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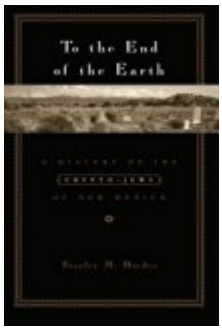

Stanley M. Hordes. *To the End of the Earth: A History of the Crypto-Jews of New Mexico.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. 376 pp. $24.50, paper, ISBN 978-0-231-12937-4.

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New Mexico's history as a frontier, representing during different epochs the outer reaches of Spanish, Mexican, and American political and cultural influence, has left a strong imprint on religion in the state. The variety that characterizes religious life in New Mexico today is a legacy of disparate traditions, native and European, that met and mingled during its frontier eras. The region's religion also bears the marks of people attracted to New Mexico ***because*** it was a frontier. Geographic remoteness and the separation from political and ecclesiastic authority have always held a special appeal for persecuted religious communities. Historian Stanley M. Hordes offers an account of one such community--the crypto-Jews--in his book *To the End of the Earth.*

Hordes's book is a historical contribution to a debate over the provenance of present-day practices, family stories, and genetic traits asserted among some twenty-first-century Hispano New Mexicans, and labeled collectively by scholars as "crypto-Jewish." Since the 1980s, scholarly debate has raged over whether these characteristics indicate a Jewish heritage, descended from Sephardic *conversos* (forced converts to Catholicism) expelled from Inquisition-era Spain. Hordes supports the assertion that the Sephardic tradition survived in New Mexico, and his book aims to demonstrate its endurance: "It is a logical--indeed, compelling--endeavor to ascertain the existence and nature of a crypto-Jewish presence in New Mexico over ... the past four centuries" (p. 9). The history Hordes assembles to this end is generally persuasive. *To the End of the Earth* offers a well-researched and clearly presented case for the continuation of concealed Jewish traditions over time, and for their eventual relocation to New Mexico.

Hordes's story begins on the Iberian Peninsula where, in the shadow of the Reconquista, Spain's Jews were coerced into adopting Roman Catholicism. The conversions that resulted, however, neither ended the practice of Judaism among the population nor allayed the suspicion of civil and church authorities toward these New Christians. When the Holy Office of the Inquisi-

tion convened in Spain in the late fifteenth century, tens of thousands of alleged ***judaizantes*** faced penance, punishment, and eventual expulsion from the kingdom. Within decades, conversos fleeing to neighboring Portugal found similarly dire conditions. In this climate, some New Christian families relocated farther afield. Conversos, like the wealthy merchant Simón Váez Sevilla, recognized in New Spain the opportunities of a young mercantile economy, well removed from the intolerance of the peninsula. Hordes traces the movement of these conversos through the seventeenth century, and he offers strong evidence of their collectively maintained--if publicly concealed--Jewish identity. Crypto-Judaism in New Spain was lived through close-knit patronage and commercial networks; ethnocentric residential and marriage practices; and wide adherence to religious rituals, including Sabbath observances and male circumcision.

Despite New Spain's "atmosphere of relative toleration," the Inquisition eventually arrived in that corner of Christendom as well (p. 33). By 1642, even the powerful Vaéz Sevilla found himself arrested as a judaizante and imprisoned seven years before being expelled back to Spain. Hordes argues that the Inquisition's escalation in the New World, and the threat of punishment it brought with it, prompted many Spanish crypto-Jews to remove yet again--traveling north this time with the expanding frontier. He identifies converso descendents in the vanguard of Spanish ventures to present-day New Mexico. Many members of Juan de Oñate's 1598 expedition, for example, came from Jewish families. Having established a lineage, Hordes then turns his attention to demonstrating a coherent crypto-Jewish identity among New Mexico's early settlers. Here, he offers strong circumstantial evidence, such as ties to active crypto-Jewish communities in Spain or Mexico City and endogamous marriage patterns, punctuated by more revealing moments, again drawn from Inquisition records. Hordes recalls, for example, the words of a Santa Fe girl, who in 1656 told her confessor that "she observed the Law of Moses with exquisite rites and ceremonies" (p. 142). He offers, too, the provocative if less-conclusive story of a former governor and his wife, arrested on allegations of observing Friday cleansing rituals in anticipation of the Sabbath. In this instance, the couple was eventually cleared of judaizante activities--a reminder to readers of the disputability of even the most "revealing" Inquisition documents. Nevertheless, the totality of evidence Hordes provides is compelling; considered as a whole, it indicates a distinct, crypto-Jewish community in seventeenth-century New Mexico.

In the book's final chapters, Hordes extends his narrative of crypto-Jewish survival from the Spanish period to the present. In the absence of Inquisition records for this later period, he does his best to assemble a history from the scarce sources he has at hand. He traces bloodlines extensively; identifies "characteristically Jewish occupations"; and points to the use of Jewish biblical names, like Abraham and Benjamin, in nineteenth-century New Mexico (p. 192). That said, here he lacks the details of religious behavior and self-recognition that make his portrait of crypto-Judaism in earlier eras so compelling. Hordes does make a convincing case for the survival of Jewish families over this long period, and even for the scattered remnants of Judaic tradition. The reader is left less sure, however, of the fate of a coherent crypto-Judaism. While additional evidence (should it ever surface) might prove revealing in this regard, something further is needed to fully understand this period--a clarification of the definition of "crypto-Judaism" itself. What characteristics are essential to crypto-Judaism and necessary for its survival? Hordes's work demonstrates genealogical survival definitively. His research shows that some twenty-first-century New Mexicans do have Sephardic ancestry. He leaves some questions about ***cultural*** survival, however, partially unanswered. To what extent--and for how long--did Catholic ancestors of the

Sephardim continue to participate in a meaningful Jewish religious world? And, on a related note, how are we to make sense of the less-than-coherent legacy of Judaism in New Mexico today?

Hordes's own evidence suggests complicated answers to these questions. He points out, for example, that by the early twentieth century crypto-Jews were converting to Protestantism, some with apparent enthusiasm. Today, most New Mexicans who engage in "Jewish" practices do so as loyal Catholics or Protestants, with no awareness of the origins of their actions. Facts like these test the applicability of the category of "crypto-Jew"--or at least point to the drastic change in its meaning over time. For descendents of crypto-Jews, as for many frontier people, religious identity changed, morphed, and hybridized. The gradual movement of conversos and their descendents out of a coherent Jewish world, and their halting entry into a Christian one, suggests that the category of "crypto-Jew" (with all its secretive, intentional resonance) might not accurately describe later generations of converso families. Genealogical continuity is only one step in understanding the dynamic cultural history of people descended from Sephardic Jews. That said, by both assembling the genealogical legacy of Judaism in New Mexico, and supplementing it with rich insight into the everyday practices of crypto-Jewish communities in New Spain, Hordes has made a remarkable contribution to the study of these people.