

## Belmonte: Listening to the Whisper and Uncovering the Footsteps!

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This presentation explores a lesser-known branch of the Sephardic Jewish experience: the *Anusim*—those who were forced to abandon their faith during the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions, yet preserved it in secret across generations. My interest in this topic emerged during a period of personal exploration and research, which led me to uncover the remarkable, and often overlooked, story of these hidden Jews.

The lecture begins by defining key historical terms such as *New Christians*, *Anusim*, and *Crypto-Jews*, while acknowledging the problematic nature of the term *Marrano*, which I avoid using throughout. A brief historical overview of late 15th-century Spain and Portugal provides context for understanding the emergence of this phenomenon and its long-lasting impact on Sephardic Jewish identity.

The presentation then considers the criteria used by inquisitors to identify suspected *Anusim*, whose defiance of forced conversion often placed them at risk of torture or death. Drawing from both historical sources and personal experience, I share insights from my journey to Belmonte, Portugal—where descendants of Crypto-Jews maintained their faith in secret for over four centuries, until their rediscovery in 1917 by Samuel Schwartz.

This presentation concludes with reflections on the resilience of hidden Jewish identity and the enduring legacy of the *Anusim*, offering an invitation for further inquiry into this important, yet often marginalized, chapter of Sephardic history.



(Picture<sup>©</sup> taken by the author of the article, in Belmonte)

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