you attempt to make sense of the history involving minorities in Texas, you must cope with him.” Both Canales and Esparza grasped how Latinos were robbed of their land without remorse by rings of judges, lawyers, bankers, and businessmen. Esparza noticed Canales’ constant battles with lawmen who refused to treat minorities with civility since lawmen regarded minorities as racially inferior. Still, both Esparza and Canales searched for hope through the Bible or the Torah.

The persuasive Canales bestowed funds for Esparza to attend the San Antonio Law School. Like numerous women, she never received a license to practice law since women faced insurmountable barriers during that era. The quick and energetic Esparza became an aide to Canales. With her skillful command of court language, she drafted or proofread briefs for legal proceedings and correspondence. As a habit, she highlighted facts and passages, pointing out certain deletions, additions and proposed structural revisions that shaped relevant cases and that a few key witnesses died under mysterious circumstances.

## The Land Grant Turmoil

From 1930 forward, Esparza spent countless hours in South Texas courthouses researching land titles and other records for property disputes to resolve legal cases for a few attorneys. To gather more files, Esparza



*Runyon took this photo of Esparza on January 15, 1935. She enjoyed dancing and the politics that drove her to get involved in Spanish land grant legal issues and complex real estate laws.*

needed to check archival materials in Mexico. This provided her opportunities to gather data on Sephardic family accounts, personal narratives and photographs of those who settled in the Monterrey region.

An industrious Esparza helped shape the Alliance of Land Grants to restore property to original families as protected by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. *The Laredo Times*, October 14, 1946, noted, “Miss Frances Esparza of San Benito, private secretary and investigator for Judge D.B. Chapin, who has numerous suits filed in federal court by descendants of heirs who were allotted the land by the Spanish government under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, is here in connection with legal matters.”

Esparza held Chapin, a former Texas state representative and Hidalgo County judge, in high esteem. In fact, a South Texas

town was named after him to honor him but he changed the name to Edinburg, the present county seat of Hidalgo County. Knowing well the oppression of the Latino, he set out to disband the Texas Rangers law force which abused

the law. In 2018, the scholar David Granville Rountree wrote that about 380 heirs of Joaquin Galan, “with the cooperation of Mrs. Francisca Esparza, the other plaintiff in the case,” were represented by attorneys such as J.W. Philips of El Campo and Dennis Chapin.

Diligent Chapin lawyers in their lawsuits undertook to transfer millions of acres of South Texas land from the present owners to the descendants of the original owners. The lawsuit claimed that the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo guaranteed South Texas land titles to the heirs. She knew the reporter Raul Garcia Avala who wrote for

the newspaper *El Norte, Monterrey, Nuevo Leon*. On May 27, 1954, this journalist wrote about the land grant row and how numerous Mexican citizens strove to get the land



*Esparza with Judge Dennis B. Chapin circa 1948. They both loved to compare notes on law books that focused on American minority legal issues. Other topics reviewed included Klan activities and the federal House Un-American Activities*

grants given to their ancestors. These clashes involved politicians from both sides of the Rio Grande, powerful oil companies and other major business firms that owned massive acreage along the Lower Rio Grande. The entities muddled the case to the point that it was choked in litigations. *El Manana, Reynosa, Tamaulipas*, May 10, 1954, and other newspapers reported these endless international legal squabbles.

In 1945, Judge Hannay overruled the heirs declaring that the territory was a part of “Texas and not within the stipulations of the treaty.” Even Brownsville and Corpus Christi were affected by the lawsuits. On July 23, 1947, the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* announced, “As a result, every homeowner of the city and every businessman with a plot of land big enough to house the enterprise in the city was thrown into question as to title by this persistent attorney except for the comparative few located on the original Kinney Tract.”

While searching for land deeds in Mexico, the country was rocked by politicians squabbling over Mexican petroleum under American control. To that end, Esparza aided Canales and Chapin in helping Latinos who lost their land due to fraud. Chapin died on March 11, 1952 and the land argument persists with other family groups into the 21st century.

## Honoring a Legacy

The persistent Esparza encouraged Latinos to pursue genealogy, a powerful lens on an era of events confronting memories of pain and humiliation. She believed that this pedigree could repair what Anglo-Saxon culture inflicted — shame and ignorance on minority cultures seen with “no validity.” Genealogy provided these minorities a platform to speak openly and honestly about the effects of centuries-old oppression. Through oral histories, it created self-discovery and helped grasp the impairment of White supremacy. This lineage furnished substance to understand civil rights struggles, property rights, and more involvement with the American mainstream and what it took to make a minority truly free. At times one could find an ancestor lynched or gunned down by abusive law enforcement.

Esparza conserved the genealogy of a fragmented Sephardic culture along the Lower Rio Grande. Biographical information, family practices, medical cases, religious concepts, and establishing identity as Americans were essential. Also, during Friday evenings, candles were lit to thank God for His blessings. Ancestral evidence was essential to these Sephardic Jews as a sacred duty to the “true faith.”



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

Esparza affirmed that “deprived people have neither the education, time, nor funds to record their heritage.” She realized that many Spanish speakers in parts of South Texas relied on popular beliefs that endured as oral testimonies rather than the written word. Skilled at cutting through red tape, Esparza’s extensive research concentrated on South Texas Latinos. Again she searched for photographs and bloodline histories to document vivid proceedings, neglected or disregarded by scholars.

This researcher focused on her illustrious relative, Juan N. Cortina, famous during the 1860s and ‘70s. She verified how crypto-Jews prospered in trade and as soldiers during the American Civil War. Esparza tackled the bulk of the research and assisted Canales and Chapin in rewriting some of the land grant cases for clarity and precision. She edited Canales’ publications about his uncle Cortina and fellow Cortinistas with pressing issues. Esparza kept a list of his unique manuscripts and records that reflected the turbulent Texas Latino experience. Sitting in the splendid Canales library, they discussed facets of this topic with certain archives and photographs of Latinos involved in the Lower Rio Grande upheavals triggered by a bloody Mexican Revolution during the 1910s and injustices in the Texas legal system. >>>

During World War II, Esparza was delighted that women participated in industry. They welded, riveted, cut steel, and constructed bombers and tanks and fused bombs. These productive females welded tight corners with smaller fingers than men. The never-stopping Esparza interacted with Communists involved in labor movements. They concentrated on the canning factories, such as the Mexican Marxist-oriented Lombardo Toledano. Intrigued with the conflicts between Toledano and the Mexican president Lazaro Cardenas, Esparza's association with Communists made her a victim of McCarthyism during the 1950s, a movement named after the red-baiting Senator Joe McCarthy. Now enemies of Canales and Chapin ventured to disgrace and humiliate her. Facing criticism, she concluded, "The best way to avoid criticism is to not exist."

## A Fragmented Sephardic Heritage

Esparza owned a chain of second-hand clothing stores along the Texas border that catered to an extensive market in Mexico, providing income in her final years. She also had income from rental properties. Her land grant crusade also prevailed when she consulted the civil rights leader Reies Lopez Tijerina in the 1960s and '70s with his New Mexico land grants concerning the descendants of their Spanish and Mexican owners. Local historians Lillian J. Stambaugh and her husband J. Lee Stambaugh were indebted to Esparza for her valuable assistance in their annals volume *The Lower Rio Grande of Texas* published in 1954.

Esparza also aided the University of Texas and folklorist Professor Americo Paredes with his research during the 1940s through the 1960s. He proclaimed that his forefathers arrived in the Lower Rio Grande region with other Spanish Jews in 1580. They both cherished Lower Rio Grande folklore.

Scholars like J.T. Canales in the 1930s and 1940s used Esparza's proceedings for legal presentations and for his published material on the eminent relative Juan Cortina in Texas. In 1972, *Rodolfo Acuna, Occupied American: The Chicano's Struggle Toward Liberation*, acknowledged Esparza in the second printing of the

first edition. As for myself, Esparza helped me with my UCLA 1978 dissertation, *Chicano Jews in South Texas*. A relative, Hiram Joel Jacques was indebted to her for his book published in 2013, *Reclaiming the Heritage of Joaquin Galan*, about the Latino legacy along the Lower Rio Grande.

Esparza upheld that these families were Jews by background. One example is the University of California-San Francisco marketing department's Professor Ricard Villarreal De Silva when he wrote on December 24, 2022 that his grandmother Juanita Gonzales Villarreal was born in Rio Grande City in 1877. "Juanita kept many Jewish traditions that she passed to my mother. My mother's maternal line maintained many Jewish customs."

DNA proved Esparza right. On June 21, 2024, the industrious merchant of Laredo Hardware Company, Armengol Guerra wrote about his DNA, "My Jewish percentage was only 3%. My highest percentage was Iberian

at 76%. We have traced our root to the province of Asturias in northern Spain. However, I know that the last name of Guerra was taken by many of the Jews in Spain during and after the 'Holy Inquisition.'" Corpus Christi Stark College and Seminary director Jeremy Covarrubias wrote on August 30, 2024 that his family was from Burgos, Spain. Through Ancestry DNA, he discovered that he has Jewish roots. Shortly after, I took the Ancestry DNA test and discovered that I am 2% Jewish. On June 28, 2025, Ricardo Romo, a previous president of the University of Texas-San Antonio, revealed his Texas crypto-Jewish roots.

Suffering from heart problems, Esparza died about 1979 and is now part of the great drama of the vivid chronicle of South Texas. I inherited the J.T. Canales collection given to her by him. It consists of documents and rare photographs of Latinos involved in notable events. In 2020, I made a commitment that her archival papers along with those of other ancestral histories, be donated to the prestigious Huntington Library in San Marino, California. 🕊



*Esparza posed for a Mexican border identification card on May 7, 1940. By then she was ousted from the League of United Latin American Citizens, which fought racist politics, due to her pro-birth control stance and feminist views concerning labor and marriage rights.*



## 2025 • LOS ANGELES

### 35th Annual SCJS Conference • Los Angeles • August 10-12, 2025

# Identities and Experiences: Navigating the Crypto-Jewish Journey

The 35th Annual SCJS Conference is behind us and all we can say is — wow! If you missed it — it was memorable.

The magnificence of the **Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel** was beyond compare. The facility was spacious, comfortable and welcoming with a beautiful interior and exterior patio as well. The staff, including **Avi Levy**, **Neda Roshani** and **Rabbi Refael Cohen** took care of our every need. Catering by **La Gondola of Los Angeles** was simply top-tier and made the continuous flow of events so easy to maintain with meals served on-time and wonderfully prepared.

The presenters did not fail; one by one, the lectures on this fascinating topic were new, fresh and stimulating. The opening Ladino musical event by the **Kol Sefardic Choir** set the stage for everything to come. Monday night's outstanding folk-opera, *La Señora* by **Dr. Michelle Green Willner** and her remarkable lineup of musicians and

singers who all hailed from professional careers was exceptional. We were so blessed to view this premiere.

The concert was followed by brief remarks from our own longtime member, esteemed author and journalist, **Andrée Aelion Brooks** who loomed large on a giant screen, broadcasting from Bellevue, Washington — it was as if she was in the room! A lovely reception followed the opera and a surprise birthday party for Dr. Willner added to the festivity.

The tireless efforts of **Dr. Elisheva Irma Diaz** got the ball rolling, and **Blanca Carrasco**, **Seth Ward**, **Diane Mock**, photographer **David Sabal**, and many more, including Blanca's cousin **Araceli de Leon** from Los Angeles, and her friend **Elizabeth Macias** from El Paso, made up an amazing team who really cared about bringing together the best we had. We were honored by the attendance of presenter **Mercedes Temboury Redondo** from Spain whose own father visited this Sephardic synagogue decades earlier on behalf of Spain.

**Professor Emeritus Dr. Avraham Gross** came all the way from Israel, and **Dr. Larry Kanter, MD** traveled from Jacksonville, Florida. We were happy to meet **Dr. Michael and Lena Keslin** from New Mexico as well. Several new faces expressed interest in helping join forces to make SCJS grow and we were delighted to have **Chaplain David Gonzalez Guajardo** from Texas, and **Janelle Worthington**, now from New Mexico, attend the meeting and voice so many good ideas.

We welcomed **Peter Svarzbein** as our Sosin-Petit awardee, who was joined by his mother **Sylvia Svarzbein** as his guest. Our keynote speaker (Stanley Hordes Lecture), **Dr. Seth Kunin**, traveled from Australia with his wife, adding much to our gathering.

Beloved founder **Stanley and Helen Hordes** attended (Stanley has not missed a conference in over 25 years), as did longtime former member **Arnold Trujillo**. **Art Benveniste** brought his adorable college-age granddaughter who had much to offer as well. Very special thanks go to **JLTV** which broadcast our beautiful 40 second commercial for a whole month for free. Our sincerest thanks for their generosity.

**Dr. Seth Ward** and his wife **Carol Kozak Ward**, and **Genie and Michael Milgrom** were among our most honored attendees.

Retired professor **Chana Rosalinda Méndez Gonzalez** captured our attention with a lecture about her *converso* upbringing and life journey, while **Nancy Katz**, our David Gitlitz Emerging Scholar, shared her doctoral project, adding more substance to regional crypto-Jewish research. Board member **Sean Schifano** illuminated the crypto-Jewish resource archive he spearheads.

A link to the conference recording is posted on our website, [www.cryptojews.com](http://www.cryptojews.com). If you missed the conference in person, take a look at what was digitally captured thanks to our remarkable audio/visual team, **Farzam Productions**. — **Corinne J. Brown**



2025 • LOS ANGELES • AUG. 10-12

Identities and Experiences:  
Navigating the Crypto-Jewish Journey



# CONFERENCE TEAM • HONORED ATTENDEES



*Pres. Blanca Carrasco and Isaac Amon, Emcee*



*Tote Bag*



*Corinne Brown, Conference Co-Chair and Composer Michelle Green Willner*



*Blanca with volunteers, Araceli de Leon and Elizabeth Macias*



*Dr. Elisheva Irma Diaz  
Conference Co-Chair*



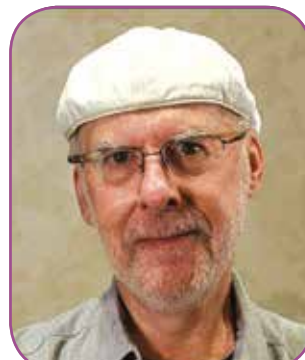
*Dr. Seth Ward, Program Chair*



*Farzam Productions, audio/visual team*



*Diane Mock, Treasurer*



*David Sabal, Photographer*

**Conference  
photography  
by David Sabal**



**2025 • LOS ANGELES • AUG. 10-12**

**Identities and Experiences:  
Navigating the Crypto-Jewish Journey**

Months of dedication culminated in an extraordinary experience at Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies 35th Annual Conference held at Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel where reconnecting with friends and colleagues in person was a true highlight. Witnessing exceptional talent on display by academics, researchers, historians, genealogists, storytellers, musicians, singers, and writers, was truly inspiring, as we collectively unraveled secrets and forged a newfound understanding of one another. I feel grateful to have been part of this transformative experience and eagerly anticipate the next one! And yes, witnessing all of this in gorgeous Beverly Hills — I left a piece of my heart there looking forward to the day I could return! Blessed by everyone's effort to make it happen! — **Blanca Carrasco**





*Dr. Stanley Hordes*



*Art Benveniste and granddaughter,  
Hannah Benveniste*



*Dr. Larry Kanter, MD*



*Peter Svarzbein*



*Rabbi David and Dr. Seth Kunin*



*Rabbi Refael Cohen, Isaac and Blanca*



*Corinne with Dr. Seth Kunin*



*Carol Kozak Ward*



*Arnold Trujillo and Nancy Katz*



*César David Ciriano Vela*



*Dennis Worthington*



*Loretta Worthington*



*Dr. Michael and Lena Keslin*



*Judith Krieger MacPherson*



# AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

## STANLEY M. HORDES DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR LECTURE



**SETH KUNIN, PhD**  
Perth, Australia  
seth.kunin@curtin.edu.au

### Seth Kunin, PhD

With great pride we welcomed the esteemed Dr. Seth Kunin to the podium as our honored presenter for the annual Stanley M. Hordes Lecture. Dr Kunin introduced us in-depth to the writing, thoughts and world of Loggia Carrasco, a brilliant woman in rural New Mexico who understood her crypto-Jewish past and wrote poignantly about it for decades. His talk was a peek into the past and the cloistered life of a



brilliant citizen of New Mexico's hidden crypto-Jewish community.

## DAVID M. GITLITZ EMERGING SCHOLAR DISTINCTION



### Nancy Katz

The David M. Gitlitz Distinction was bestowed on SCJS member and University of Houston graduate student Nancy Katz who is working

**NANCY KATZ**  
Huntsville, Texas  
nancy@comkatz.com

on a graduate project regarding crypto-Jewish communities. Nancy's presence has always been invigorating and her lectures informative. We are delighted to help her along with this encouragement and its reward.

Many thanks to Risa Aqua for award artwork

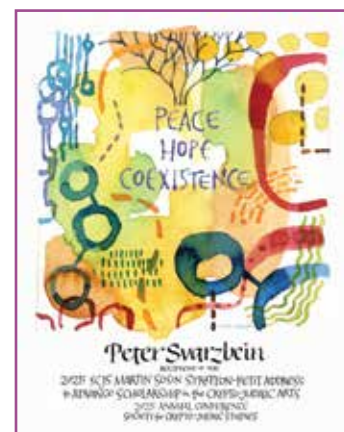
## MARTIN SOSIN STRATTON-PETIT ADDRESS TO ADVANCE SCHOLARSHIP IN THE CRYPTO-JUDAIC ARTS



**PETER SVARZBEIN**  
El Paso, Texas  
pgsvarzbein@gmail.com

### Peter Svarzbein

For the last 20 years, the haunting images by photographer Peter Svarzbein comprise a distinct story about crypto-Jewish life in Texas and New Mexico. In addition to being an astute observer, Peter brought this untold story to the public via his El Paso Kosher Taco Truck Project wherein newsprint copies of his food truck menu opened to reveal the history and timeline of crypto-Jewish persecution and survival. Giant visuals were projected onto the sides of buildings telling the modern-day story. Ideally suited for the Sosin-Petit distinction, Svarzbein is dedicated to making a difference by helping communities throughout the U.S. thrive and heal.



# SPONSORS

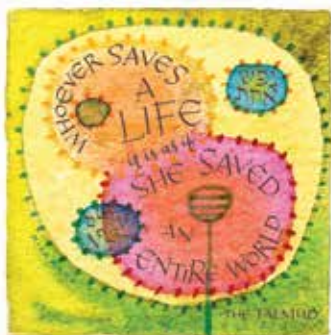
## LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT



**GENIE MILGROM**  
Miami, Florida  
[www.geniemilgrom.com](http://www.geniemilgrom.com)

## Genie Milgrom

Past SCJS president Genie Milgrom has led the way through the darkness of crypto-Judaic genealogical research for decades, using her own search for her past as a way to illuminate those of others. At every in-person conference for the past several years, she shares her work and her success at our genealogy workshops, a tradition that preempts the opening of each conference. In recognition of her many contributions, from this time forward, this event will be known as the **Genie Milgrom Genealogy Workshop**.



**Genie Milgrom**  
RECIPIENT OF LIFETIME  
SCJS LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD  
SCJS ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
SOCIETY OF CRYPTO-JEWISH STUDIES

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Stanley and Helen Hordes  
Art Benveniste  
Debbie Wohl-Isard  
Elisheva Irma Diaz  
Corinne Brown



**Sephardic Temple**  
Tifereth Israel



*Blanca presents Appreciation Certificate  
to Larry Kanter*



*Blanca receives a commemorative book  
from the synagogue*

## Missed the Conference?

Visit [www.scjs2025.wordpress.com](http://www.scjs2025.wordpress.com)

and

Find a YouTube link at  
[www.cryptojews.com](http://www.cryptojews.com)



2025 • LOS ANGELES • AUG. 10-12

*Identities and Experiences:  
Navigating the Crypto-Jewish Journey*





# PANELS • LECTURES



Isaac Amon, Emcee



Genie Milgrom Genealogy Workshop



Nancy Katz, Gitlitz Emerging Scholar



Dr. Avraham Gross



Ben Donenberg



Diane Mock discusses the benefits of SCJS membership



Art Benveniste and Mercedes Temboury Redondo



Sean Schifano and Conference Attendee



Emily Lodmer and Joëlle Bahloul



Peter Svarzbein



Corinne Brown  
(Rabbi David Kunin in background)



Rabbi Refael Cohen



2025 • LOS ANGELES • AUG. 10-12

**Identities and Experiences:  
Navigating the Crypto-Jewish Journey**





Rachel Kaufman, Naomi Leyh, Seth Ward and Isaac Amon



Chana Rosalinda  
Méndez Gonzalez



Joëlle Balouh

Once again, thank you all for your participation in the SCJS 2025 Conference in Los Angeles.

Great lectures! Great food! Exciting opera! Friendships created and renewed! Professional contacts solidified. All in all, a success.

I will keep [www.scjs2025.wordpress.com](http://www.scjs2025.wordpress.com) open for quite some time. I've added

a link to the Livestream YouTube page. In 2026 we will meet via Zoom, and in 2027 we plan to meet in person in an exciting location.

I have been in touch with many of you individually, and some of you have been in touch with me. I look forward to hearing from all of you!

Best wishes and once again thank you for your hard work to make the conference such a success.

— Seth Ward



Dr. Seth Ward

## Panel 1: The Sephardic Temple / The Converso Diaspora

**Arnold Trujillo**, Chair

**Arthur Benveniste**: *The History of the Spanish Jews Who Founded Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel*

**Mercedes Temboury Redondo**: *A Crypto-Jew Catholic Priest in Lima in 1624: Padre Manuel Nuñez Magro de Almeyda*

**Avraham Gross**: *Portuguese Inquisitors in Search of "Missing" Members of the Nação*

**Nancy Katz**: *Hidden Voices: Oral History, Identity, and Crypto-Jewish Memory in the Borderlands*

## Panel 2: Identity and Belonging: Connecting to Our Roots

**Judith Krieger Macpherson**, Chair

**Drora Arussy and Genie Milgrom**: *Rediscovering Roots: The Significance of the Certificate of Sephardic Heritage in Strengthening Identity and Cultural Belonging*

**César David Ciriano Vela and Magda Ciriano Moreno**: *Important News about Spanish Sephardic Citizenship in 2025*

## Panel 3: Echoes of 1492

**Rachel Kaufman**, Chair

**Seth Ward**: "Law of Moses" or "Jewish Blood?" Perspectives From 20th and 21st-Century Popular Culture and Historiography

**Naomi Leyh**: *Welcoming the Bride: An Affective Reading of Lekha Dodi as a reparative response to the Spanish Expulsion.*

**Isaac Amon**: *Echoes of 1492: Migration, Salvation, & Annihilation*

## Panel 4A: Finding Your Voice

**César Ayala-Casás**, Chair

**David Gonzalez Guajardo**: *Targeting Jews and Latinos: Perspectives on the War of Ideologies and the Rhetoric of Antisemitism on Returnees to Judaism*

**Chana Rosalinda Méndez Gonzalez**: *Lágrimas de Jacobo —Converso Traditions, a Personal and Historical Narrative*

## Panel 4B: Writing Your Own Story: A Writers Workshop

**Corinne Brown and Genie Milgrom**: Facilitators

An open, pragmatic discussion about crafting a narrative of your personal story. Participating authors (and would-be authors) include **Blanca Carrasco, Judith Krieger MacPherson, Diane Mock** — and **You!**

## Panel 5: Crypto-Jews In Unexpected Places

**Lawrence Kanter**, Chair

**Ben Donenberg**: *Shakespeare's Secret Jews*

**Corinne Brown**: *Did Crypto-Jews Help Open the Western Frontier Through the Fur Trade?*

**Rabbi David A. Kunin**: *Jewish Descendants in Papua*

## Panel 6: Converso Legacy, History, and Identity

**Joëlle Bahloul**, Chair

**Schulamith Halevy**: *Revisiting the Case of Roberto Mercado Manzanares*

**Daria Berman**: *Many More Miles: Tracing the Converso Diaspora in the Mexican Inquisition*

**Sean Schifano**: *Going Public: Oral History, Educational Spaces, and the Converso Legacy Archives*

# ENTERTAINMENT • VENUE



*Michele Green Willner Singer*



*La Señora performance*



*Anna Davidson and Jared Jones, La Señora soloists*

## La Señora Rehearsal and Performance



*Julie Hinton, Holly Howell, Michael Scott Harris,  
and John Bergquist*



*MGW Singers*



*Los Angeles Jewish Community  
Children's Choir*



*The La Señora Score*

**T**hank you for an  
amazing conference  
and an amazing evening of *La  
Senora!* — Chana Rosalinda



*Kenton Youngstrom*



*Laura Osburn*



*Daniel La France*



*Full house watching the opening film for  
La Señora in the main sanctuary.*





*Andrée Aelion Brooks (on screen)  
for La Señora closing comments*



*Kol Sephardic Choir  
performance*



**W**ow! What a La Señora night!  
THANK YOU to my extraordinary  
singers—Anna Davidson, Jared Jones,  
Julie Hinton, Vera Frances Lugo, Michael  
Scott Harris, and John Bergquist, The  
MGW Singers, the Los Angeles Jewish  
Community Children's Choir —THANK  
YOU to my superb instrumentalists,  
Laura Osburn, Kenton Youngstrom,  
and Daniel de La France. THANK  
YOU Blanca Carrasco, Corinne Joy  
Brown and SCJS for the opportunity,  
and THANK YOU ALL for attending/  
watching! — **Michelle Green Willner**

## Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel



*Our wonderful venue*



*Sanctuary window*



*Welcoming SCJS*



*Sanctuary skylight*



*Lobby window*



*Dining on the patio*



*Sanctuary*



**2025 • LOS ANGELES • AUG. 10-12**

**Identities and Experiences:  
Navigating the Crypto-Jewish Journey**





# FRIENDS • FELLOWSHIP • FUN



*Drora Arussy and Genie Milgrom*



*Diane Mock and Corinne Brown*

From persecution to resilience, the crypto-Jewish journey spans continents and millennia. It was my honor to emcee and speak at this SCJS conference, reflecting on the global legacy of 1492: expulsion, Inquisition, migration, resilience, and renewal. One thread connects this remarkable tapestry: legal history, Jewish memory, and the pursuit of justice. — **Isaac Amon**



*Blanca hard at work*



*Tote Bags Sponsor*



*Joëlle Bahoul, Lena & Michael Keslin, and Larry Kanter*



*Art Benveniste leads synagogue tour*



*Drora Arussy*



*Rita and Bob Rubin*



*Debbie Wohl-Isard joins us via the internet!*



*Dr. Larry Kanter and Chap. David Gonzalez Guarjardo*



*Sarah Zamari and Sydney Heisler*



*Art Benveniste and  
Judith Krieger MacPherson*



*Michelle with La Señora Musicians*



*Michelle Green Willner  
and Carol Kozak Ward*



*Lena Keslin and Blanca*



*Corn Mother Hamsa by  
Janelle Worthington*



*Janelle Worthington*



*Emily Lodmer*



*Mercedes Temboury Redondo*



*Helen and DDr. Stanley Hordes*

**Next Conference  
Online, Sunday  
October 25, 2026**

**2027  
In-Person Conference  
TBA**

I am truly delighted to hear how beautifully everything came together. A packed sanctuary, smooth livestream, and a reception that felt like a real celebration — such a gift to our community and a testament to all the hard work.

I'm so glad the camaraderie was high and that everyone enjoyed the food and festivities.

Please know how much I missed being there in person to share in the joy. Please take a moment to rest and savor the success of such an uplifting event. With love and appreciation — *Tu hermanika,*

— *Elisheva Irma Diaz*



*Janelle Worthington and the  
way of the 21st century*



**2025 • LOS ANGELES • AUG. 10-12**

**Identities and Experiences:  
Navigating the Crypto-Jewish Journey**



*SCJS has avoided the topic of Christopher Columbus until now for many reasons. This article (for me) changed everything. You be the judge. — Editor*

# Was Christopher Columbus a Crypto-Jew?

.....  
*An Homage to Estelle Irizarry*

.....  
**HARRY EZRATTY, ESQUIRE**

Born Estelle Diane Roses in 1937, the Ashkenazi daughter of a Paterson, New Jersey couple was late to college because she was so sick. The major she applied for was filled, “So,” Estelle explained, “I opted for a second choice — Spanish.” The rest was history.

After earning master’s and PhD degrees, Estelle married Manuel Irizarry, a Puerto Rican air traffic controller stationed at Washington DC’s airport. She became known as Estelle Irizarry, a leading authority of Spanish literature.

Estelle was a groundbreaker; her career filled with many firsts. She was the first female Jewish professor at Georgetown University, heading the Department of Spanish Literature. She would be the first woman and Jew associated with the many Hispanic and academic organizations in which she participated. For seven years, Estelle was editor-in-chief of *Hispania*, a journal reaching the 16,000 members of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese. She was a member of the North American Academy of the Spanish Language and a corresponding member of the Royal Spanish Academy.

Spain recognized Estelle by awarding her the Cross of the Civil Order of Alfonso the Wise. She wrote 35 books and over 150 articles for academic journals. No stranger to the computer, she used it to determine literary analyses of Spanish authors. She was the review editor of *Computers and the Humanities*.

Estelle was modest and discouraged others from calling her Dr. Irizarry. In the two books she wrote about Christopher Columbus, her name appears without citing her graduate degrees. I mention these qualifications to emphasize that Estelle Irizarry was a serious academician and a remarkable person.

She had another attribute: Estelle was dedicated to proving that Christopher Columbus — or Cristobal Colon as he is known among Spanish-speakers — was an active and practicing crypto-Jew. (I refer to Columbus as Colon in this essay.)



My wife and I first met the Irizarrys in the 1980s at Beth Shalom, our synagogue in San Juan, Puerto Rico. We became friends and discovered we had things in common. The Irizarrys maintained



*Christopher Columbus or Cristobal Colon as he is known among Spanish-speakers*

a winter home in Puerto Rico and lived mainly in Washington DC. My wife and I lived in San Juan and maintained a home in Baltimore, Maryland. We all attended Friday night services at San Juan’s Reform Synagogue. It did not take long for Estelle and I to learn that we both shared a deep interest in Cristobal Colon, trying to unravel the many secrets surrounding him, and trying to make sense of who he really was and where he came from.

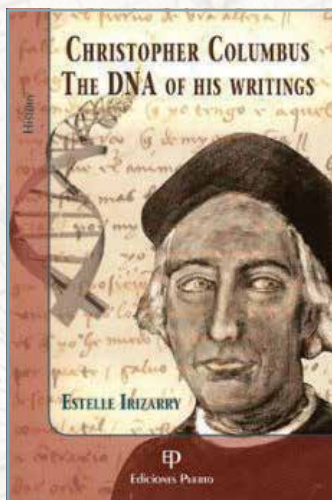


Estelle believed Colon was an active, practicing, crypto-Jew who artfully concealed his identity. She cited his deep knowledge of the Hebrew Bible and his frequent citations of the Hebrew Prophets in his writings. She pointed out, among other things, that he compared himself to Moses and David when caught up in the difficult situations he often found himself in during his eventful life. Other facts I will get to later.

I thought otherwise. From my study of Colon over decades, I believed him to be Catholic, but a descendant of first or second generation converted Jews. Colon was aware of his Jewish background, concealing it by publicly touting his religious duty to provide heathens for conversion and freeing Jerusalem from the Saracens, restoring the city to Christianity. The social, religious and political climate of late 15th-century Spain was unhealthy for converted Jews or their descendants. Colon wanted everyone to know he was a good Christian.



Estelle Irizarry



I had to agree with Estelle that Colon planted many tantalizing and enigmatic clues about his life which, aside from being strange, often made no sense. For instance, Colon wrote this puzzler upon being awarded the title, Admiral of the Ocean Sea (the Atlantic Ocean) by the Spanish Monarchs, Isabel and Ferdinand:

"I am not the first admiral in my family, let them give me the name they will, for, after all, David, a very wise king, kept ewes and lambs and later was made King of Jerusalem and I am the servant of the same Lord who raised David to that state."

Colon scholars believe he may have been alluding to the French Admiral, Coulombe, whose name is a Gallic version of Colon. In 1476, Colon sailed under Coulombe's command in a war to unseat the Crown of Aragon. Shipwrecked at Lagos, Portugal, he lived thereafter in Lisbon for several years with his brother, Bartolomeo, selling maps and books. Later after marrying into a noble Portuguese family, Colon lived on an island his in-laws governed. From there, he sailed to ports as far north as Iceland and Ireland.

The noted Spanish historian and Colon biographer, Salvador de Madariaga, believed Colon had Jewish roots. He was one of many historians puzzled about Colon's real family background. De Madariaga wrote:

"Like the squid, he (Colon) oozes out a cloud of ink around every hard fact of his life. This ink, multiplied by the industry of his historians, has

made but blacker and thicker the mystery which attaches to him." (Cited from *Vida del muy magnifico señor Don Cristobal Colon*. English version: *Being the Life of the Very Magnificent Lord, Don Cristobal Colon*. Buenos Aires, 1940).

In 2009, Estelle gave me a book she had just published called *Christopher Columbus, The DNA of His Writings*. (Ediciones Puertos, Inc.), establishing Estelle among the first to try to prove Colon's Jewish heritage through computer analysis of his writings. Estelle



**HARRY EZRATTY**

Baltimore, Maryland  
haelaw@verizon.com

Harry A. Ezratty, SCJS parliamentarian and counsel, lectures throughout the U.S. at colleges, universities, historical societies and community groups, including as a Scholar-in-Residence. He currently lives in Baltimore, Maryland where he teaches courses on American Jewish history and culture.

Harry was born a Sephardic Jew in New York City and is a graduate of New York University and Brooklyn Law School. A maritime lawyer by profession, Harry is an independent history scholar, historian, writer and lecturer, who has been collecting art since 1960 and authored seven books. His first, *How to Collect and Protect Works of Art*, was followed by *500 Years in the Jewish Caribbean*; *They Led the Way – The Creators of Jewish America*; *Baltimore in the Civil War – The Pratt Street Riot and a City Occupied*; *The Builders – Jews & the Growth of America*; *Flags of Convenience – Bureau of Military Information*; and *The Builders – Jews Who Shaped Modern America, Vol. III*.



wrote the book to prove her theory of Colon's Catalanian-crypto-Jewish origins through his language. Much in her book indicates that he might have been an active crypto-Jew.

Estelle points out some of the facts about the Admiral's secret life: Colon was a prolific writer; with scores of letters, instructions to his financial advisors, many log entries, together with side notes in the margins of his personal books and documents. Theses were written in Spanish or Latin and some Portuguese. He wrote his will in Spanish, and later a codicil, executed the day before he died. Through analyses of all this material, the computer told Estelle that Colon's first languages were Catalanian and Spanish.

Colon authored a poetic book written in Latin and some Spanish, called *Libro de los Profetas* (*The Book of Prophecies*). It is packed with quotations from the Hebrew and Christian bibles and loaded with cabalistic mysticism and asserts that he, Colon, was chosen by God to find the Garden of Eden and liberate Jerusalem from the Saracens. Linguists agree that the Admiral was a first-class author who, despite errors, could have become a writer. Colon drew maps while he was on the beach in Lisbon, living with his younger, map-maker brother, Bartolomeo. Map making requires a good knowledge of math, history and geography.

"The brothers did not become geographers, historians, mathematicians and familiar with the Old Testament, growing up in the home of a simple Genoese wool merchant," Estelle once said. I had to agree with her.

"So where did all this knowledge come from?" I asked.

"From the rabbis and the businessmen in the *converso* community to which Columbus belonged, of course," she replied, comfortable with her theory.

It was possible, I thought, eager to learn more. So I read her book. Not once but twice. What Estelle did was enter all Colon's writings into a computer. After careful analysis, she came up with some interesting results. She began by dividing the Admiral's writings into five categories: (1) Columbus the Writer, (2) Columbus the Poet, (3) Columbus the Scribe, (4) His Secret Language, and finally, (5) His Humor.

Being careful, she used only original unedited documents wherever possible. Over the centuries, most of Colon's works have been poorly edited, often changing their meaning from

“So where  
did all this  
knowledge  
come from?”

the original and erasing significant punctuation. Editors thought they were correcting errors. But Estelle proved otherwise.

The computer found repeated words and phrases used by Colon and traced where they belong linguistically and geographically. For example, how often does Colon refer to himself as I? How many times does he repeat certain words and phrases in Spanish,

Portuguese or Latin? How many times does he cite the Bible? What kind of linguistic, grammatical or spelling errors does he make and to what are they attributed? What other languages have crept into his speech? What is the average length of a Colon sentence? What are his favorite words and expressions? A pattern soon emerges framing a writer's unique style — his linguistic DNA.



King and Queen of Spain,  
Ferdinand and Isabella

In the chapter titled Columbus the Writer, Estelle confronted a problem. In the log of his first historic voyage, she noted that Colon often refers to himself in the first person, such as "I sailed," or "I saw." But he also refers to himself as "the Admiral," or "he." It was as if two different people had written the log. She solved this puzzle by realizing that the log had been edited by Father Bartolomeo de Las Casas, a priest and a descendant of converted Jews, who was a Colon admirer. De las Casas sailed to the New World, becoming an activist for the natives who were enslaved and suffered other abuse. Like Colon, he wrote extensively. Estelle also analyzed de Las Casas' writings, discovering among other differences from Colon's prose, that he wrote short, clipped business-like sentences, unlike Colon's "longer, wordier sentences." De las Casas had given way as Colon's editor to becoming a Colon observer.

Estelle believes that de las Casas's editing emphasizes Colon's dedication to the church, noting his wish to produce heathens for conversion to Christianity. It suggests, she believes, that



de las Casas wished to ensure that Colon was free from any heretical taint and that he was a solid Christian. Were there any suggestions that Colon was not free of any heresy? There were.

What Estelle does not reveal in her book is that in 1500, Colon and his two brothers, Diego and Bartolomeo, were shipped back to Spain from Santo Domingo in chains. As Royal Governors of the Colony, they were accused of malfeasance to the Crown by Colon's enemy at court, Francisco de Bobadilla. As they marched through the city to the pier, loaded down by shackles, the colonists banged on pots and pans, hooting and whistling. The brothers were called *Faraones*, (Pharos), a slang term used by the Jesuits to denote heretics. They were also called *marranos* and *conversos*, names associated with heresy. Those calumnies were also painted on the city's walls.



*Columbus in court with Queen Isabella*

Since de las Casas admired Colon, Estelle asks: was the priest trying to downplay the event? Was he ensuring for posterity that it was Colon who wanted to save the savages of the newly discovered lands? Estelle posits that de las Casas argued the Admiral was a good and true Catholic.

Colon died in 1506. It was not until sometime in the 1530s that de las Casas obtained a copy of the log of the first voyage and began editing it. He was probably aware of the odium heaped upon the Colons decades earlier. Now he would do everything he could to tell

the world that Cristobal Colon was a true servant of Christ. De las Casas found many errors in Colon's Spanish which he corrected, attributing them to a spotty education.

According to Estelle Irizzary, Colon was a natural poet. In her second chapter, dedicated to Columbus the Poet, she says that "writing poetry requires a high degree of the mastery of the language." Colon's *The Book of Prophecies*, is poetic and written in Latin with some Spanish. Analyzing this book, Estelle noted the influences of Catalan and Galician languages.

In this chapter Estelle has a sub-division she calls "A Crypto-Jewish Project?" On its face, she says, *The Book of Prophecies* appears to be a Catholic homily to Christ and the monarchy. She believes otherwise. Here's why. After his wife died, Colon fell in love with a lady from Cordoba. Since, according to Irizzary, this lady, Beatriz Henriquez, was Jewish, so then was his second son, Fernando. I do not believe that it has been solidly established that Beatriz Henriquez was Jewish. But many reputable historians, including de Madariaga, believe it to be so. Estelle further states that even Colon's first wife, Filipa Moniz Perestrelo, was "perhaps" of Jewish ancestry, making Diego, Colon's first son, also Jewish. I have never come across that allegation in my many years of studying Colon.

Fernando, the illegitimate son of Beatriz Henriquez and Colon, was 13 when the Admiral wrote his book. Fernando's handwriting in its pages is attributed to his task of transcribing his father's notes into the final text. Estelle tells us that during this period in history, copying texts was a way of studying, especially for a Jewish boy preparing for his *bar mitzvah*. Estelle says it was Colon's way of preparing his son for manhood according to Jewish tradition. She goes a step further. Fernando was 13 when he also accompanied his father on his fourth and final voyage. Estelle believes Fernando was supposed to enter

manhood on this voyage. In a later chapter there is an historical analysis of copying texts which she believes strengthens her theories.

Estelle introduces her readers to a procedure called N-graphs or N-grams. It is a device used by code breakers to identify languages used in coded documents. It is precise in its ability to identify linguistic patterns within a word selection. A sample copy of Colon's writing revealed the following results for his basic languages in order: Catalan, Spanish, Galician, and French. As a mariner he would have picked up

“Colon was a prolific writer; scores of letters, log entries and side notes... written in Spanish, Latin and some Portuguese.”



Galician, French and other dialects from fellow crew members. As a lawyer who has dealt with mariners for over half a century, I can attest to the fact that borrowing words and phrases from other languages occurs frequently among sailors. For example, Cuban, Dominican and Puerto Rican seamen use the word *gallo* (rooster) for the nautical term guidewire. The Hispanic sounding *chicoo* morphs from the English, chief cook.

It is in the chapter Estelle calls, Columbus the Scribe, that she begins to win me over. She notes that the use of punctuation during Colon's time was chaotic. Writers followed no rules. Sentences did not begin with a capital letter, and few writers used a period to alert their readers that a sentence had concluded. Often, a new sentence begins by merely leaving a large blank space between unpunctuated words. Paragraphs were disregarded. Estelle points out that when Miguel de Cervantes finished his Castilian masterpiece, *Don Quixote*, he sent it to his publisher lacking punctuation and paragraphs, leaving the editors to sort it out.

What the computer told Estelle was eye-opening. In documents she examined from the various provinces of Spain, Portugal, western Italy, and Europe in general, the rules of punctuation were ignored. Only in the areas of modern-day Catalonia, i.e. Barcelona, Valencia, Ibiza, Mallorca, and Zaragoza, were punctuations scrupulously obeyed. There was also the use of the *virgule*, (/) the slanted line which functioned as a comma and was used with regularity only in the Kingdom of Aragon (Catalonia). A sentence ended with a double virgule (/ /) or sometimes with a double virgule and a period (/ /.) which Irizarry calls a point. Colon was an absolute master at the use of space between sentences and all forms of punctuation. He was adept at moving the virgule and other grammatical marks to change the mood or meaning of a sentence. And we can count on Colon to be consistent in all his writings with his use of punctuation. It is what Estelle calls, "Columbus's unyielding use of the virgule." She is impressed with his consistency; nor does Colon trust the editing of his work to others, he did it all himself as he was writing.

What does this mean with respect to the idea that Colon is a crypto-Jew? Two things. The computer places him as probably Catalanian by birth, as he uses Spanish and Catalan as his primary means of communication. And it verifies that neither Italian nor any of its dialects have any influence whatsoever on Colon's large body of writing or speech. Estelle asks her reader: "Where did Colon learn that diagonal-based punctuation...?"

“Colon was an absolute master at the use of space and punctuation.”

She concludes that since no other place but Catalonia used the *virgule*, Colon must belong to what she calls "that geocultural region." It was a region where Jews lived in great numbers and where, during the anti-Jewish riots of 1391, many were forcibly converted.

Estelle was present in Puerto Rico, when Beth Shalom hired a Torah scribe to repair one of its damaged Torah scrolls. She learned from him that the repair can only be performed using special ink and



Christopher Columbus illustration from *Grand Voyages* (1596) by Theodor de Bry (1528-1598)

quills, and that he follows inflexible rules about space between words, margins, columns and the height and slant of letters. The scribe tells her that there is never any room or allowance for error or deviation. Everything must be perfect, or the Torah is considered "unkosher" and cannot be used.

The scribe tells Estelle that a medieval king once ordered his aides to compare two Holy Scrolls, written many years apart, to seek out differences proving the Torah is not the work of God. The king is shocked when he is told that both scrolls are completely identical. Scribes are dedicated to making new scrolls or repairing old ones that when read in the synagogue may never vary. After all, the scribe emphasizes, "The Torah is the word of God."

Estelle has an insight. If Colon is a crypto-Jew, as she deems him to be, then his education also entailed copying texts just as he set his son, Fernando, to do. And while copying texts as a form of education does not require the same unyielding and scrupulous care a Torah scribe must adhere to, Jews are nevertheless taught that careful attention still goes into the



process. After all, someone will be reading this work in the future. It should be as correct and coherent a century from now as it is today.

Estelle calls the reader's attention to Colon's 1501 letter to Queen Isabella. It stands out as a carefully precise document peppered with 30 virgules, 12 double virgules with a rate of sentence segments at 8.6 words. Colon consciously wants the Queen to read this letter slowly and with care and so he is leading her in that direction with punctuation and stops no European but a Catalanian would employ. He seeks her permission to make a fourth voyage, and he wants Isabella to take her time reading his request.

But let us pause a moment. Everyone, including de las Casas, reading Colon's writings makes similar comments: Colon errs in his spelling and grammar. He carries these errors over into his speech. Accounts of his appearances before the royal court verify errors and inconsistencies in spoken Spanish. That

may be why he is often called the foreigner, even in official court documents. Consuela Varela and Juan Gil, translators of the entire body of Colon's works say, "the great Navigator does not express himself correctly in any language." Ramon Menendez Pidal, the one-time president of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language, the organization charged with maintaining the



Retrato de Cristóbal Colón  
(Marga Millán Fernández)

purity of the Spanish language, writes: "Despite his syntactic incapacity he reaches on some occasions unexpected stylistic heights."

What does Estelle make of this? In her chapter on Christopher Columbus's Secret Language, I believe she unravels the mystery surrounding Colon's erratic use of language. She asks a pertinent question: if Colon wrote and spoke all his languages in error, how was he able to

walk around the city without someone asking where he came from; or at least recognize Colon's place of origin through an accent? And why did not de las Casas, who wrote so extensively and positively about the Admiral, clear up that enigma?

There is a missing link here, she concludes. It is Judeo-Spanish or Ladino, that special dialect used among Iberian Jews, which invites Mediterranean languages and Hebrew into its lexicon. It is an idiom pre-dating the great Spanish pogrom of 1391, which forced thousands of Jews to convert to Christianity or face death. It is, she expounds, one of Colon's first languages.

Ladino does not follow the regular rules of Spanish grammar or pronunciation. To add to that quirk, Ladino varies from region to region by incorporating often-used or important local words. Thus there is a laxity in its form vis-a-vis the modern structured Spanish in global use. Estelle goes back to the computer for answers and comes up with interesting results. She finds what she calls "remarkable Ladinoisms in Colon's writings."

Colon uses "-ico" (from the old Aragonese) at the end of his words such as: *mansevico* (young man), and *paxaricos* (little birds). Note the x instead of j for *paxaricos*. And the pronunciation is odd. It is not *pa-har-ico*, but Ladino's *pa-sha-rico*. Modern Spanish spells *mansevo* with a b instead of a v. Go to Istanbul and look for Mr. Castro. You will not find him. He is listed as *Kastro* because in Turkish the c is pronounced as a ch. Thus Ladino speakers of the Ottoman Balkans substitute k for c to proximate the hard c. There is, she found, the persistent use of *haber* instead of *tener*. Estelle finds differences between Spanish and Ladino in prefixes, semantics and the use of adjectives and idioms, although the same words will have different meanings. She identifies the historical changes in Spanish using h and f. Spanish says *hablar*, Ladino says *favlar*. The word for city (*ciudad*) is rendered in Ladino as *civdad*.

"[Estelle] finds remarkable Ladinoisms in Colon's writings."

What stopped me short was that the computer came up with the word Colon used for "so." Instead of Spanish *asi* he uses Ladino *ansi*. I never studied Spanish and when Estelle asked me how I learned it, I answered, "*En la calle, Estelle.*" (On the street, Estelle.) *Ansi* was a word I have never been able to properly eliminate from my usage, even to this day; I tend to use, from time to time, the more elegant *ansina*. When I was learning to use modern Spanish, I had to jettison many Ladino words and pronunciations which were archaic or from another language.



As an example, at home we used *paras*, the Turkish word for money, instead of *dinero*; and *palto* (coat) instead of *abrigo*. Although I do recall that *plata*, or even the Hebrew *kesef*, for money, was used at home on occasion.

“Where did you learn your Ladino?” Estelle asked me. “At my nona’s (Italian for grandmother) feet. She spoke no English, only Ladino and French.” I replied.

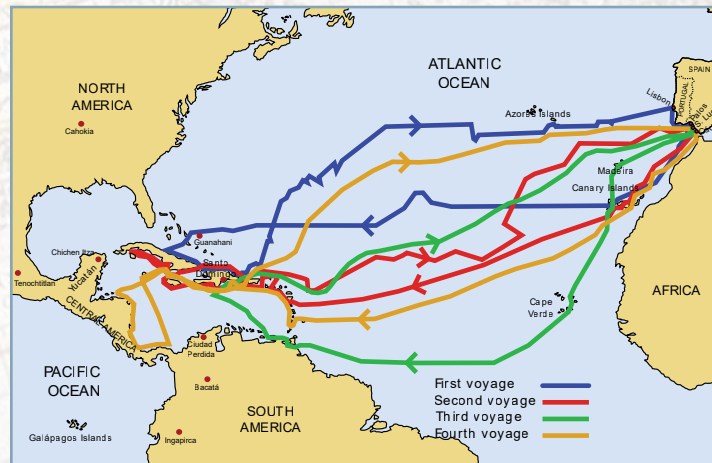
“That is how Colon learned his Ladino,” Estelle explained. “At home and he integrated it into his Castilian Spanish which led folks to believe he was poorly educated.”

Estelle Irizarry died in 2017. Seven years later, Dr. Antonio Lorente, of the University of Granada in Spain, performed DNA analysis on what he purported to be Colon’s remains, together with those of his son and brother, both named Diego, and determined him to be a Sephardic Jew. I am certain Estelle would have been pleased with the discovery. But to my mind it raises some serious puzzles just as the rest of Colon’s enigmatic life has done.

Here is why. Upon Colon’s death he was buried in a monastery in Valladolid, the town in which he last dwelt. When his son, Diego, became governor of Santo Domingo he ordered both his and his father’s graves to be interred in the colony’s soon-to-be completed cathedral, where they remained until in 1794, when the entire island of Hispaniola became French. Colon’s body was then removed to Cuba. In 1898 when the United States took control of the island from Spain, Colon was moved again, this time to Seville where his remains are claimed to be resting. Or so it would seem. Because the Dominican Republic claims it never left Santo Domingo.



*Christopher Columbus illustration from Grand Voyages (1596) by Theodor de Bry (1528-1598)*



*The voyages of Christopher Columbus*

Like the Admiral during his lifetime, his present location raises many mysteries. The international merry-go-round of where the Admiral’s bones really are, is compounded by the Dominican Republic’s insistence that they are in that country and not in Seville. The Dominican government refuses to permit DNA on what are considered to be Colon’s remains. It has erected a huge lighthouse-tomb, touting it as the real site of Colon’s remains.

In his will Colon directed that his chains be buried with him. I have read no mention of them anywhere after his demise. It can only be assumed that wish was not carried out; otherwise, the chains would have followed the body, proof of its location.

Then we learn that in 1877 in the cathedral in Santo Domingo, workers stumbled upon a lead box labeled, “Don Colon, Admiral of the Ocean Sea.” But we must remember

that Diego Colon, the Admiral’s son and heir, inherited the title, The current Cristobal Colon, the 17th Duke of Veragua, also holds this title. So who is in the lead box? Colon himself could not have created a better puzzle for historians to unravel.

But considering Estelle’s fine work and her analysis with the computer together with the not-so-reliable work of the DNA specialists, they make a strong case for Colon to be a crypto-Jew. If it was not Colon’s remains that were examined, as some scholars claim, they were matched with those of his son and brother which show Sephardic genes. That should be enough to satisfy any skeptic. That being said, we will let you decide. 🧐



Printed with permission from [www.IsabelEats.com](http://www.IsabelEats.com). Isabel Orozco Moore started Isabel Eats in 2015 as a way to document her family's recipes and connect to her Mexican heritage.

## Capirotada (Mexican Bread Pudding)

*Capirotada* or Mexican Bread Pudding, consists of layers of crusty bread, raisins, bananas, almonds, and cheese all soaked in sweetened cinnamon milk.

Prep Time: 10 mins.  
Cook Time: 50 mins.  
Soaking time: 15 mins.  
Total Time: 1 hr.  
Servings: 10 servings  
Calories: 413 kcal

### INGREDIENTS

Oil or butter, for greasing  
4 large *bolillo* bread rolls,  
cut into 1-inch thick pieces  
(about 10-12 cups)  
5 cups nonfat milk  
1 8-oz cone *piloncillo* (or 1¼ cup dark brown sugar)  
3 cinnamon sticks  
2 whole cloves  
3 large bananas, sliced into rounds  
1 cup raisins  
½ cup sliced almonds  
2 cups shredded Oaxaca cheese (or any melty white cheese  
like Monterey Jack, Provolone or Mozzarella)

### INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a 9x13-inch baking dish (or a dish that is slightly bigger) with oil or butter. Set aside.

Place cubed bread onto a large baking sheet. Bake for 5 minutes so that bread become a little toasted and dried out. Remove from oven and set aside.

Add milk, *piloncillo*, cinnamon sticks, and cloves to a large pot over medium-high heat. Whisk together; bring to a gentle boil.



Reduce heat to low and simmer uncovered for 10 minutes, whisking occasionally. Remove from heat and discard cinnamon sticks and cloves.

Assemble *capirotada* by spreading half the toasted bread in a single layer in prepared baking dish. Top with all banana slices, half of the raisins, half of the sliced almonds, and half of the shredded cheese. Repeat the process with remaining ingredients to make one more layer.

Carefully pour sweetened milk all over the *capirotada*, paying close attention to the bread at the edges.

Cover dish with aluminum foil and bake for 15 minutes, then remove the foil and bake uncovered for 15 more minutes.

Remove from oven, let it cool for 5 minutes, and serve warm. Or let cool completely, cover and refrigerate, and serve cold.

### TIPS FROM ISABEL

**Bread** - If you do not have *bolillo* bread, you can use French bread or any crusty loaf of bread.

**Cheese** - Use any melty cheese. Oaxaca, Monterey Jack, Provolone, Mozzarella, or even Cheddar will work.

**Sweetener** - If you do not have *piloncillo*, use 1¼ cups dark brown sugar.

**Sprinkles** - Totally optional, but my family always served it with round rainbow nonpareils sprinkles on top. It sounds a little strange, but it adds such a fun pop of color and a little crunch. Since we only make this dish once or twice a year, what better way to celebrate than with sprinkles! 🌈

# Schelly Talalay Dardashti

## Genealogist and Writer

### 1946-2025

**S**CJS mourns the passing of Schelly Talalay Dardashti, a longtime member of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies and a noted figure in the Jewish genealogy field, who passed away August 16, 2025 at the age of 79. Dardashti was a writer and researcher who was the founder and main administrator of the Tracing the Tribe Jewish genealogy group on Facebook which, at Schelly's death, had more than 82,000 members around the world.

For a time, Schelly was also the Facebook administrator for SCJS and served as a board member from 2015 until 2023. She was a regular contributor to the SCJS in-person conferences with stimulating presentations and notable genealogy workshops. She published widely on Jewish genealogy issues and her articles appeared in *Avotaynu*, *NGS Quarterly*, *The Forward*, and *Hadassah*, among others. She maintained a regular column, "It's All Relative," for the *Jerusalem Post* (1999-2005) as well as a Tracing the Tribe blog, founded in 2006, which later transitioned to the Facebook group.



During her life, Schelly lived in Teheran, Tel Aviv, Miami, Los Angeles, Las Vegas and lastly, Albuquerque,

New Mexico. A journalist and genealogist, she had traced her Ashkenazi, Sephardi and Mizrahi families across Iran, Spain, Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. An early proponent of DNA testing for genealogy, she co-administered several DNA projects at FamilyTreeDNA.

Schelly served as the U.S. Genealogy Advisor for MyHeritage.com and was a co-administrator of the Iberian Ashkenazi DNA Project, FTDNA. A founding member, she served on the board of the Sephardic Heritage Institute New Mexico for many years. She was also a Persian community liaison for the Avotaynu Jewish Heritage DNA Project. She was president of JGS of New Mexico which sponsors annual Jewish Genetics and Jewish DNA/Genealogy conferences. In addition, Dardashti was a founding member of Centro Sefarad New Mexico.



*Schelly with long-time friend and genealogy companion, Maria Apodaca*

Schelly will be missed by many. May she be long-remembered.

# Joseph A. Lovett

## Filmmaker and LGBTQ Activist

### 1945-2025

**T**hose of us who have been members of SCJS for many years always celebrated the several occasions when filmmaker and LGBTQ activist Joe Lovett attended our conferences. Charming, brilliant and outgoing, he was first introduced to SCJS at the Dallas Conference in 2014 in order to meet members of the crypto-Jewish community who could serve as resources for his developing film, *Children of the Inquisition*.

In Dallas, Joe struck up a warm friendship with Doreen Carvajal, an invited speaker, and the late Dr. David Gitlitz, and also with the conference chair, our then-president, Genie Milgrom. Greatly inspired, Joe began the project that would carry him into the Sephardic and crypto-Jewish world for many years, culminating in the magnificent 90-minute documentary that has inspired so many.

A former filmmaker for ABC News Studio and 20/20, Joe was among the first to deal with the AIDS crisis and come out personally as a gay man in an industry where most identities were kept private. After leaving 20/20 in 1989, he founded Lovett Productions, Inc.



(later, Lovett Stories+Strategies), where, in partnership with the CDC and ABC, he produced *In a New Light* — a star-studded AIDS awareness primetime special televised in the 1990s.

In 2001, Lovett won a Peabody Award and an Emmy nomination for writing, producing, and directing HBO's *Cancer: Evolution to Revolution*, which was billed as "150 minutes of television that could save your life." It started a national conversation about how to cope with, treat and learn to live with cancer. As his eyesight worsened, Lovett made the film *Going Blind* and conducted an outreach campaign, "Going Blind and Going Forward," that "ignited a global movement of individuals, grassroots organizations and medical professionals sponsoring screenings to raise awareness and to improve access to vision enhancement services."

Joe is survived by his longtime partner Jim Cottrell, MD whom he met in 1976. They sustained a relationship of almost 49 years before Joe's death on July 14 at the age of 80. Over the last decade, Joe developed idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, a condition that proved fatal.

Joe will be missed by many. 🕯️



Joe Lovett and Past SCJS President Debbie Wohl-Isard at the 2014 SCJS Conference in Dallas





SOCIETY FOR CRYPTO-JUDAIC STUDIES

## KANTER LECTURE SERIES

LAWRENCE & KATHY KANTER  
PHILANTHROPIC FUND OF THE  
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Special thanks to Dr. Lawrence Kanter for his ongoing support of this program.

SEPTEMBER 2025

### Rebecca Wartell, PhD



**REBECCA WARTELL, PhD**  
Richmond, Indiana  
wartere@eartham.edu

Crypto-Judaism is often described as a matriarchal religion, with *conversa* women as the keepers of Jewish ritual in the privacy of homes. In this lecture, **Matriarchs and Memory: The Female Foundations of Crypto-Judaism**, Wartell discussed ways in which crypto-Judaism also focused on feminine aspects of God through the veneration of women in the Bible including Esther, Judith, Mary, and even the

Virgin of Guadalupe. Following the Expulsion of Jews from Spain, Jewish mysticism also became increasingly focused on the concept of the *Shekhinah*, the feminine Divine Presence, as the source of salvation for *conversos*. The historical evolution of these themes was richly illustrated by artistic examples over time, portraying women with wings as protectors and nurturers. 🕯

NOVEMBER 2025

### Matthew Warshawsky, PhD



**MATTHEW WARSHAWSKY**  
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warshaws@up.edu

Referencing the six essays in his important book, *From New Christians to New Jews: Seventeenth-Century Spanish Text in Defense of Judaism*, Warshawsky discussed the issues of Jewish identity and survival during the Inquisition period shared by six different Iberian authors of the Diaspora, including arguments for open advocacy for

Judaism to personal laments about justice and suffering. Listeners enjoyed a rare insight into the thoughts and feelings of those who had to deal with the Expulsion, expressed through poems, sonnets and letters. His research supports the idea that these contributions should be considered among the best examples of trans-Atlantic literature.

Matthew Warshawsky (PhD, Ohio State University) is a professor of Spanish at the University of Portland, where he has taught since 2002. His expertise ranges from introductory Spanish language to courses about the Islamic, Jewish, and Christian cultures of medieval Spain; women authors of Golden Age Spain; *Don Quixote*; Spanish literature from the Baroque era to the present; and Latin American Jewish literature and culture.

Most recently, he is the author of the monograph *From New Christians to New Jews: Seventeenth-Century Spanish Texts in*

Warmest thanks for their generous gifts in 2024-2025

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ANDRÉE AELION BROOKS • BLANCA CARRASCO

ELISHEVA IRMA DIAZ • BEN DONENBERG

DEBBIE WOHL-ISARD

.....

PROFOUND THANKS FOR ALL THE MANY OTHER  
GENEROUS INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS



*Defense of Judaism* (Juan de la Cuesta-Hispanic Monographs, 2024). His collaboration with students has led to coauthored publications in peer-reviewed journals of undergraduate research on the literature of Iberian authors of Jewish origin. He currently serves on the executive committee of the Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association, and previously has served on the national screening committee for Fulbright English Teaching Assistantships to Spain and as vice president of conference programs for the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies. In January 2026, he will start a fourth term as chair of the Department of International Languages and Cultures at the University of Portland.

## COMING UP

JANUARY 18, 2026

Seth Ward, PhD



**SETH WARD, PhD**  
Denver, Colorado  
sward@uwyo.edu

**D**r. Seth Ward presents **The Enduring Relevance of the Spanish Inquisition**

The Inquisition... “We have a mission: to convert the Jews. They’ll see the light, learn wrong from right — we’ll make them an offer they can’t refuse.”

The Spanish Inquisition transformed both Jewish history and the world at large. Rooted in

centuries of religious tension and a generation of forced conversions, it marked a turning point in the story of Jewish survival, identity and diaspora. It remains a powerful lens through which to examine antisemitic tropes — especially those surrounding Jewish “blood” versus Jewish belief. How we remember the Inquisition shapes how we understand both the past and our present — and remembering it is more vital than ever.

Dr. Seth Ward is a lecturer, teacher, consultant, and expert witness on Middle East, Hebrew, Islam and Judaic topics. He taught Islamic, Jewish and Middle East studies, including student travel courses at the University of Wyoming Dept. of Philosophy and Religious Studies from 2003 until retirement in 2022, and previously, at the University of Denver, University of Colorado-Boulder and the University of Haifa. Ward earned his PhD at Yale University.

Dr. Ward has been a longtime board member of SCJS and for many years, has served as program chair for the annual conferences. He recently delivered this compelling topic in Denver and we want to be sure he shares it with all of you.

MARCH 22, 2026

Ben Donenberg



**BEN DONENBERG**  
Los Angeles, California  
ben@shakespearefestivala.org

**I**s it possible that the great writer of sonnets, plays and poems, William Shakespeare, was deeply aware of the presence of hidden Jews in London society? Was there any truth to his rumored liaison with a Jewish woman, in some ways his muse? As a dramatist and professional theater historian, Ben Donenberg, founder and artistic director of the Los Angeles Shakespeare Center, presents **Shakespeare’s Secret**

**Jews**, a stirring and fascinating look into the bard’s many works, wherein various Jewish characters played a specific role. (Most Jews in London at that time were originally from Spain or Portugal.) This talk was delivered at our Los Angeles 2025 conference and it was so interesting, that we felt those of you who missed it should be able to hear it.

Donenberg’s Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles is an award-winning, community-based arts organization that began operations in 1986. He received local awards and national recognition from Actors’ Equity Association, NAACP, Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle, California Theater Association, and the Mayor of Los Angeles. His 2006, six-year presidential appointment to the National Council on the Arts was unanimously approved by the United States Senate. He has lectured on theater aesthetics at the University of Southern California, the Huntington Library, and the SCLA’s WILL Power Teacher Training Seminars. He received his Bachelor’s degrees in Philosophy from University of Southern California and is a graduate of The Juilliard School’s Drama Division. >>>



APRIL 12, 2026

## Ilan Stavans, PhD



**ILAN STAVANS, PhD**  
Amherst, Massachusetts  
istavans@amherst.edu

With *El Iluminado*, Ilan Stavans describes what happens when a brilliant professor of Spanish literature and language become a character in his own graphic novel, functioning as both author and subject. It is nothing less than the creation of a story that holds more suspense and depth than the best “who-dunnit” ever, one where fiction and reality are clearly blurred.

While crafting a novel around the sudden death of a New Mexican murder victim outside Santa Fe, Professor Stavans is unwittingly drawn into the search for the killer only to discover that there is more to the situation than he thought. Behind the crime is the search for a missing manuscript or diary, reported lost centuries earlier and belonging to the Spanish Colonial Jewish martyr, none other than Luis de Carvajal the Younger. In time, Stavans realizes that if he can find the answer to one dilemma, he might find the answer to the other. In a novel that gallops along at a furious pace with enough red herrings to fool a real detective, its triumphant finish reveals more than the details of the crime — it is an homage to the story of New Mexico’s crypto-Jews, as well as Jewish values, thought and meaning. With charming illustrations and brisk dialogue, one may never go back to reading regular fiction again.

Ilan Stavans, PhD (born Ilan Stavchansky on April 7, 1961 in Mexico City) is a Mexican-American essayist, lexicographer, cultural commentator, translator, short-story author, publisher, TV personality, and teacher known for his insights into American, Hispanic and Jewish cultures. He has been a professor at Amherst College and has taught courses on a wide array of topics covering Latin American culture and literature, Jewish writers, modern American poetry, and more.

Listen to the author discuss how and why this book, first published in 2012, came about and why its forthcoming re-release is so important now.

MAY 17, 2026

## Douglas Schar, PhD



**DOUGLAS SCHAR, PhD**  
Great Falls, Virginia  
ddsindc@gmail.com

Join Dr. Douglas Schar in a compelling discussion, **Exploring the Hidden Past of Spain’s Gypsy Population**, about the surmised and actual origins of Spanish gypsies, also known as *Gitanos*, part of the Romani people. This culture had long been thought to originate from a single migration out of northwest India (Rajasthan) into Europe around the 12th–15th centuries.

However, new genetic evidence from a comprehensive DNA study provides an unprecedented window into their ancestry. With unerring inquiry and clear indicators via DNA studies, Schar reveals a new understanding of their deep connection to diverse Jewish population suggesting that the Spanish gypsies may descend from an itinerant international Jewish trading community rather than from a late-medieval Indian migrant group. SCJS board member and frequent contributor to *HaLapid*, Douglas Schar is a popular genetic scientist with a worldwide following.

A former ethnobotanist and health journalist, Schar now dedicates himself to crypto-Jewish studies including those expelled from Spain, but also the forced converts of northern Europe, Iran, north Africa, as well as the Afro-European crypto-Jews of the New World, Cape Verde, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand. His website, [www.HiddenJewishAncestry.com](http://www.HiddenJewishAncestry.com) receives roughly 30,000 visitors each month. Many of the people who reach out have discovered their Jewish ancestry by way of an ancestry DNA test. Following contact, he addresses their questions regarding their ancestry. A growing community of people are surprised to discover they have Jewish roots and would like to know more. This includes people from Sephardic backgrounds, but also Iranians whose ancestors converted en masse to Sufism in the 1890s, Dutch Jews who disappeared in Indonesia, and more. 🌍

Another banner season for our Kanter lecturers is on the books! We welcome scholars, rabbis, artists and more. Each presents their diverse interests and individual knowledge of Jewish history. Mark your calendar now and be sure to join us online. Watch *La Granada* for details.

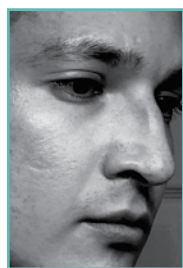
## Kathleen Alcalá's work pleases again

**K**athleen Alcalá's recent essay on unraveling her family history, 500 years after the Spanish Inquisition. "My Hand on His Shoulder: A Descendant of Crypto-Jews Inserts Herself into the Historical Record" is the perfect read!



**KATHLEEN ALCALÁ**  
Bainbridge Island, Washington  
kjalcala@gmail.com

## Kudos to Blanca Carrasco and Family!



Joel Carrasco

**J**oel Carrasco, son of Blanca and Cesar J. Carrasco Trejo, and a recent UTEP grad in Digital Media Production, reached the red carpet with his first-ever music video. His video of Larry Lesser's song "Lights Lead Home" from Lesser's award-winning album *Sparks* was announced as an Official Selection (from 130 entries) for the second annual Silver City Community Film Festival. (www.silvercityfilmfest.org).

Said Blanca, "I'm so proud and happy to share this posting: Dr. Larry Lesser entrusted my son with his beautiful song to tell the story through a lens and he did amazingly! Our thanks to *The New Mexico Jewish Journal* for running the story in its August issue! (Story contributors: Blanca Carrasco, Joel Carrasco, Larry Lesser, and Kim Ryan.)

And another blessing, daughter Rebecca Carrasco weds Quetzalcoatl Mendoza Rosas. Congratulations to all!

## BOOK RE-RELEASE

## Ilan Stavans Rides Again

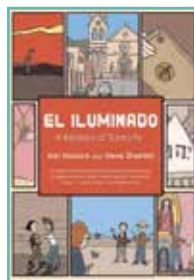
**A Not-to-be Missed Reprint of the Exciting Graphic Novel, *Il Iluminado*.**

**I**n the publishing industry, books are either "evergreen" with an indefinite shelf life or, once released, pushed to backlist after 90 days. Which is why a reprint of a previous edition is always exciting. After all, everyone loves a comeback!

Such is the case with Ilan Stavans's fascinating graphic novel, *Il Iluminado*. In this entertaining, thought-provoking detective story

set in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a fictional Ilan Stavans, a highly respected professor of Spanish literature at Amhurst College, seeks to solve a murder and locate a lost manuscript by a prominent 16th-century crypto-Jew who was burned at the stake by the Spanish Inquisition.

The book's first release was followed by this prophetic discovery, changing the impact of the novel in many ways. It raises the age-old question "Does art imitate life, or the other way around?" Either way, a plunge into its pages with the delightful illustrations by Steve Sheinken is better than a night at the movies. It is a classic who-dunnit with intriguing subplots, demanding your attention until the surprising end.



This paperback edition includes a new afterword recounting the amazing and now-famous events that occurred after the original publication: the actual discovery of Luis de Carvajal's memoir and its restoration to Mexico. Release date March 2026.

## Isaac Amon from L.A. to D.C.

**A**fter the SCJS conference, on my birthday of all days, I headed to Washington, DC for The Rohr Jewish Learning Institute National Jewish Retreat (which typically draws 1,000 people from around the world) to speak at the Omni Shoreham Hotel — as we mark the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution and the 80th anniversary of the Nuremberg Trials.

I presented two topics:  
1). "Crypto-Judaism: The Extraordinary Legacy of the Inquisition, *Conversos*, and Their Hidden Role in Shaping America's Constitution" — and  
2). "From Nuremberg to The Hague: An ISIS Investigator Explores the Impact of the Nuremberg Trials and Genocide on International Justice"

From L.A. to D.C., three threads connect this remarkable tapestry: legal history, Jewish memory, and the pursuit of justice.

Feeling grateful to spend my birthday doing what I love — sharing history, law, and the lessons that still shape our world today. 🕯️



**ISAAC AMON, PHD**  
St. Louis, Missouri  
isaacamonlaw@gmail



# READERS' FEEDBACK

## We appreciate your support

**T**hank you for so generously sharing and publishing the story of the Jewish cemetery on the Lido — and your support for the NMJJ.

**Diane Joy Schmidt**  
Publisher and Editor,  
New Mexico Jewish Journal  
editor@nmjewishjournal.com

**T**hank you both very much!  
Congratulations on the magazine!  
Happy to be a contributor.

**Nan Rubin**  
Boston, Massachusetts



## Quality yields insights

**D**eceptive practices were upended in Spain with the arrest of individuals caught selling false Jewish genealogies. Visit the link below for the whole story. And be aware — dishonesty rears its ugly head in the search for a Jewish past.

**Mark Bennett**  
Pine Grove, California

Many thanks to Mark for forwarding this alarming story.  
— Editor

[www.jpost.com/international/article-859558](http://www.jpost.com/international/article-859558)

## Order Back Issues of HaLapid

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

All back issues are now available ONLINE.  
Current issue posted after next publication.

Just one more benefit of membership - so join or renew now!  
[www.cryptojews.com](http://www.cryptojews.com)



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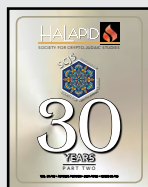
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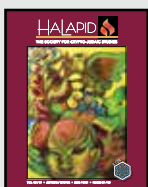
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Autumn/Winter  
2020



Spring/Summer  
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Autumn/Winter  
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Spring/Summer  
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Autumn/Winter  
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Winter/Spring  
2017-18



Spring/Summer  
2017



Autumn/Winter  
2016



Spring/Summer  
2016



Autumn/Winter  
2015



Spring/Summer  
2015



Autumn/Winter  
2014



Spring/Summer  
2014



# YOU are part of a Mission!



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

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

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

Our website, [www.cryptojews.com](http://www.cryptojews.com), has archival status; scholars and interested individuals may access hundreds of articles and papers from past issues of *HaLapid*. It also features stories and news of SCJS and related events.

Since 1991, we have attracted members from the United States, Canada, Mexico, Latin America, Spain, Portugal, Scotland, England, France, Italy, Israel, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, Macao, Goa, Central America, the Spanish Caribbean Islands, and elsewhere.

Your continuing membership and donations make it possible for us to continue our mission. We welcome new and renewing members. We are all active participants in this important field of study.

In addition to membership, we welcome donations to our other funds. The Randy Baca/Dennis Duran Fund provides assistance for those researching possible Sephardic ancestry and wish to attend conferences. A donation to our Conference Fund ensures the participation of outstanding keynote speakers and supports special conference programming. In addition, your contributions supports our mailing and publication expenses.

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

## Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies

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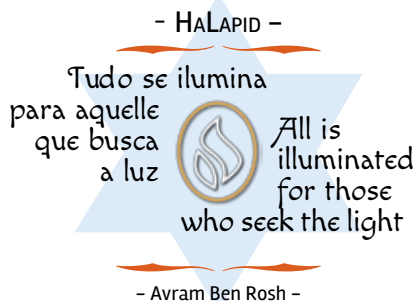
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# THE TORAH IN THE TAROT

By Stav Appel • Ayin Press, June 2025

*A beautiful Tarot deck and booklet revealing the lost and forgotten Jewish origins of the Tarot*



For hundreds of years, the original meaning of the Tarot de Marseille, the artistic ancestor of the contemporary Tarot, has been a source of mystery, speculation and debate. When Torah student Stav Appel encountered the Jean Noblet Tarot, one of the

oldest known preserved versions of the Tarot de Marseille, he found something curious: the Magician held his arms in the shape of the Hebrew letter aleph **א**, the Hermit wore a Jewish prayer shawl, and three pieces of matzah hid beneath the Moon. The meaning of these images surfaced when Appel

*“... a landmark contribution to the field of Tarot studies...”*

— Ayin Press

learned that the deck was created circa 1650, during a centuries-long prohibition on Judaism in the Kingdom of France.

*The Torah in the Tarot* includes a booklet written by Stav Appel with a foreword by poet Ariana Reines, as well as a historically

accurate color reproduction of the Jean Noblet Tarot — the only modern copy that preserves the full scope of the deck’s original Judaica — created by the French artist Florent Giraud of Tarotgraphe.



Stav Appel is a data scientist and a lifelong student of Torah. Earlier in his career he was the director of the Israeli-Palestinian coexistence organization Nitzanei Shalom, and the director of International Service Programs for American Jewish World Service. He holds an MBA from the Yale School of Management and has studied Biblical Hebrew at Hebrew University and Yale Divinity School.

He currently resides in Upstate New York. Find Stav on Instagram @torah.tarot.



*“Stav Appel’s scholarship was a jolt of clarity for me — like a beam of sunlight dispelling centuries of innuendo.”*

— Ariana Reines, author, *A Sand Book*

Available at Amazon and Thriftbooks