

The Huguenots and the Jews Entwined in the pathways of History

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Introduction

Throughout the centuries our Jewish ancestors has inadvertently crossed paths with another specific cultural and religious group, the Huguenots. The Huguenots were *French Protestants* who were members of the *Reformed Church*, which was established in 1550 by *John Calvin* Like the Jews, the past Huguenots suffered extreme prejudice and were persecuted because of their cultural and religious beliefs. They were forced to flee their native France, many settling and creating their own communities in countries across the world, including, Holland, England, America and South Africa. They had their own language, dialect, places of worship and general trades. Both Jews and Huguenots believe they are the direct decendants of the twelve tribes of ancient Israel. To anyone outside these cultures the appearance and customs of a Huguenot and a Jew would have seemed the same and because of indifference and prejudice the majority communities would probably had not made a any distinctions between the two groups. They wore similar attire, they spoke with a strange colloquial accent different from that of the native speaking populations of the host countries and shared the same first names and surnames such as Jacob, Salomon, Sasine, Sasiene, Saseen and Sass.

Our Jewish ancestors and the Huguenots would have lived and worked in the same neighbourhoods, although probably within their different communities.

But there is much speculation that during the last few hundred years many Jews because of religious persecution in Spain, Portugal and France did convert to Christianity or became Christians and remained Jews behind the scenes and that some Jews migrated to America during the mid seventeenth century in the guise as Huguenots rather than Jews.

The intriguing and interesting articles below describe how the historic pathways of our Jewish ancestors and the Huguenots have become intertwined. The similarities between the two groups are astounding and any Sasieni family member would have great difficulties in publishing an accurate account of family history lifestyles without the word Huguenot popping up in there somewhere.

Who were the Huguenots?

The Huguenots were *French Protestants* who were members of the *Reformed Church*, which was established in 1550 by *John Calvin*. The origin of the name Huguenot is uncertain, but dates from approximately 1550 when it was used in court cases against "heretics" (dissenters from the Roman Catholic Church). As nickname and even abusive name it's use was banned in the regulations of the Edict of Nantes, which *Henry IV* (Henry of Navarre, who himself earlier was a Huguenot) issued in 1598. The French Protestants themselves preferred to refer to themselves as "*réformees*" (reformers) rather than "Huguenots".

It was much later that the name "Huguenot" became an honorary one. A general edict, which encouraged the extermination of the Huguenots, was issued on January 29th, 1536 in France. On March 1st, 1562 some 1200 Huguenots were slain at *Vassy*, France. This ignited the Wars of Religion which would rip apart, devastate, and bankrupt France for the next three decades.

During the infamous *St Bartholomew Massacre* of the night of 23/24 August, 1572 more than 8 000 Huguenots, including Admiral Gaspard de Coligny Governor of Picardy and leader and spokesman of the Huguenots, were murdered in Paris. It happened during the wedding of Henry of Navarre, a Huguenot, to Marguerite de Valois (daughter of Catherine de Medici), when thousands of Huguenots converged on Paris for the wedding celebrations.

When the first rumours of the massacre reached the Vatican in Rome on 2 September 1572, pope Gregory XIII was jubilant and wanted bonfires to be lit in Rome. He was persuaded to wait for the official communication; the very morning of the day that he received the confirmed news, the pope held a consistory and announced that "*God had been pleased to be merciful*". Then with all the cardinals he repaired to the Church of St. Mark for the *Te Deum*, and prayed and ordered prayers that the Most Christian King might rid and purge his entire kingdom (of France) of the Huguenot plague.

On 8 September 1572 a procession of thanksgiving took place in Rome, and the pope, in a prayer after mass, thanked God for having "granted the Catholic people a glorious triumph over a perfidious race" (*gloriosam de perfidis gentibus populo catholico laetitiam tribuisti*).

Gregory XIII engaged Vasari to paint scenes in one of the Vatican apartments of the triumph of the Most Christian King over the Huguenots. He had a medal struck representing an exterminating angel smiting the Huguenots with his sword, the inscription reading: *Hugonottorium strages* (Huguenot conspirators). In France itself, the French magistracy ordered the admiral to be burned in effigy and prayers and processions of thanksgiving on each recurring 24th August, out of gratitude to God for the victory over the Huguenots.

The *Edict of Nantes* was signed by Henry IV on April 13th, 1598, which brought an end to the Wars of Religion.

Protestant churches and the houses of "obstinates" were burned and destroyed, and their bibles and hymn books burned. Emigration was declared illegal. Many Huguenots were burned at the stake.

At least 200 000 French Huguenots fled to countries such as Switzerland, Holland, Germany, England, America, and South Africa, where they could enjoy religious freedom. Between 1618 and 1725 between 5 000 and 7 000 Huguenots reached the shores of America. Those who came from the French speaking south of Belgium, an area known as *Wallonia*, are generally known as *Walloons* (as opposed to *Huguenots*) in the United States.

The organised large-scale emigration of Huguenots to the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa occurred during 1688 - 1689. However, even before this large-scale emigration individual Huguenots such as *François Villion* (1671) and the brothers *François* and *Guillaume du Toit* (1686) fled to the Cape of Good Hope. In 1692 a total of 201 French Huguenots had settled at the Cape of Good Hope. Most of them settled in an area now known as Franschoek ("French Corner"), some 70 km outside Cape Town, where many farms still bear their original French names.

A century later the promulgation of the Edict of Toleration on 28 November 1787 partially restored the civil and religious rights of the Huguenots in France.

Immigrants in Amsterdam

In 1550 Amsterdam had about 10 to 12 thousand inhabitants and merchants were starting to explore the world seas. In 1585 The Spanish troops under command of Alva conquered Antwerp and 19.000 Protestants -Baptists and Lutherans- escaped and went north. Amongst those were a lot of merchants and skilled craftsman and many of them settled in Amsterdam and gave the city an enormous economical impulse.

In 1598 a ship loaded with Portuguese Jews arrived in Amsterdam. At the end of the 15th century the Spanish Jews were persecuted and went to Portugal, but now Spain had annexed Portugal and they had the choice of being converted to Catholicism or end up being burned at the stake. Most of these Jews were wealthy merchants and they invested in the Amsterdam trading companies and founded synagogues, of which some still exist.

Not all Portuguese Jews were rich, but they were a lot better off than their East European fellow-believer. In the 17th century they were constantly persecuted and threatened by pogroms and the ones who had the chance, escaped to safer places like Amsterdam. They were penniless and it was hard for them to build a new existence. The Portuguese Jews took care of them, but soon the number of High German Jews exceeded the number of their Portuguese brothers. They too founded their own synagogues close to the ones of the Portuguese Jews. This neighbourhood is still known as the Jewish quarter although W.W.II made an end to the hegemony of the Jewish population.

The Jews have always had a huge influence on many aspects of Amsterdam, they made the city one of the most important diamond centres in the world, and they even added several typical words and expressions, which originated from Hebrew, to the Amsterdam dialect.

On 18th Oct. 1685 Louis XIV and cardinal Richelieu made an end to the relative freedom of the French Protestants, the so-called Huguenots, by the "Edict of Fontainebleau". This was the beginning of violence, the systematic destruction of Protestant properties and the for France disastrous exodus of 400.000 Huguenots. Many of them moved to Amsterdam and gave the city a new impulse. But the economy of Amsterdam was declining and many of them moved on, a small group went to South Africa; other groups went to America and had an important influence on the colonist's population.

But also smaller groups had put their marks on Dutch society, Armenians, which were Orthodox Christians, came to Amsterdam to practice their religion in peace. Russian, Greek and Italian merchants, who settled here, but also adventurers from Germany and Hungary, sailors from Norway and Ireland. Amsterdam was a melting pot of nationalities and cultures. At the end of the 18th century the population of 220.000 was 50% Reformed, 22% Catholic, 15% Lutheran and 10% Jewish.

Immigration of Huguenots to Spitalfields, East London, England.

The rapid development of Spitalfields into a populous district was the result of a large number of French Protestants settling there towards the end of the seventeenth century.

These French Protestants - known as Huguenots - had made their escape from their native land when Louis XIV issued in 1685 the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which for over eighty years at least had afforded to them some measure of protection from extreme persecution on account of their religion. This treatment of the Huguenots in the long run impoverished France by the loss of a skilled, diligent, and thrifty population that became scattered in Switzerland, Holland, and England. They brought with them the knowledge of many arts and industries, which was beneficial to the people that gave them an asylum. Settlements were made in various parts of England, and in them all kinds of handicrafts were established.

Of the number of Huguenots that came to Spitalfields in the East End of London, a large proportion were silk weavers, and among the remainder there were many who were engaged in the ordinary everyday trades vital for a community who spoke a foreign language unintelligible to the native shopkeepers. This coming of the Huguenots did not originate the silk weaving industry in the district: it was already existent in the neighbourhood when they came and doubtless it was because of this that the locality of their settlement was more or less determined.

During the course of the preceding hundred years or so a number of such refugees from Holland and France had reached British shores, and not a few of them, including weavers, resorted in the immediate eastern suburbs, for, on account of their foreign birth, they were ineligible to participate in the privileges of the City of London, though exceptions were made in certain cases to give to them this freedom to manufacture and to trade. Strype, the historian, who belonged to a family of weavers, and was of Dutch descent (though he was born off Petticoat Lane, in a court which was afterwards included in Spitalfields), informs us that many of these early refugees "planted themselves here (Hog Lane, otherwise Petticoat Lane) in that part of the lane nearest Spitalfields, to follow their trade, being generally broad weavers of silk, so that the lane soon became a contiguous row of buildings." This shows the direction taken by the inflowing population. The district lying outside the City boundary offered particular advantages for those engaged in silk manufacture as it was close to the most important place of sale, and because it was favourably situated to meet the demands of the ever-changing fashions.

The once Huguenot Church later became a Synagogue. Upon a wall on the south side of the Huguenot Church in Fournier Street there was seen a large sundial with the inscription "Umbra sumus" (We are shadows) which, with its universal application, so appropriately refers to the strangers who came and passed this way and who have faded almost from remembrance.

SEARCHING FOR CRYPTO-JEWS IN FRANCE: FROM SPANISH JEWS TO FRENCH HUGUENOTS

There is increasing interest concerning where the overt (unconcealed) Jews and crypto (secret)-Jews of Spain and Portugal settled after being exiled by the Inquisition. Morocco and other parts of North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, and **Holland** have been of major interest as Islamic or Protestant areas, which did not have a Catholic Inquisition. In these areas, exiles generally practiced their Judaism openly. Portugal, and later, Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the Americas have been of major concern as places where the Inquisition was imposed, leading to crypto-Jews secretly practicing Judaism. But, little attention has been given to France, the only country besides Portugal (and Morocco, a short distance by water) that borders Spain.

France, because of its proximity to Spain, was a natural point of escape for Jews fleeing across the border. This was only slightly less likely for Jews fleeing Portugal. Jews had been officially excluded from France since 1394, and the border was officially closed to Jews, but a trip through the Pyrenees was a route taken by some exiles. A geographical imperative "well nigh forced" the New Christians of Spain and Portugal "to take the road to France" even if only as a way station for other places. Because of the persecution of conversos in Barcelona (Catalonia) in 1488 and in the Balearic Islands in 1489, "Flights to foreign countries--particularly to the southern provinces of France--began to assume panic proportions". In addition to the geographical proximity, before the expulsion of Jews from France in 1394 there had been a close relation between the Jewish communities of Spain and France, with Spain providing many of the leaders for the French Jewish communities.

France was a Catholic country, and not only expelled its Jews in 1394, but also expelled the Jews from Provence in 1481 when Provence was formally united with France. But, France also had Catholicism different from that in Spain, basically independent and relatively without an Inquisition. Hence, the situation for Jews was different from the situation in Spain. Although Jews had been expelled from France in the twelfth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, "in Bordeaux as elsewhere in southern France, an indeterminate scattering of conversos remained behind. And after 1481, the Sephardic remnant was quietly enlarged by an uninterrupted infusion of New Christians from Spain and Portugal. Virtually all of them were judaizers--marranos".

Meanwhile, although most of Provence's Jews departed in 1481, "a tiny comminution underwent baptism and remained on. Nevertheless, throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, augmented by periodic rivulets of Sephardic fugitives, the little enclave of Provencal conversos began to regain something of its former demographic vitality".

France did continue to have restrictions against Ashkenazic Jews, mostly in eastern France close to Germany, even while it allowed the settlement of Portuguese Jews in Bordeaux in 1483, mainly for economic reasons. Bayonne and surrounding towns, only fifty miles from the Spanish border, also developed Sephardic communities. "Like the marrano community of Bordeaux, this trans-Pyrenean cluster of settlements became a major focus of crypto-Judaism in southern France". Although there were ups and downs, "crypto-Judaism could be maintained with relative impunity" because no Inquisition court existed in France. As exile continued, numerous other communities developed along the Atlantic coast and inland.

In 1550, France officially opened its borders, and conversos fleeing Spain and Portugal were officially allowed to live in France. As Beinart notes, "the proximity of the territorial border made it possible for conversos fleeing Spain and Portugal to maintain ties with their families who had remained there and to establish business connections supervised from France".

Despite some overtness, the "non-French, suspiciously non-Catholic" merchants Portugais did live a tense balancing act. Scarcely fifty years after recognition the "New Christians" who had been in Bordeaux for less than ten years were asked to leave, and settled mostly in Peyrehorade, Bidache, and Bayonne. In 1615, Louis XIII published an edict demanding that all Jews, disguised or not, leave France in one month, but the Parliament of Bordeaux prevented the expulsion from taking place. In 1656, Louis XIV issued an edict, which in effect confined the "New Christians" to the Bordeaux, Bayonne, and surrounding areas. The nouveaux Chretiens "continued throughout this time to live within the frame of Catholicism. They were baptized, married, and buried according to the Catholic tradition and made no apparent attempts to reveal a Jewish heritage. They were repeating the history of the Marranos of Spain".

Slowly, however, the crypto-Jews of southwestern France began to be referred to as Jews, and the king and his advisers "gave clear evidence that the future of these newly designated Jews was uncertain". By 1700, Louis XIV no longer believed in "their Catholic camouflage" and began to treat the merchants Portugais as Jews. If viewed as Jews, they would have no status, and would have "to pay exorbitant taxes for rights the nouveaux Chretiens had always freely enjoyed". The worse was over, however, and gradually the nouveaux Chretiens returned to practicing Judaism, and disciplined those members of the community who strayed from the community. In addition to the ups and downs in the Bordeaux and Bayonne areas, there were problems for crypto-Jews in other parts of France. In 1632, for example, in Rouen, thirty-seven New Christians were arrested for their "Jewish ways," and an auto-de-fe was possible. They declared their fidelity to Catholicism, paid money, and were released.

While there were distinct Sephardic communities (especially Bordeaux), which eventually openly returned to Judaism, most of the Sephardic Jews in France "disappeared." One theory claims that they later showed up in **Holland**, and another theory claims that they merged into Catholicism in France. While it is clear that some of the family names did show up later in **Holland**, it is not clear that all members of these families moved to **Holland**. Even if one agrees that most Sephardim/crypto-Jews moved to **Holland**, the possibility remains that some members/descendants of the families remained in France. The fact that the community attempted to discipline "straying" members indicates that some individuals hesitated to return openly to the community. Recognizing individual differences, it also is unreasonable to believe that all exiles and their descendants were able to overcome the pressures of the ups and downs of Christian intimidation. The fact that crypto-Judaism lasted longer in France than in any other western European country of exile increases even more the possibility that over time some descendants would have been lost to the open practice of Judaism. If some of the Sephardic exiles in France did convert to or openly follow Christianity, would they have converted to or followed Catholicism or Protestantism?

The Sephardim who went to France, as either overt or secret Jews, found a religious situation very different from that in Spain and Portugal, particularly because of the rise of Protestantism in France. The rise of Protestantism (French Protestants were called Huguenots) in France was significant for Jews. Protestantism had several factors that would make it more attractive than Catholicism for secret Jews who wanted a Christian outward identity or for Sephardim actually accepting Christianity over a period of decades. First, Protestantism, like Judaism, had a mutual enemy in Catholicism because of the Inquisition's attack on both. The rise of Protestantism in Western Europe added to the insecurity of Catholicism, and was one factor leading to the Inquisition. In Spain, Huguenots also were persecuted. In 1565, for example, in Pamplona, the capital of Spanish Navarre, there was "an intensive round-up of active French Huguenots". While Pamplona was a major centre of repression of Protestants, other areas also were similar. In Toledo, for example, in 1565, a tribunal "made short work" of a group of accused individuals, some of whom were Protestants

Second, Protestantism, like Judaism, had a special appeal to merchants and to the financially well-off and well-educated segments of society. Third, and related to the second point, Protestantism had a special appeal in seaports and shipping areas of France, especially in the LaRoche area of western France, on the Bay of Biscay about two hundred miles from the Spanish border and about eighty miles from Bordeaux. The Sephardic and Huguenot areas of settlement overlapped to a noticeable extent. Fourth, at its height, before their most severe persecutions under Louis XIV, Huguenots comprised one-tenth of France's population. The largest numbers were in western and southern France, the areas closest to Spain.

Fifth, in removing many of the trappings of Catholicism (rituals, liturgy, saints, a church hierarchy, etc.), Protestantism returned to a more original Christianity, which was closer to Judaism. Customs such as naming of children also followed this pattern with Old Testament (Holy Scriptures) names, instead of New Testament Saint names, being used much more frequently by Huguenots than by Catholics. By the end of the 1500s, for example, in Rouen, of the ten most frequent Protestant male names, seven (numbers 4 through 10) were Old Testament names (Abraham, Isaac, Daniel, David, **Jacob**, **Salomon**, and Samuel). Among Catholics, there was only one "Old Testament" name (Abraham), and it was in tenth place. This pattern of Huguenot naming continued, although weakening with time, in the United States. As late as the 1700 period, for example, Ester and Judith remained among the nine most frequent female Huguenot names in Charleston, South Carolina, while Abraham, Daniel, Isaac, and **Jacob** were frequent male names. Even as late as 1790 in the United States, Huguenots, despite rapidly assimilating and generally following non-traditional Christianity, were more likely than most other Protestant groups to have Old Testament names. The exceptions were in the Puritan areas of New England, areas which were the most traditional in their following of Christianity. Among the sixteen most frequent Huguenot male names in 1790, seven (Benjamin, Samuel, **Jacob**, Daniel, Abraham, Isaac, David) were Old Testament names. There clearly is a connection between naming patterns and ethnic/religious identity.

As pressures periodically increased against the "New Christians" in France, it is difficult to believe that some did not overtly convert to Christianity. And, if they did, it is reasonable that some would have chosen Protestantism rather than Catholicism in the period when Protestantism was still strong. Huguenots also had a mixed treatment in France, some times being good and some times suffering much persecution because they were not Catholic. Thousands were killed, sent to prison, or had their children taken away. Louis XIV ended Huguenot rights in 1685, and gave the Huguenots a short period of time to convert to Catholicism or go into exile. About 160,000 Huguenots went into exile, and about 850,000 openly converted to Catholicism. Similar to crypto-Jews, some overtly practiced Catholicism but remained crypto-Protestants (Nouveaux Convertis). Paul Revere's family is believed to have been crypto-Protestants. There were times when it was safer to be a crypto-Jew overtly practicing Catholicism than to be a Huguenot, but in the earlier years (up to about 1572) it was safer to be a crypto-Jew overtly practicing Protestantism than to be an overt Jew.

Throughout Huguenot history, French Protestantism has had a special affinity for Jews. The Huguenots, especially in the Lanquedoc area of southern France, later (beginning about 1700) referred to themselves as living in "The Desert" which they likened to the Hebrews living in the Desert. The Huguenot shield had a burning bush in the middle, with God's name written in Hebrew. In the Nazi period French Protestants had an admirable record of defending Jewish

refugees.

Did crypto-Jews or former Sephardim come to the United States as part of the Huguenot migration (the decade after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 being the most active decade)? One prominent Huguenot family in the southern United States has maintained a traditional family belief (not accepted by all members of the family, of course) that they are descended from a prominent Sephardic family exiled during the Inquisition. Part of the reason is the similarity of their surname to that of this prominent Sephardic family of Spain. Research so far has found two members of this family who think there is some truth to the family folklore. Others, of course, are hesitant to believe in or acknowledge Jewish ancestry because of their strong and prominent membership in the Christian culture.

Other Huguenot family names also suggest a possible connection with Jewish origins. Mauze, for example, according to one source, comes from the small town of Mauze near LaRoche. This source, which spells the name as Mauze or Moze, says the name is believed to have been derived from the Arabic word "mauz" meaning plantain tree. Another source lists one spelling as Mose, which some researchers would say suggests a possible Jewish origin. Simons, DeSpain, and Pardieu (Pardo?) are other surname examples, which raise questions about possible Jewish or Spanish origins. Pardo usually is a Sephardic name. Simons (Simoes) is a fairly common Portuguese name, and could be either Old or New Christian, often referred to Francisco Gomes Simoes as an Old Christian, but Filgueira refers to Francisco Simoes Tinoco as a New Christian. Simao (Simon), common as a Jewish given name and surname, is also a Portuguese surname, although much less common than Simons. Simons is rare as either a Spanish and French surname, although Simon is fairly common in both languages. DeSpain means "from Spain." Of course, these names also could have non-Jewish origins, requiring detailed research to determine whether the origins are Jewish or non-Jewish.

In the United States, and more so in some specific areas such as Charleston, South Carolina, the Huguenots intermarried with prominent other Protestant families and became full members of the Christian (mostly Protestant) aristocracy. As in other areas of crypto-Judaic studies, research in this area is hindered because of reluctance of some descendants to acknowledge either overt or covert Jewish ancestry. In the 1920s, after becoming active with the crypto-Jewish community in Belmonte, Portugal, Lucien Wolfe helped organize a "Pro-Marrano" Committee in London, with branches in the United States and France. This was not continued, and more questions than answers remain on crypto-Jews in France and on French Huguenot descendants in the United States.

From a historical sociology perspective, however, the historical situations are too suggestive to overlook the possibility of a Spanish-French connection leading to crypto-Jews in France.

Conclusion

As interest increases in Jewish Genealogy & Jewish History in general, interest should also increase in specific areas in order to give a better understanding of the tremendous diversity within the Jewish community.