

Crypto-Judaism

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Crypto-Judaism is the secret adherence to Judaism while publicly professing to be of another faith; practitioners are referred to as "crypto-Jews" (origin from Greek **kryptos** - **κρυπτός**, 'hidden'). The term crypto-Jew is also used to describe descendants who maintain some Jewish traditions of their ancestors, often secretly, while publicly adhering to other faiths, most commonly Catholicism.^{[1][2][3][4][5]} The phenomenon arose in the Middle Ages following the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 from Spain.^[6]

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Judaica (clockwise from top): Shabbat candlesticks, handwashing cup, Chumash and Tanakh, Torah pointer, shofar, and etrog box

Europe

Officially Jews who converted in Spain in the 14th and 15th centuries were known as *Cristianos Nuevos* (New Christians), but were commonly called *conversos*. Spain and Portugal passed legislation restricting their rights in the mother countries and colonies. Despite the dangers of the Inquisition, many *conversos* continued to secretly and discreetly practice Jewish rituals.^[6] ^[7]

In the Balearic Islands, numerous *conversos*, also called Chuetas, publicly professed Roman Catholicism but privately adhered to Judaism after the Alhambra decree of 1492 and during the Spanish Inquisition. They are

among the most widely-known crypto-Jews.

Crypto-Judaism dates back to earlier periods when Jews were forced or pressured to convert by the rulers of places they lived in.

Some of the Jewish followers of Sabbatai Zevi (Sabbateans) formally converted to Islam, and later followers of Jacob Frank ("Frankists") formally converted to Christianity, but maintained aspects of their versions of Messianic Judaism.

Crypto-Jews persisted in Russia and Eastern European countries influenced by the Soviet Union after the rise of Communism with the Russian Revolution of 1917. Rather than being forced to convert, all religion was regarded as undesirable, although some faiths were allowed to continue under strict supervision by the regime. Since the end of Communism, many people in former Soviet states, including descendants of Jews, have publicly taken up the faith of their families again.

The "Belmonte Jews" of Portugal, dating from the 12th century, maintained strong secret traditions for centuries. A whole community survived in secrecy by maintaining a tradition of intermarriage and hiding all external signs of their faith. They and their practices were only discovered in the 20th century. Their rich Sephardic tradition of Crypto-Judaism is unique. Only recently did they contact other Jews. Some now profess Orthodox Judaism, although many still retain their centuries-old traditions.^[8]

Xuetes

The Xueta are a minority on the Balearic island of Majorca (Mallorca) who are descended almost entirely from crypto-Jews, forced to convert in 1391. The term "xueta" literally translates to "pig" in Catalan, similar to the old Spanish (Castilian) term and *marrano*, both of the same meaning.

Today, they comprise a population of 20,000–25,000 on an island of 750,000; they have professed Roman Catholicism for centuries but have only recently seen a lessening in tensions with ethnic Majorcans. According to some Orthodox rabbis, the majority of Xuetes are probably Jewish under Jewish law (by descent from Jewish mothers) due to the low rate of intermarriage with outside groups.^[citation needed] Only recently have intermarriages between the two groups been more prevalent or noticeable.

During World War II, Nazi Germany was known to have pressured Majorcan religious authorities into surrendering the Xuetes, targeted because of their Jewish ancestry. Reportedly the religious authorities refused the Nazi request.^[citation needed]

Several Xuetes are reported to have "reconverted" to Judaism. Some have become rabbis.^[9]

Neofiti

The Neofiti were a group of crypto-Jews living in the Kingdom of Sicily which not only included the island of Sicily but nearly all of Southern Italy from the 13th to the 16th centuries.

Asia and Muslim lands

There are, or have been, several communities of Crypto-Jews in Muslim lands. The ancestors of the Daggatuns probably kept up their Jewish practises a long time after their nominal adoption of Islam. A large community of Crypto-Jews lived in Mashhad, near Khorassan, where they were known as "Jedid al-Islam", who were mass-converted to Islam around 1839. Most of this community left for Israel in 1946, but some have converted into Muslims and live in Iran today.^{[10][11]} In the central Iranian village of Sebe, local Muslims practice many Jewish customs, such as women lighting a candle on Friday night (the eve of the Jewish Sabbath). Before sundown on Friday, they prepare a small fire which they leave on throughout Saturday, so as not to ignite the fire on Sabbath.

North America

There are three distinct historical components to colonial roots of crypto-Judaism, largely restricted to Spanish-held territories in Mexico, each with distinct geographical and temporal aspects: early colonial roots, the frontier province of Nuevo León, and the later northern frontier provinces. The crypto-Jewish traditions have complex histories and are typically embedded in an amalgam of syncretic Roman Catholic and Judaic traditions. In many ways resurgent Judaic practices mirrored indigenous peoples' maintaining their traditions practiced loosely under Roman Catholic veil. In addition Catholicism was syncretic, absorbing other traditions and creating a new creole religion.

Early colonial period — 16th century

However, Portugal in 1497 issued a similar decree that effectively converted all remaining Jewish children, making them wards of the state unless the parents also converted. Therefore, many of the early crypto-Jewish migrants to Mexico in the early colonial days were technically first to second generation Portuguese with Spanish roots before that. The number of such Portuguese migrants was significant enough that the label of "Portuguese" became synonymous with "Jewish" throughout the Spanish colonies. Immigration to Mexico offered lucrative trade possibilities in a well-populated colony with nascent Spanish culture counterbalanced by a large non-Christian population. Migrants thought the culture would be more tolerant since the lands were overwhelmingly populated by non-Christian indigenous peoples.

Colonial officials believed that many crypto-Jews were going to Mexico during the 16th century and complained in written documents to Spain that Spanish society in Mexico would become significantly Jewish. Officials found and condemned clandestine synagogues in Mexico City. At this point, colonial administrators instituted the Law of the Pure Blood, which prohibited migration to Mexico for New Christians (*Christiano Nuevo*), i.e. anyone who could not prove to be Old Christians for at least the last three generations. During this time, the administration initiated the Mexican Inquisition to ensure the Catholic orthodoxy of all migrants into Mexico. The Mexico Inquisition was also deployed in the traditional manner to ensure orthodoxy of converted indigenous peoples. The first victims of burnings or autos de fé of the Mexican Inquisition were indigenous converts convicted of heresy or crypto-Jews convicted of relapsing into their ancestral faith.^[*citation needed*]

Except for the province of *Nuevo León*, initiation of the Blood Purity Laws reduced the migration of conversos.

Nuevo León — 1590s to early 17th century

The history of the colonization of Mexico can be described as a northward expansion over increasingly hostile geography well-populated by angered tribes and loose confederations of indigenous peoples being conquered. Spain financed the expansion by exploiting mineral wealth, using indigenous peoples as labor in mines, and establishing *ranchos* for raising livestock. One troublesome region was a large expanse covering the North-Eastern quadrant of New Spain (Nueva España). Chichimec, Apache and other tribes were resistant to Christianization and "settling". They were perceived to render the frontier (*frontera*) a lawless and unsettled region.

Luis Carvajal y de la Cueva was a Portuguese New Christian royal accountant who received a royal charter to settle Nuevo León, a large expanse of land in the hostile frontier. Significantly, in the charter Carvajal y de la Cueva received an exemption from the usual requirement that he prove that all new settlers were "old Christians" rather than recently converted Jews or Muslims. This exemption allowed people, especially Crypto-Jews, to come to Nuevo León who were legally barred from entering New Spain elsewhere.^[12] Many of the 100 soldiers and 60 laborers Carabajal was authorized to bring to New Spain were Crypto-Jews.^[13]

With Carvajal as governor, Monterrey was established as the center, currently in the state of Nuevo León. Within a few years, some people reported to Mexico City that Jewish rites were being performed in the Northern Province and efforts to convert heathen indigenous peoples were lax.^[citation needed] The principal economic activity of the new colony seems to have been slave trading of Indians captured by Caravajal and his associates.^[14] Carvajal's Lieutenant Governor, Gaspar Castaño de Sosa, led a large expedition to New Mexico in 1591 in an effort to establish a colony. Castaño was arrested for this unauthorized expedition and sentenced to exile in the Philippines. The sentence was later reversed but he had already been killed in a slave revolt.^[15]

The governor, his immediate family members, and others of his entourage were called to appear before the Inquisition in Mexico City. They were arrested and jailed. The governor subsequently died in jail, while his family members were rehabilitated. One of these was Anna Carvajal, a niece of the Governor. She and others were later again taken captive and sentenced to burning at the stake for relapsing.

The governor's nephews changed their name to Lumbroso. One of these was Joseph Lumbroso, also known as Luis de Carvajal el Mozo, who is said to have circumcised himself in the desert to conform to Jewish law. His memoirs, letters and inquisition record survive. Two other nephews also changed their names to Lumbroso and migrated to Italy, where they became famous rabbis.

When Governor Carvajal was in office, the city of Monterrey became a destination for other crypto-Jews feeling the pressure of the Mexican Inquisition in the south of the territory. Thus, the story of Nuevo León and the founding of Monterrey are significant as it attracted crypto-Jewish migrants from all parts of New Spain. They created one of the earliest Jewish-related communities in earlier Mexico. (The Jewish communities in modern Mexico which practice their Judaism openly were not established until the considerable immigration from eastern Europe, Turkey and Syria in the late 19th century and 20th century.)

Former Mexican territories in the modern-day southwestern U.S. 17th century–18th century

Due to the activities of the Mexican Inquisition in Nuevo León, many crypto-Jewish descendants migrated to

other frontier colonies further west to the trade routes passing through the towns of Sierra Madres Occidental and Chihuahua and further north on the trade route to Paso del Norte (Juarez/El Paso) and Santa Fe (both cities in the then colonial Province of New Mexico New Mexico), and somewhat less in California.

In the former Spanish-held northern New Spain (modern-day Southwestern United States), some Hispanic Roman Catholics have stated a belief that they are descended from crypto-Jews and have started practicing Judaism. They often cite as evidence memories of older relatives practicing Jewish traditions. The crypto-Jews of New Mexico have been documented by several research scholars including Stanley M. Hordes,^[16] Janet Liebman Jacobs,^[17] Schulamith Halevy, and Seth D. Kunin.^[18] Only one researcher (Folklorist Judith Neulander) has been skeptical of the authenticity of the Jewish ancestry of Hispanos of the Southwest, she argues that these remembered traditions could be those of Ashkenazi, not Sephardi, Jews and may possibly be constructed memories due to suggestion by proponents. She also argues that the Jewish traditions practiced by older relatives were introduced by groups of Evangelical Protestant Christians who purposely acquired and employed Jewish traditions as part of their religious practices. Neulander's theory has been directly addressed in Kunin's book "Juggling Identities: Identity and Authenticity Among the Crypto-Jews". More recently, Evangelical Protestant Christians have opened missionary groups aimed at cultivating evangelical doctrine in Southwestern American communities where crypto-Judaism had survived.

Current times

According to a recent study (December 2008) published in the American Journal of Human Genetics, 19.8 percent of modern Spaniards (and Portuguese) have DNA reflecting Sephardic Jewish ancestry (compared to 10.6 percent having DNA reflecting Moorish ancestors.[1]. The Sephardic result is in contradiction or not replicated in all the body of genetic studies done in Iberia and has been relativized by the authors themselves and questioned by Stephen Oppenheimer who estimate that much earlier migrations, 5,000 to 10,000 years ago from the Eastern Mediterranean might also have accounted for the Sephardic estimates. "They are really assuming that they are looking at this migration of Jewish immigrants, but the same lineages could have been introduced in the Neolithic". The same authors in also a recent study (October 2008) attributed most of those same lineages in Iberia and the Balearic Islands as of Phoenician origin. The rest of genetic studies done in Spain estimate the Moorish contribution ranging from 2.5/3.4% to 7.7%.

Recent genetic research, however, has shown that many Latinos of the American Southwest may be descended from Anusim (Sephardic Jews who converted to Roman Catholicism). Michael Hammer, a research professor at the University of Arizona and an expert on Jewish genetics, said that fewer than 1% of non-Semites, but more than four times the entire Jewish population of the world, possessed the male-specific "Cohanim marker" (which in itself is not necessarily carried by all Jews, but is prevalent among Jews claiming descent from hereditary priests), and 30 of 78 Latinos tested in New Mexico (38.5%) were found to be carriers. DNA testing of Hispanic populations also revealed between 10% and 15% of men living in New Mexico, south Texas and northern Mexico have a Y chromosome that traces back to the Middle East.^[19]

In northern Mexico, Monterrey, the capital city of the state of Nuevo León, that shares a border with Texas, is said to contain descendants of Crypto-Jews. The church in Agualeguas, Nuevo León, Mexico indeed has Star of David windows beneath the Christian cross atop the domed roof. The state of Jalisco has several cities with large numbers of Anusim, mainly Guadalajara, Ciudad Guzmán, and Puerto Vallarta, although a steady influx of Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe during the late 19th century and early to mid-20th century into Mexico

City, Guadalajara, and Veracruz is also widely known.

Today, there are about 40,000^[20] Mexican Jews, both Ashkenazi and Sephardi. Researchers and historians say that number would rise considerably if Anusim (or Crypto-Jews) were included in those estimates.

Central, South America and Caribbean

As in the American Southwest, in the department of Antioquia, Colombia, as well as in the greater Paisa region, many families also hold traditions and oral accounts of Jewish descent. In this population, Y chromosome genetic analysis has shown an origin of founders predominantly from "southern Spain but also suggest that a fraction came from northern Iberia and that some possibly had a Sephardic origin".^[21] The Medellín tradition of the *marranada*, where a pig is slaughtered, butchered and consumed on the streets of every neighborhood each Christmas has been interpreted as an annual affirmation of the rejection of Jewish law.^[22]

A safe haven destination for Sephardic Conversos during the Spanish Colony was Santa Cruz, Bolivia.^[23] In 1557 many Crypto-Jews joined Ñuflo de Chávez and were among the pioneers who founded the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra.^[24] During the 16th century several Crypto-Jews that faced persecution from the Inquisition and local authorities in nearby Potosí, La Paz and La Plata also moved to Santa Cruz for it was the most isolated urban settlement and because the Inquisition did not bother the Conversos there^[25] for this frontier town was meant to be a buffer to the Portuguese and Guaraní raids that threatened the mines of Peru. Several of them settled in the city of Santa Cruz and its adjacent towns of Vallegrande, Postrervalle, Portachuelo, Terevinto, Pucarà, Bolivia, Cotoca and others.^[26]

Several of the oldest Catholic families in Santa Cruz are in fact of Jewish origin; some traces of Judaic practices are still alive among them and have also influence the rest of the community. As recent as the 1920s, several families preserved seven-branched candle sticks and served dishes cooked with reminiscing kosher practices.^[25] It is still customary among certain old families to light candles on Friday at sunset and to mourn the deaths of dear relatives on the floor.^[24] After almost five centuries, some of the descendants of these families still acknowledge their Jewish origin, but practice Catholicism (in certain cases with some Jewish syncretism).

In addition to these communities, Roman Catholic-professing communities who are descendants of Crypto-Jews are said to exist in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico^[27] and in various other Spanish-speaking countries of South America, such as Argentina, Venezuela, Chile and Ecuador. From these communities comes the proverb, "Catholic by faith, Jewish by blood".

All the above localities were former territories of either the Spanish or Portuguese Empires, where the Inquisition eventually followed and continued investigating crypto-Jews who had settled there. The Inquisition endured longer in the colonies than it had in Spain itself.^[27]

Famous Crypto-Jews

- Luis de Carvajal was the governor of the state of Nuevo León, a northern Mexico province in which

the restriction against immigration from conversos was relaxed in order to encourage migration to the peril-fraught frontier. He was responsible for bringing a significant group of crypto-Jewish conversos living in Portugal since the Expulsion of 1492.

- Luis de Carvajal el Mozo, was the nephew of Jose Luis Carvajal y de la Cueva, the only crypto-Jew of the Spanish colonial era whose memoirs have been preserved.
- Antonio Fernandez Carvajal was a Portuguese merchant in London; "like other Marranos in London, Carvajal prayed at the Catholic chapel of the Spanish ambassador, while simultaneously playing a leading role in the secret Jewish community, which met at the clandestine synagogue at Creechurch Lane."^[28]
- Some scholars of Judaic studies believe that Miguel de Cervantes may have been a crypto-Jew or of crypto-Jewish descent.^[29]
- Rodrigo Lopez, a converso who fled from Portugal to England and became physician to Queen Elizabeth I.^[28]]]

See also

- Doctrine of mental reservation
- History of the Jews in Latin America
- History of the Jews in the Netherlands
- Sephardic Jews in India
- Marrano
- Anusim
- Jewish ethnic divisions
- Jewish history
- Morisco
- Kakure Kirishitan
- Crypto-Christianity
- Crypto-Paganism
- Limpieza de sangre
- Dönme
- Who Is A Jew?

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External links

- Resources > Medieval Jewish History > Expulsion from Spain and The Anusim (<http://www.dinur.org/resources/resourceCategoryDisplay.aspx?categoryid=445&rsid=478>) The Jewish History Resource Center, Project of the Dinur Center for Research in Jewish History, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
- The Story of Secret and Forcibly Converted Jews (<http://www.jackwhite.net/iberia/>)
- Shavei (<http://www.shavei.org>)
- Luis de Carvajal, el mozo [1] (<http://parentseyes.arizona.edu/bloom/carvajal.htm>)
- Society for Crypto Judaic Studies [2] (<http://www.cryptojews.com/>)
- Crypto Jews/Anusim Resources [3] (<http://www.miriamherrera.com/crypto-jewishlinks>)
- Shavei Israel - a group tht helps our lost brethren return (<http://www.shavei.org>)
- Beth HaDerech - Returning to Judaism (<http://bethaderech.com/category/anusim/>)

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