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SOCIETY FOR  
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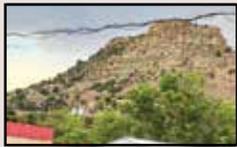
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### Identities and Experiences: Navigating the Crypto-Jewish Journey

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# Gypsy Crypto- Jews

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**DR. DOUGLAS SCHAR**  
BA, DIPPHYT, MCPP, PHD

There was a time when the term crypto-Jew referred to Iberian Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity in the 15th century and maintained some degree of Jewish identity in Spain or in the Colonies. However, this is just one branch of the crypto-Jewish family tree.

Largely driven by testing by Ancestry DNA (and others), more and more communities are coming out as crypto-Jews. I have recently been working on a project that involves another overlooked group and a branch of my own family tree: crypto-Jewish gypsies.

## The Anglo-Romani Crypto-Jews

Two years ago, Reverend Dean Shaw, a pastor from the north of England and member of the Anglo-Romani community contacted me. His ancestry test confirmed he was 13% Indian. In theory, Romani are northern Indians who migrated to western Europe in the 15th century. So this he expected, but his 7% Ashkenazi-Jewish ancestry was a surprise.



*Anglo-Romani Couple  
Christopher Smith and Patience Lovell*

As far as he knew, he was 100% Anglo-Romani. His parents were Anglo-Romani. All four of his grandparents were Anglo-Romani. Indeed, his parents were cousins. His family tree reveals 400 years of documented Anglo-Romani ancestry — a family tree that is literally a who's who of famous Anglo-Romani families; the Lees,

the Boswells, the Smiths, the Herons (Young), the Buckleys, the Winters, and the Hearns. No Jews in sight!

To get to the bottom of this mysterious ancestry, seven other members of the Winter-Shaw family took an Ancestry DNA test. The result was the same. Reverend Shaw's mother, his father, his maternal uncle, his maternal cousin, his maternal cousin's wife who was a distant cousin, his paternal cousin and his sister's son, all had Ashkenazi-Jewish ancestry.

The question became, where did this Anglo-Romani family get their Jewish ancestry? There were no Jewish ancestors in the memory of the immediate or extended family or in the 400-year-old family tree.

To make matters even more mysterious, the Anglo-Romani do not really know what was home before England. Family trees, state and church records indicate they "appeared" in England in the 16th century with no country of origin listed.

Perhaps because as Jew or gypsy, they would not have been welcome when they



arrived. Jews were expelled from England in 1290 and were not permitted to enter England again until 1656. It was illegal to be a Jew in England for 266 years. Henry VIII's ministers passed the Egyptian Act of 1530 which prohibited Romani to live in England. Henry's daughter, Mary I, passed the Egyptian Act of 1554, also prohibiting Romani from residing there.

The first member of this Anglo-Romani family to appear in the written record was John Faa in 1520. Faia is a Sephardic Jewish name. When this family "appeared" in England, and ever after, 30% of their first names were Spanish. David and Esther appear repeatedly. The family's arrival in England lines up with the Spanish Jewish Expulsion of 1492 and the subsequent persecution of *conversos*. Thus, they could have come from Jewish Spain.

One important fact about England that should be remembered: Though Jews and gypsies were banned, England never had an Inquisition.

As happens with crypto-Jews, Jewish habits or customs can survive long beyond the people's knowledge of their Jewish ancestry, and this appears to be the case with this Anglo-Romani family. In the first instance, they have rules which are kept with the same intensity that the Orthodox Jew maintains the law. And some of the rules are Jewish rules. This includes hygiene and food preparation. Modesty — amongst men and women — is mandated. Menstruation makes women untouchable. Like Jewish women, gypsy women are off limits for 40 days after the birth of a child. In addition, more than half of these families long-used given names were and are Hebrew names (Ahaliah, Asher, Ital, Jabez, Kessiah, Lemuel, Moti, Norit, Rabbi, Sinit, Tamar, Zillah, etc.)

For much of Anglo-Romani history, this family had a home-based spiritual life, but not a religious life. According to Reverend Shaw, they were not church people. With one exception. They did something called "churching." Anglo-Romani lived a nomadic life, but when a child was born, wherever that was, the infant would be taken to the local chapel and "churched" or baptized. That might be his or her only appearance in a church. This may well date back to the Inquisition where it was important to maintain the appearance of Christianity.

## DNA Does Not Lie

While history and genealogy do not offer much information about this Anglo-Romani family's Jewish past, modern science does.

As the noted genetic genealogist Dr. Donald Yates always says, "DNA does not lie." When Reverend Shaw contacted me, he was in receipt of a commercial DNA test revealing he had Ashkenazi-Jewish ancestry.



*Route of the Cochin Jews from Kekala, India to London, England*

Hoping to gain insight into their Jewish past, all eight family members' raw DNA files were uploaded onto the GedMatch.com platform. This platform gives you the opportunity to compare DNA samples to more specific populations, i.e., Georgian Jews, Uzbeki Jews, Moroccan Jews, etc. This in turn, gives you a more precise ancestry report. The more sophisticated calculators revealed Reverend Shaw had inherited 58% Jewish ancestry not the originally revealed 7%.



*A Yemenite Jewish Bride*

## Breaking News

The commercial testing companies indicated all eight family members inherited Indian ancestry. The more sophisticated DNA testing tools revealed their Indian ancestry was Jewish Indian ancestry, Cochin Jewish, *Benei Menashe*, and *B'nai Israel*.

In addition, the family carried Central Asian Jewish ancestry (Uzbeki Jewish), Caucasian Jewish ancestry (Georgian Jewish, Azerbaijani Jewish, and Armenian Jewish), Western Asian Jewish ancestry (Iraqi Jewish and Iranian Jewish), Italian Jewish ancestry (Italim), Moroccan Jewish ancestry, Sephardic Jewish ancestry, and Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry. They are a crypto-Jewish family, but one of many different Jewish ethnicities.

## More Evidence

Check and double check are what my science training taught me. I thought it would be good to have confirmation of this Anglo-Romani family's Jewish ancestry from other testing companies: DNA Consultants and FamilyTree DNA.

DNA Consultants is a genetic genealogy company that conducts ancestry testing in an entirely different way from other companies. They do forensic genetic genealogy testing connecting clients with real people who live or once lived. They check for four known Jewish DNA markers. Reverend Shaw was shown to carry all four of these markers.

The next step was to test Reverend Shaw with FamilyTree DNA. The result was the same: he had Jewish ancestry including Ashkenazi, Mizrahi and Yemenite. The Yemenite ancestry was astonishing.

Earlier results revealed Reverend Shaw carried Jewish Indian ancestry. The Indian Jewish story starts when Israelites began moving to Yemen in the 1st century BC. There they formed the very ancient Yemenite Jewish community. Between the 2nd and 4th centuries, Yemenite Jews made their way to the Kerala coast of India. Once there, the various Indian Jewish communities came into existence. Reverend Shaw inherited genes from a Yemenite-merchant Jew, who braved the Indian ocean and set up a new life in India 2,000 years ago!

## The Longest Trek

This family's trek from Jewish villages in Kerala, India to England was 11,174 miles. It happened over the course of many lifetimes, long before railways and cars existed. This was a trek made by way of horse, camel and donkey.

The family's DNA suggests that they followed the Silk Road and along the way, married Jews from the places they passed through including Central Asian (Uzbeki Jewish), the Caucasus (Azerbaijani Jews, Armenian Jews, Georgian Jews), Western Asia (Iranian Jews and Iraqi Jews), Africa (Libyan Jews, Algerian Jews, Moroccan Jews), and Europe (Romaniote Jews, Italim Jews, Ashkenazi Jews, Sephardic Jews).

And then somewhere around the 16th century, this multi-ethnic Jewish family made their way to England. Between 1500 and present day, their Jewish past was forgotten and was traded in for an Anglo-Romani identity.

## Relatives in Spain

Further research revealed this Anglo-Romani family had many close DNA matches to the Spanish gypsy community. Despite being



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**O**r. Douglas Schar is a full time genetic genealogist. He founded the Institute of Jewish Genetic Genealogy in Washington, DC. His family tree includes crypto-Jewish gypsies. Doug received his undergraduate degree in Jewish history. He then earned a medical diploma and a PhD in medical botany. Upon retiring from medicine, he returned to his first love, Jewish history. He now works full-time researching the crypto-Judaic identity and currently focuses on the crypto-Jews of Northern Europe. His next project involves the crypto-Jews who lived illegally in England, 1502-1626. Doug publishes his research on his website, [www.HiddenJewishAncestry.com](http://www.HiddenJewishAncestry.com).

separated by a body of water for at least 500 years, the Anglo-Romani family and Spanish gypsies still appeared as cousins.

The study of crypto-Jews is always filled with unexpected twists and turns. One of the English family's close DNA relatives was Lisardo Cano Montes. I contacted Señor Cano and was in for a big surprise. Not only did he know his Spanish gypsy family was really a Jewish family, but he had been doing research on the subject for 45 years. He is the pre-eminent scholar in the Jewish origins of Spanish gypsies and he has written four books on the subject. He maintains an extensive archive of historical, genetic and cultural records and books on the Jewish origins of the Spanish gypsy community! Following a DNA match brought me into contact with the world's foremost expert in the Jewish origins of the Spanish gypsies.

## Lisardo Cano Montes: The Man Who Solved the Mystery

Señor Cano Montes was raised in a Spanish gypsy family. As stated, gypsy life is highly regulated by a series of rules. Much



*Lisardo Cano*



like Orthodox Jewish families, people adhere to the rules or face banishment. Señor Cano was raised strictly adhering to the gypsy rules. He knew them well.

Early in his life he was inspired to read the Bible and the Torah and began reading both with great intensity. In the 1980s, he realized that the rules that governed gypsy life could be found in the Torah. He began thinking that his Spanish gypsy family might really be a Spanish Jewish family. This persistent thought led to a lifetime of searching Spanish gypsy history and culture for proof of their Jewish origins.

From 1981 to the present, Mr. Cano has been researching and publishing his findings in books – 16 of them! These include *The Gypsies' Jewish Origin* (1981), *Gypsies, Lost Tribes of Israel* (2016), *Dictionary of Hebrew Words in Calo-Romani* (2021), *The DNA of Gypsies is Israelite* (2021), and many more.

When Ancestry DNA became accessible to the public, Señor Cano Montes began searching for genetic evidence connecting Spanish Gypsies and Jews. He focused on the study of male and female chromosomes (haplogroups). His research revealed that Spanish gypsy men shared the same male haplogroups as Jewish men: J1, j2, E, and G. His research revealed that 18% of Spanish gypsies shared a common female haplogroup (M5a1) with the Jews of Cochin. Even more astonishing, 31% of Spanish gypsies inherited the female haplogroup U3, which has been found in ancient remains in the Judean hills.

After much discussion, Lisardo Cano Montes, and I launched the Spanish Gypsy Israelite Research Project. We started by DNA testing 10 Spanish gypsies. The result? All participants were a minimum 75% Jewish in ancestry which included Indian Jewish (Cochin, *Benei Menashe*, *B'nai Israel*), Uzbeki, Georgian, Azerbaijani, Iraqi, Iranian, Italian, Moroccan and Algerian, Sephardic, and Ashkenazi Jewish.)

The research was such a success we decided to do more DNA testing and add genealogy.

We have now DNA tested over 75 Spanish gypsies from 14 provinces including Alicante, Almeria, Asturias, Badajoz, Burgos, Caceres, Cadiz, Cataluna, Cordoba, Huesca, Malaga, Sevilla, Toledo, and Valladolid. All have been shown to be primarily of Jewish descent. Genetic archeology reveals they have ancient Canaanite ancestry, and ancestors buried in both the Erfurt, Germany Jewish cemetery (11th-13th century) and Norwich, England Jewish cemetery (11th-13th century).

A careful analysis of common Spanish gypsy surnames reveals they can all be found in Genie Milgrom's Sephardic Database as Sephardic surnames. We are currently tracing four Spanish gypsy families with Sephardic surnames back to people tried in

the Inquisition. It is possible they are halachically Jewish (Jewish in accordance with Torah-law) as well as genetically Jewish!

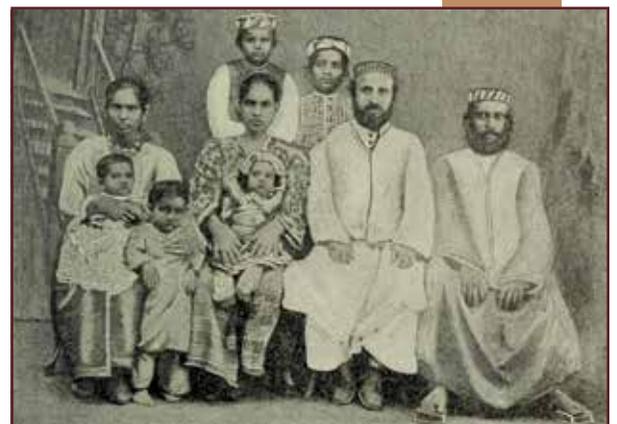
We expect to finish and publish the project in 2025. Stay tuned as we publish more of our findings on this new group of crypto-Jews in *HaLapid!* 🌐



Yemenite Jews



Yemenite Jews travel to Kochi, India



Indian Jews