Iberian New Christians and Their Descendants

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Edited by

Abraham Gross, Adina Moryosef and Jack Cohen

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In Memoriam

Gloria Mound z"l

Pioneer of Bnei Anousim research and founder of Casa Shalom

and

Elie Schalit z”l

Zionist visionary and man of action, and champion of the Bnei Anousim revival

Dedicated by Neil Davis

"…*behold, the bush burned with fire, but the bush was not consumed*" (Exodus 3:2)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section Two: New Christians and the Bnei Anousim: From Documental Historiography to Field Research

INTRODUCTION

IBERIAN CONVERSOS, CRYPTO-JEWS, AND DESCENDANTS: HISTORY AND CONTEMPORARY IDENTITIES

The Institute for Sefardi and Anousim Studies (ISAS) at Netanya Academic College held its international conference *Reconnecting 2016: Reinvigorating Shared Latino-Jewish Roots and Heritage* in Sunny Isles, Florida. This two-day gathering was a landmark event in that it combined two distinct elements in the confluence of these two cultures: lectures and panels on the present status of Latino-Jewish relationship, with contemplation on its future, and the presentation of scholarly papers on the history of the Iberian New Christians (Jewish Conversos) during the Early Modern period, as well as on their contemporary descendants.

Most of the chapters in the present volume are the written versions of oral presentations from that conference. Our intention is to present a state of research, especially regarding scholarship in the relatively new field of contemporary Bnei Anousim. A terminological clarification for the reader is in order here. *Anousim* in Hebrew means "forced ones," and generally refers to Jews who were converted to another religion against their will. In our historical context it refers specifically to the Jewish population converted by force to Catholicism from 1391 through the fifteenth century in Spain and Portugal, who are referred to by the terms New Christians, Conversos, and Marranos. *Bnei Anousim* in Hebrew means "descendants of forced converts." We have adopted this term, which is the most common term in use today to designate those who consider themselves to be of Jewish origin and wish to reclaim, to some extent, their ancestral heritage. The term "New Christians" in the title of this volume refers to the totality of the Jewish population that was converted to Catholicism and their ensuing generations, with no regard to their religious beliefs and practices, while "crypto-Jews" refers to those who retained some measure of Judaism.

Planning the conference with this intention, we invited recognized scholars who represent the widest possible spectrum, geographically and

thematically. The range of disciplines is mainly, but not exclusively, from the humanities and social sciences, reflecting our intention to present readers with the diverse array of fields involved and to underscore the possibilities which might arise for innovative scholars willing to engage in complementing inter-disciplinary research.

This is a particular desideratum when the contemporary issue of Bnei Anousim is considered, an area which is very young and relatively unknown when compared with the countless historical studies, hundreds of articles, and scores of books on the Inquisition and the New Christians published just during the past half century. Established historians who have the training, skills, languages, experience, and familiarity with the vast material related to the world of the New Christians in Iberia and in their diaspora are rarely willing or able to depart from their (possibly) more "safe" or "sound" document-based work and tackle new methodological issues involving informant-based studies, however more exciting. Indeed, some of the studies in this volume will make it amply clear why it is far more convenient for academics to remain within the more methodologically conservative sphere of document-based historiography rather than venture out and explore new domains. This is a pity, because it is precisely those historians in control of the vast primary sources, Christian and Jewish, and of the enormous secondary corpus of accumulated academic research, who can contribute to studies which integrate history and anthropology, or any other relevant discipline.

This is the primary reason for our decision to supplement the conference presentations with additional solicited chapters which had been presented in previous ISAS conferences and which we thought would create a better overall picture of the field.

Chronologically, the historical chapters deal with issues related to New Christian existence as early as the end of the sixteenth century. However, we consciously focus on the eighteenth century to counterbalance the clear quantitative disparity in favor of studies focusing on the seventeenth century, which saw the dramatic creation of the New Christian Diaspora, especially the rise of new communities of those who returned to Judaism, be they in Western Europe (Amsterdam, Hamburg, London) or in the Atlantic and Caribbean (Jamaica, Curaçao, Suriname, etc.). The interesting cultural and historical processes—European and Jewish—and the outstanding intellectual figures of former Marranos who were involved in them have served as magnets for scholars' interest and attention. While there is no reason to question the centrality of that period, the history of both the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions and their stubborn struggle to uproot persisting Judaizers did not stop there. As a matter of fact, the

first quarter of the eighteenth century witnessed possibly the most comprehensive and ferocious attack of the Spanish Inquisition since the 1480s, involving every single Inquisitorial court throughout the land. Neither did the Portuguese Inquisition slow down during this period. The exodus of New Christians from Portugal to Brazil reached unprecedented proportions, and Jewish "heresy" was alive and well there, as can be deduced from the numerous Inquisitorial *processos*. The study of eighteenth-century New Christian history is of additional importance since it is, so to speak, the far end of the genealogical bridge between contemporary Bnei Anousim and the ancestors they must identify in their search for New Christian roots.

Some of the importance in the present volume lies in the multi-faceted methodological discussions of the reality of descendants of forced converts who lost any meaningful touch with Judaism more than twenty generations ago and who were intensively hunted down and persecuted for the following three hundred years. In a society which has largely lost any memory of their origins, one should ask, how real are their Jewish roots? How "Jewish" are odd and unexplained family customs? How much of a perceived history is no more than wishful thinking in an age in which, for the first time in two millennia, we encounter a phenomenon of individuals and groups who wish to adopt Judaism and to join the Jewish people?

Several of the chapters in this volume address this pressing question. For the first time, a serious demographical study discusses and boldly suggests a staggering quantitative estimate of the number of individuals in the Latin world who have Jewish roots. Two genetic studies measure the extent of endogamy among New Christians. Another chapter addresses the tactical question of how to conduct reliable interviews and extract meaningful information in a highly sensitive and secretive society, which presents unique methodological problems. A comprehensive methodological chapter attempts to put to rest the "Judith Neulander thesis" which has denied the veracity of customs which were generally interpreted as stemming from Jewish tradition and proving Jewish descent. A fascinating report on ongoing research of "Marrano memory" in a Peruvian town illustrates the dilemmas an anthropologist–detective faces investigating some traces of practical Jewish customs of unknown origin alongside some strong memories of Jewish origin. Finally, a chapter traces the *halakhic* (Jewish legal) roots of contemporary rabbinic attitudes toward the issue of Jewish identity and "return" to Judaism.

A note on editing and style: It is inevitable that in a collection of essays by diverse authors, with different areas of expertise and in some cases different native languages, there are variations in style. We have attempted

as far as possible to apply a uniform standard of English usage while taking into consideration author preferences.

Finally, it is our pleasure and privilege to take this opportunity to publicly acknowledge our deep gratitude to the Saba Foundation (*Agudat Saba*) in Israel, which since our inception has been the principal supporter of the ISAS and its activity, stemming from its leadership's deep conviction that the Bnei Anousim are a significant contemporary phenomenon with historical roots deserving academic investigation. Mr. Neil Davis (UK/Israel), a warm-hearted philanthropist for Jewish-Israeli causes, also has been deeply involved from the beginning. His generosity in establishing our unique library and its expansion over the years, as well as so many other ad hoc contributions, has enabled us to carry out a variety of activities and projects. Ever the gentleman, he deferred having this volume dedicated to him in order to acknowledge two people who were significant to our endeavors. We value his personal friendship very much and wish him many healthy years of continued philanthropy.

Mr. Michael Dezer's contribution to the *Reinvigorating Shared Latino-Jewish Roots and Heritage* event and hospitality in his Trump International Resort Hotel in the Miami suburb of Sunny Isles enabled a high-level and indeed unforgettable conference which, in turn, created friendships and lasting cooperations between individuals and organizations. Dr. David Altman, Senior Vice President of Netanya Academic College initiated the conference and was personally involved in and behind the scenes from the moment of inception and throughout the complicated process of planning and realizing that multi-facetted event. Many thanks also to the conference's organizing committee, led by ISAS manager Shlomo Buzaglo.

Last but not least, this volume is a team effort, and I would like to acknowledge and thank my co-editors for the great partners they have been.

Professor Abraham (Avi) Gross, Chair

SECTION ONE:

ROOTS AND REALITY: GENERAL PERSPECTIVES OF CONTEMPORARY DESCENDANTS

CHAPTER ONE

IBERIAN-JEWISH COMMON ROOTS— THE DNA PERSPECTIVE

MAX BLANKFELD

Human migration and genetics

Our DNA contains our personal history. On an individual level, it tells us about the origins of our ancestral lines since early days, and the distinct population clusters that each of these lines belong to. Analyzed in a collective way, it contains the history of the migration of humankind along the tens of thousands of years since humans left Africa.

One may ask, how is this possible? As researchers sampled the DNA of various indigenous populations around the world, they found that each of those populations, while sharing some mutations in their DNA, also carried distinct mutations that characterized the different groups they belong to.

In other words, as people started migrating out of Africa, they dwelled for thousands of years in different places. As they spread around the world, in each of those places a geographically-specific mutation developed. Thus, a group that settled for thousands of years in Southern Europe, for example, would present a mutation not found in a group that went the opposite direction and took the Asian route to the Americas.

In the early 1960s, famed professors A.W.F. Edwards and L.L. Cavalli-Sforza published a series of peer-reviewed scientific papers on this subject. In a paper entitled "Reconstruction of Evolutionary Trees,"[1] they published one of the first, if not the first, human migration map, based on fifteen distinct populations (Figure 1.1). As we will see later, more recently this tree evolved in such a way that we would need several pages

[1] Anthony W.F. Edwards and Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza, "Reconstruction of Evolutionary Trees," Pub. No. 6, Phenetic and Phylogenetic Classification (London: Systematics Association, 1964), 67-76.

to display the many distinct population groups that can be distinguished through DNA analysis. And it is constantly evolving.

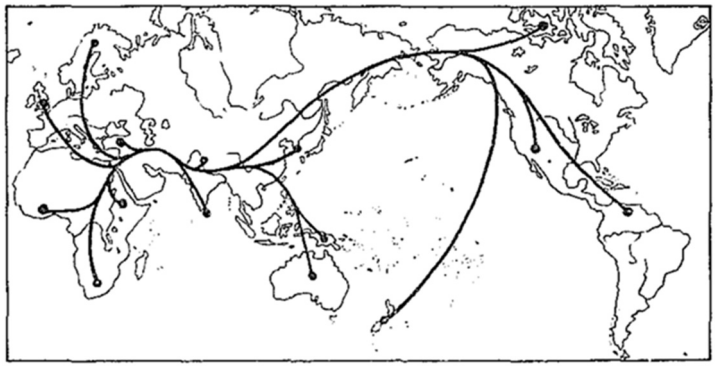

FIG. 1. Topology of the minimum-evolution tree uniting fifteen human populations; constructed on the basis of the frequency of blood-group alleles.

Figure 1.1. The gene frequency tree published by Edwards and Cavalli-Sforza, 1964

Genetic genealogy

The publication of two studies in the late 1990s led to the birth of the field of genetic genealogy. In the first article, in 1997, professors Michael Hammer from the University of Arizona and Karl Skorecki from the Technion–Rambam Medical Center in Haifa, Israel published a study[2] that tested the hypothesis that if the *Kohanim* (Jewish priestly class) were the direct male descendants of Aaron, the first *Kohen HaGadol* (High Priest), then today's self-claimed *Kohanim* should share a number of markers in the Y-chromosome, given that the Y is passed from father to son with mutations happening at a reasonably low frequency.

Indeed, after testing 188 Jewish males, self-declared *Kohanim*, the study found that a significant percentage of them shared several markers.

In a completely different case, a study conducted by Dr. Eugene Foster in 1998 addressed a longstanding controversy related to US President Thomas Jefferson and his slave Sally Hemings.[3] The study, which was based on a comparison of the Y chromosome from descendants of

[2] Karl Skorecki et al., "Y chromosomes of Jewish Priests," *Nature* 385 (2 January 1997): 32.

[3] Eugene A. Foster et al., "Jefferson Fathered Slave's Last Child," *Nature* 396 (25 November 1998): 27-28.

Jefferson's paternal uncle, Field Johnson, and Eston Hemings, showed the male descendant of Sally Hemings was a Jefferson because of the shared Y chromosome, but could not point to a specific Jefferson.

After reading these two studies, Bennett Greenspan, an avid genealogist, thought that this could resolve a long-standing question about two individuals, one in Argentina and another in California, whom he suspected were related but could not prove due to the lack of a paper trail.

He contacted Prof. Hammer in Arizona, who confirmed that the puzzle could be solved by testing the Y chromosome of the two male individuals. The proof of concept was performed and the results proved that the two descended from the same direct paternal line. Soon after, in April 2000, Family Tree DNA was born as the first company to offer direct-to-consumer DNA tests to verify relationships for genealogy purposes.[4]

The phylogenetic tree of humankind

Phylogenetics is the study of how genetics can be used to show how people are related. Simply put, just as we chart our family trees and establish relationships by looking at the branches of our tree, similarly, scientists were able to create a "tree of humankind" wherein the branches define the different routes of the migration out of Africa tens of thousands of years ago that lead to different parts of the world (Figure 1.2). There are phylogenetic trees for both the Y chromosome and the mtDNA.

Y chromosome and genetic genealogy

The Y chromosome traces the paternal line with no influence from spouses along that line. Because it follows only one line (Figure 1.3), instead of an ethnic breakdown, it provides an ancestral migration route of the genetic population of that paternal line. Each specific genetic population is referred to as a haplogroup, which can provide deep anthropological information about the story of mankind as well as help refine an individual's genealogical search. With a Y-DNA test one can see a visual representation of this journey (Figure 1.4).

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_Tree_DNA.

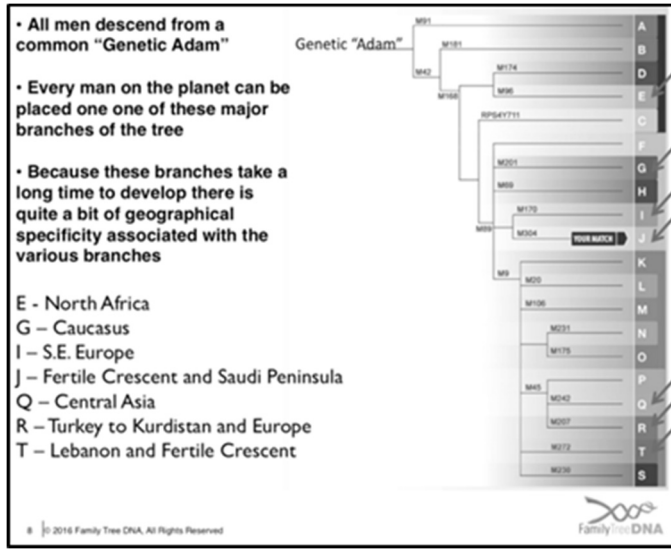

Figure 1.2. Y-Chromosome phylogenetic tree

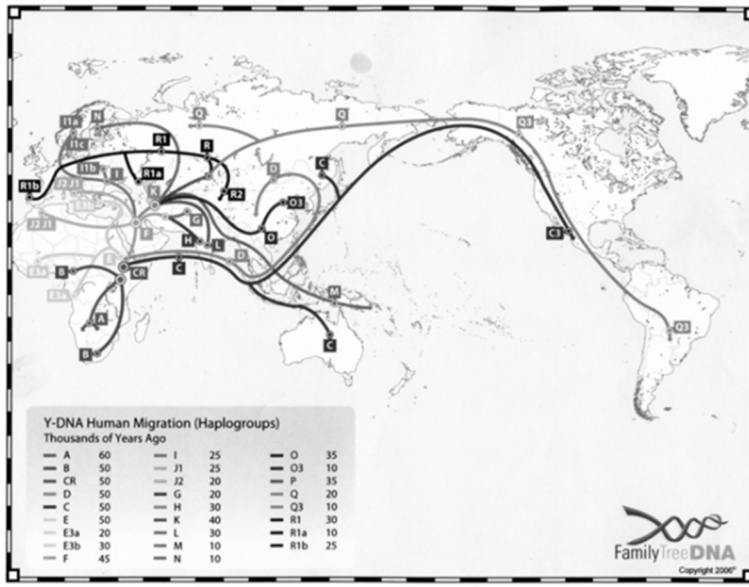

Figure 1.3. Y chromosome traces the paternal line

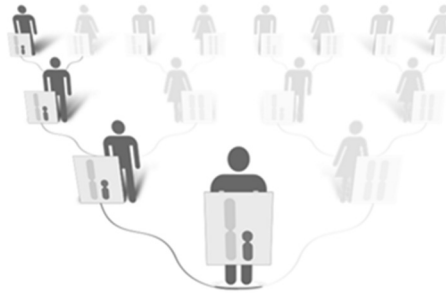

Figure 1.4. Ancestral migration routes of a genetic population

In addition to providing this deep ancestral migratory route, Y chromosome test results can be matched against other people who tested the same markers, in order to find those who share a common direct paternal (father, father's father, father's father's father, etc.) ancestor. By making this comparison, one can also find common geographical origins and common background—in our case, Ashkenazi or Sephardi background.

Mitochondrial DNA and genetic genealogy

Mitochondrial DNA traces the maternal line with no influence from spouses along the way. Because it follows only one line, instead of an ethnic breakdown, it provides the ancestral migration route of that maternal line (Figure 1.5). Similar to the Y chromosome, this migration route is called a haplogroup and can provide deep anthropological information about the story of the human race. While also following a lettering convention for the haplogroups, the Y chromosome and the mitochondrial DNA haplogroup letters represent different population groups (Figure1.6).

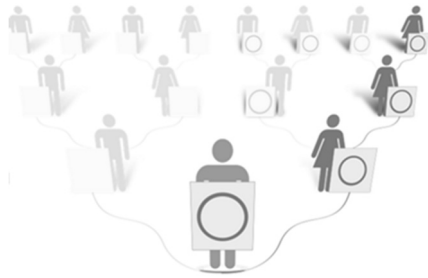

Figure 1.5. Mitochondrial DNA provides the ancestral migration route of the maternal line

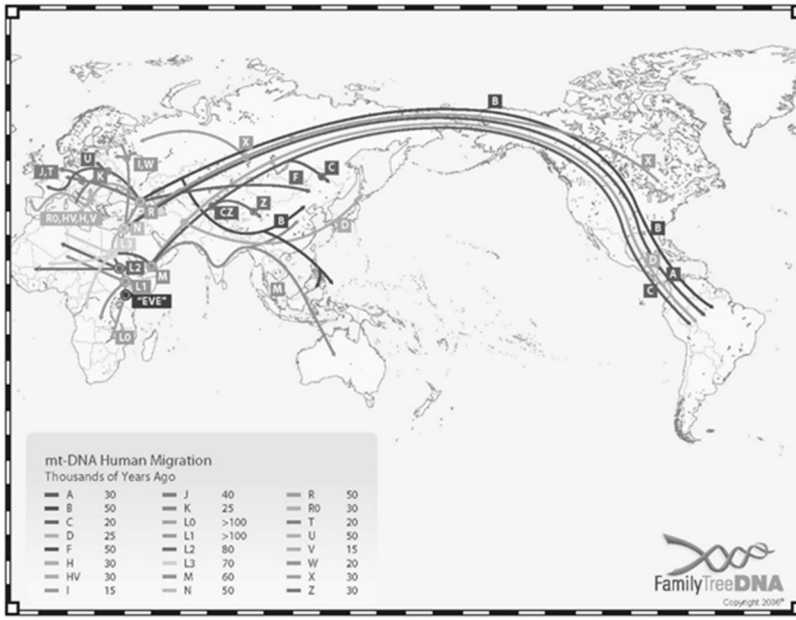

Figure 1.6. The Y chromosome and the mitochondrial DNA haplogroup letters represent different population groups

As in the case of the Y chromosome, in addition to providing this deep ancestral migratory route, mitochondrial DNA test results can be matched against other people who tested their mitochondria in order to find those who share a common direct maternal (mother, mother's mother, mother's mother's mother, etc.) ancestor. Here also, utilizing this comparison one

can also find common geographical origins and common background—in our case, Ashkenazi or Sephardi background.

AIMs—Ancestral Informative Markers and population clusters

AIMs are points in our DNA that, according to the mutations that they exhibit, allow determining and differentiating between different geographical regions. They can tell us the breakdown of our ancestral origins, as has been documented in various scientific papers. One such paper in 2011 examined 128 ancestral informative markers in 4,871 individuals in a global set of 119 population samples, including samples of distinct Jewish origins.[5]

Family Tree DNA enables individuals to obtain the breakdown of their ancestral origins through an autosomal test called Family Finder. A white paper was published with the methodology serving as a basis of Family Finder's myOrigins.[6]

The test result is plotted in a heat-map with the percentages of the different population clusters resulted from that autosomal test (Figure 1.7).

Figure 1.7. This map demonstrates that the person tested has significant Ashkenazi ancestry, but also some admixture from other Europeans

[5] Judith R. Kidd et al., "Analyses of a Set of 128 Ancestry Informative Single-nucleotide Polymorphisms in a Global Set of 119 Population Samples," *Investigative Genetics* (January 2011), https://doi.org/10.1186/2041-2223-2-1.
[6] https://www.familytreedna.com/learn/user-guide/family-finder-myftdna/myorigins-methodology/.

Who are the Jews on a genetic level?

There has been a plethora of scientific papers tackling the subject of population genetics and Jews. Almost all of them share a common element: Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews have relatively recent shared ancestral origins. We will briefly present the general findings of those studies relative to the three types of tests that a person can perform in order to discern a possible Jewish ancestry.

Y chromosome

A study published by Michael Hammer in 2000 demonstrated that the Y chromosome of Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews shares mutations commonly found in Middle Eastern people. In other words, he asserted common origins of Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews and traced them back to the Middle East.[7] Likewise, in other studies at Family Tree DNA, by sampling the large database of people that have tested and claim to have Jewish ancestry in their paternal line, we found that over 40% of the Ashkenazi, Sephardi and non-Jewish Middle Easterners tested share Haplogroup J—typical Middle Eastern, and that the three main Jewish haplogroups constitute over 70% of Jews, whether Ashkenazi or Sephardi (Figures 1.8, 1.9, 1.10).

[7] Michael F. Hammer et al., "Jewish and Middle Eastern non-Jewish Populations Share a Common Pool of Y-Chromosome Biallelic Haplotypes," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 97, no. 12: 6769-6774.

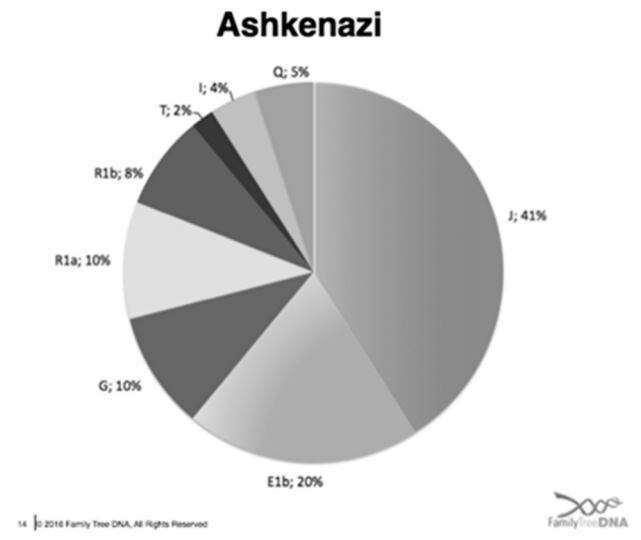

Figure 1.8. Haplogroup J among Ashkenazi Jews

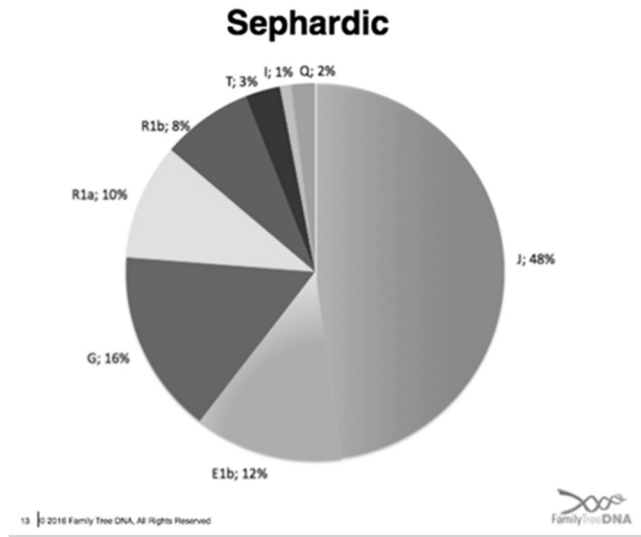

Figure 1.9. Haplogroup J among Sephardi Jews

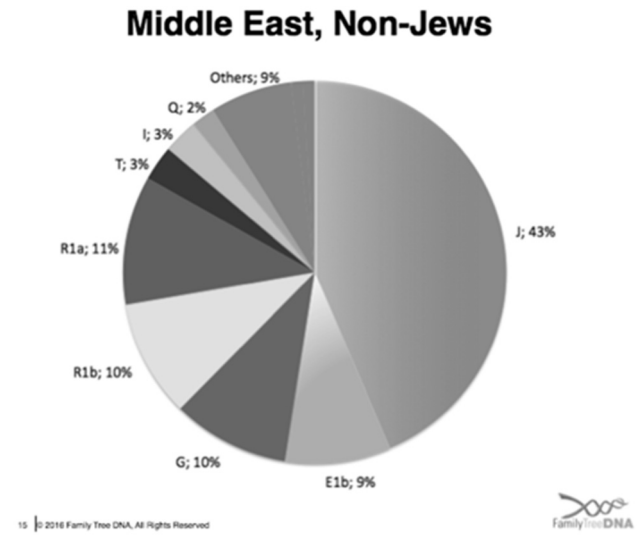

Figure 1.10. Haplogroup J among non-Jews in the Middle East

Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA)

The foremost researcher of Jewish mitochondrial DNA, Doron Behar, wrote several papers based on samples collected from various Jewish populations. In a groundbreaking paper from 2006, Behar found that:

> Close to one-half of Ashkenazi Jews, estimated at 8,000,000 people, can be traced back to only 4 women carrying distinct mtDNAs that are virtually absent in other populations, with the important exception of low frequencies among non-Ashkenazi Jews. We conclude that four founding mtDNAs, likely of Near Eastern ancestry, underwent major expansion(s) in Europe within the past millennium.[8]

In another paper published in 2008, also led by Behar, 1,142 samples from 14 different non-Ashkenazi Jewish communities were analyzed:

> Unlike the previously reported pattern observed among Ashkenazi Jews, the numerically major portion of the non-Ashkenazi Jews, currently

[8] Doron M. Behar et al., "The Matrilineal Ancestry of Ashkenazi Jewry: Portrait of a Recent Founder Event," *American Journal of Human Genetics* 78, no. 3 (April 2006): 487-97.

> estimated at 5 million people and comprised of the Moroccan, Iraqi, Iranian and Iberian Exile Jewish communities showed no evidence for a narrow founder effect, which did however characterize the smaller and more remote Belmonte, Indian and the two Caucasus communities. The Indian and Ethiopian Jewish sample sets suggested local female introgression, while mtDNAs in all other communities studied belong to a well-characterized West Eurasian pool of maternal lineages.… These findings highlight striking differences in the demographic history of the widespread Jewish Diaspora.[9]

Bnei Anousim mtDNA seems to reflect Middle Eastern origin alongside introgression of Iberian lineages. It is also important to note that they share with Ashkenazi Jews the four dominant lineages, albeit in much lower frequencies. This might attest to close relations between the communities, which, however, is not well documented in historical records.

While the mitochondria show no clear evidence of a predominant Middle Eastern founder effect in the wider Jewish population, the section below addressing autosomal DNA will show that many of the descendants of those lines will find traces of their Jewish and Middle Eastern ancestry in their recombinant DNA.

Autosomal DNA (atDNA)

Studies of the Ancestral Informative Markers (AIMs) contained in the autosomal DNA have shown that Jews can be clustered in Ashkenazi and Sephardi blocs the same way other populations can be broken down geographically. While there are several papers that address Ashkenazi Jews, there have been no scientific publications referring to Sephardi Jews, given that not enough data has been collected by the scientific community to support a study.

However, since Family Tree DNA began collecting autosomal DNA from Jews across Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, we have been able to identify Sephardi clusters among the populations of the Iberian Peninsula, Turkey, Southern Europe, and North Africa.

Additionally, by comparing the individuals who tested their atDNA at Family Tree DNA, we can clearly see that the clusters of Jews of Ashkenazi ancestry are very close to the clusters of Jews of Sephardi ancestry.

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[9] Doron M. Behar et al., "Counting the Founders: The Matrilineal Genetic Ancestry of the Jewish Diaspora," *PLoS ONE* 3, no. 4 (April 30, 2008), https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0002062.

Additionally, there was a high level of admixture between Jews who were forcefully converted during the Inquisition with the non-Jewish (Catholic) population. The subsequent admixture of their descendants within the non-Jewish community led to small blocks of matching DNA between Jews and Hispanics. This phenomenon of substantial admixture did not occur in Jews of Ashkenazi ancestry, which explains why an autosomal Ashkenazi cluster can be more easily defined than a Sephardi cluster.

Conclusion

Whether from papers published by researchers who collected samples from various populations, or from direct-to-consumer genetic testing that started in 2000 with millions of people having tested, it has become clear that our DNA contains mutations that tell us about our ancient and recent origins. Our DNA can uncover possible Jewish ancestry, whether Ashkenazi or Sephardi, the same way it tells one about Native American, Scandinavian, Eastern European, and many other ancestries around the world.

While Jews are connected by their faith, culture and traditions, it has been proven that Jews, like other peoples of the world, also have common DNA elements that have developed according to their geographical origins and migration paths.

Finally, for those interested in trying to find Sephardi ancestry in their DNA, all three tests can help in different ways: while the Y-DNA and the mtDNA can show Sephardi ancestry in the direct paternal and maternal line respectively, the Family Finder heat map will be able to show if there is any ancestry pointing to the Iberian Peninsula.

CHAPTER TWO

LATINO JEWISH DEMOGRAPHY: THE REAL AND THE VIRTUAL

SERGIO DELLAPERGOLA

Introduction

The renewed interest in Latino-Jewish demography is part of a broader identity debate that currently animates contemporary Jewish communities, especially in the Western hemisphere. The dilemmas of old and new Jewish identities in the Latino continental and transnational context pertain to a broader issue of search for existential meaning involving family roots, community relations and organizations, knowledge, values and symbols, beliefs and inspiration. Such renewed search for meaning can be viewed in the framework of a sort of mental, rather than physical, migration flow. In this case, the dimension of spatial mobility does not count as much as the dimension of moving, and making choices, through a world of alternative and competing cultural and religious contents and options, some of which are Jewish, and some of which are not.

In this broad scenario of intellectual and religious mobility, ideal points of origin contrast with ideal points of destination, and personal trajectories sometimes intersect. Old and submerged cultural and religious Jewish roots sometimes evolve into new manifestations of individual and collective identity, religious practice, and community building. In this process, many people reveal, discover, or re-discover ancient forms of Jewish identification and behavior, and seek recognition within an established Jewish institutional network. It is a sometimes excruciating process, running against many odds, in the course of which new forms of identification and new institutional frameworks may be created and developed. The process itself is not regulated by the individual actors alone, but occurs within the active context of several significant judges and gate-keepers that embody the contemporary Jewish institutional world. The latter is characterized by shared agreements and vested

interests, but also divisions and conflicting views that do not facilitate the spiritual journey of these new seekers of Judaism.

At the one end of this ideal transfer of personal and community allegiances often stand the pull factors of a keen quest for recovery or even first-time attainment of an ancient form of belonging with Judaism, a restored spiritual attachment, and a need for new forms of individual and collective bonds and interactions. At the other end of this transfer sometimes stand the push factors of disappointment and disenchantment with material conditions personally experienced and/or with ideal and institutional attachments currently available or known to the movers. Among the latter we may include dissatisfaction with the failure of Western society to create and redistribute economic welfare and improve social justice, as well as a crisis of values and moral standards among parts of the Church with whom these movers currently belong in parts of the world that are predominantly Catholic.

The observed and intriguing fact is that there is an unprecedented quest for conversion to Judaism, and/or revival of Jewish customs and community activism locally, and/or migration to Israel, involving thousands of persons. Many of these potential or aspiring neophytes claim veteran Jewish ancestry as putative descendants of Jews who converted under duress during the time of the Inquisition. Until one or two generations ago, very few were part of this current of connecting or reconnecting with Jewish identity or were even aware of its potential relevance to themselves. In this article we delineate some broad contours and implications of this emerging phenomenon—where the boundaries between the real and the virtual are not entirely clear cut.

Quantitative dimensions: Jewish population history and geography

The general framework of a picture of the recent phenomena of demographic and identificational change may be found in a short overview of Jewish population size and continental distribution over time. Figure 1 demonstrates how the main geographical distribution of Jews worldwide has dramatically changed during the last thousand years, beginning with the travel notes of Benjamin of Tudela in the twelfth century, and especially since the early eighteenth and through the beginning of the twenty-first centuries.[1] It shows several things in particular: the decline of

[1] Sergio DellaPergola, "Some Fundamentals of Jewish Demographic History," in *Papers in Jewish Demography 1997*, ed. Sergio DellaPergola and Judith Even

the early predominance of a Middle Eastern Jewish presence among a relatively small world Jewish population; the initial growth and subsequent stagnation of Western Europe out of a Jewish global configuration that lacked a real center; the rapid Jewish population expansion and the growth of Eastern European communities between 1800 and 1939; the rise of North American Jewry since the beginning of the twentieth century; and the emergence of Israel as the largest community during the more recent period, in particular since the beginning of the twenty-first century. The dominance of Ashkenazi over Oriental and Sephardi communities among the total Jewish population is a relatively recent phenomenon of the modern and contemporary eras. Indeed, in earlier times Jews had been predominantly concentrated in the Middle East, under Islam, and in Western Arab and Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking lands. Much of the latter was wiped out due to forced conversions to Christianity, as well as to mass emigration. Central, Caribbean, and South America initially offered partial refuge to Jews who had suffered expulsions and persecutions (see Figure 2.1).

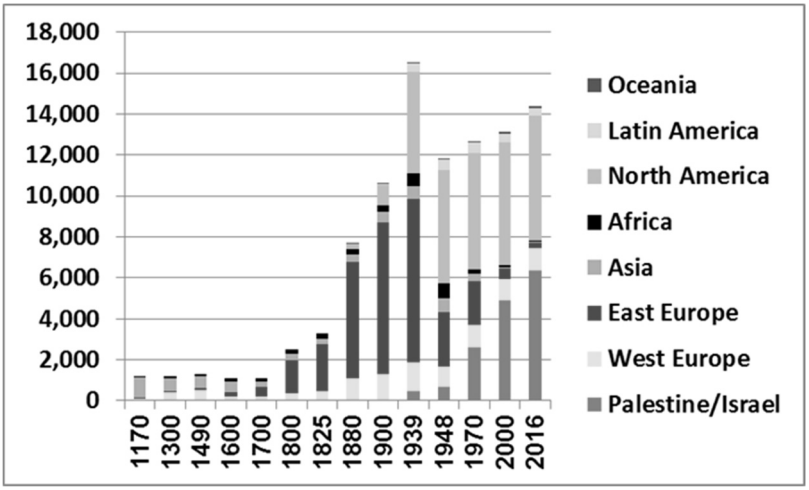

Figure 2.1. World Jewish population distribution by major regions, 1170-2015 (thousands). Source: DellaPergola (see note 1)

(Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 2001), 11-33; Sergio DellaPergola, "World Jewish Population 2016," in *American Jewish Year Book 2016*, ed. Arnold Dashefsky and Ira Sheskin (Dordrecht: Springer, 2017), 253-332.

Between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, Eastern Europe was the site of a massive Jewish demographic expansion. The reasons were mostly related to the interplay of relatively lower mortality and relatively high fertility. This early demographic transition often preceded similar expansive phenomena among the total population of the same countries. Large-scale migrations from Eastern Europe gradually brought about the rising prominence of the Jewish community in the US. The *Shoah* (conventionally translated into English as Holocaust) dramatically curtailed Jewish communities all over Europe, and to some extent also in North Africa and the Middle East. Partly due to the destructions elsewhere, partly because of their power of attraction of massive flows of international migration, eventually the great protagonists of Jewish population growth in the twentieth century became the United States and Israel. The Jewish world passed from an extremely dispersed geographical configuration to one much closer to a bi-polar distribution, with an additional pool of Jews highly dispersed among scores of smaller Jewish communities elsewhere.

In the long-term historical process, it should be stressed, large numbers of former Jews were lost through the attrition of forced conversions and spontaneous assimilation, as well as physical persecution and mass killing. In this context, events in the Iberian Peninsula bore very significant consequences for the later unfolding of Jewish population globally.

One important finding in today's assessment of the size and location of Jewish populations globally is the growing correspondence between the density of Jewish presence and the degree of development and quality of life in a given country or location. The Jewish population today has become highly bi-polar between Israel and the US in its geographical configuration. In the process, areas that had been central in the past lost demographic primacy, as in the case of the Middle East and North Africa, Western and especially Eastern Europe, and also Latin America. This is also true of the major directives of institutional and cultural internal hegemony. However, the influence of the submerged areas of Jewish identification on the main current centers of Jewish presence cannot be neglected.

Who is a Jew in the contemporary context?

Defining Jewish populations in the contemporary context has become progressively complicated as a consequence of the increasing frequency of religious and ethnic intermarriage involving Jewish partners. The pristine definition of “Who is a Jew” as “a person born of a Jewish mother or

converted to Judaism" still represents the legal foundation upon which many Jewish communities worldwide as well as Israel's 1950 Law of Return rely. In 1970, the Law of Return itself was expanded considerably to allow the right to immigrate to Israel to children and grandchildren of Jews and their spouses, regardless of their Jewish status. Moreover, the Law of Return does not specify what actually constitutes conversion to Judaism, thus giving ample ground for interpretation and debate that more than once has generated cases that were brought before Israel's Supreme Court.

These ancient and more recent provisions tended to create, at least in theoretical juridical doctrine, a dichotomy between "Jews" and "non-Jews." However, the actual nature of contemporary identities, reflecting frequent social, cultural, and marital interactions between people who originally pertained to different groups, is much more fluid, changeable, and porous. The consequence is that—beyond normative considerations and provisions that may have remained relatively unchanged—a more realistic view of contemporary Jewish populations can be portrayed by a model of concentric circles (see Figure 2).[2]

Today, the number of people for whom the subjective feeling of Jewish belonging does not match the Jewish legal definition is constantly increasing. Many people formally belonging to Judaism are now completely disconnected from any form of interest toward or participation in collective Jewish life. At the same time, a growing number of non-Jewish individuals who have various degrees of kinship and/or affinity with other Jews may be involved in the cultural and social life of Jewish communities, often marginally, sometimes intensely. A growing gap emerges, therefore, between (a) subjective feelings of a Jewish identification (no matter how specified), (b) categories of formal Jewish identification followed by traditionalist religious authorities according to matrilineal lineage, (c) decisions by the rabbis of Reform communities who accept patrilineal lineage as a criterion for Jewishness (Conservative Judaism does not, but has debated the matter), and finally (d) operational criteria adopted by researchers in their empirical fieldwork, whether demographers, sociologists, or students of other disciplines. In addition, various organizations operating within the Jewish community at large often adopt different criteria in defining their boundaries of action and strategies to reach their targeted constituencies.

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[2] Sergio DellaPergola, "Disciplinary, Normative and Institutional Aspects of Conversions to Judaism," in *New Ways of Joining the Jewish People,* ed. Tudor Parfitt and Netanel Fisher (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 204-223.