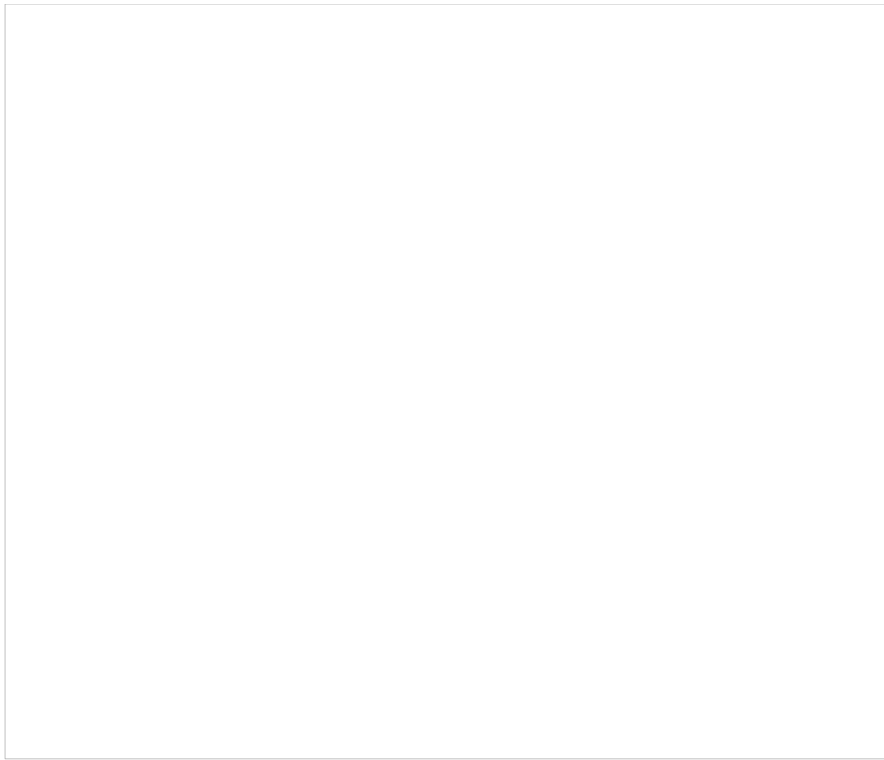




# Anusim, from the Iberian Peninsula to Sicily and Calabria 2012-08-12

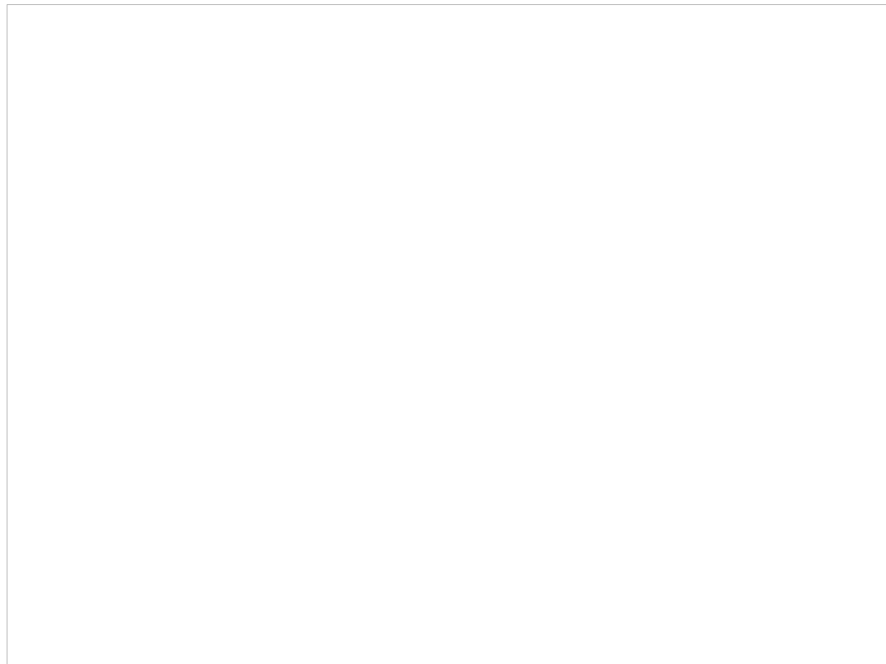
## Very interesting article written by Yael Amato

**Anusim, "forced ones"** is the correct term which describes a group of Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula during the 1492 Inquisition. The issue was particularly important for many of them because they were not only forced to convert to Christianity, but moreover forced to abandon their Jewish Nation status. The greatest damage would have been how to keep Judaism without being any longer part of the Jewish Nation. We recognize true Anusim from this particular detail, and for their efforts to keep traditions even in the Diaspora. Some of the Anusim had the inner knowledge to believe that *auto da fe'* would not stop, their father's wise heritage had printed in their minds that prosecutions would not come to an end therefore a secure way to live as a Jew, was actually to remain Anusim, and only through strong faith they had continued to believe time will come to reopen the door again to free them to a safe Jewish life. Coming from the Iberia Peninsula, both from Spain and from Portugal, these Jews mostly arrived in Sicily being Conversos. They moved to Calabria as soon as the prosecution obliged them to leave the Sicilian Island while a smaller group of them moved up to Naples areas, and mixed with Jews who immigrated from the north side. They had abandoned all their belongings and homes and brought with them only their safety and life, which by Halacha' is the most important thing: *"save one life and save the world"*; a Jew who saves his life continues the generation therefore saves the world. Anusim knew how to save their generations. The traditions to do that are mainly of two kinds, however, each group has its own ways to keep these traditions. It is important to make a clear distinction within Jewish Anusim traditions and Marranos' who, in Italy were the Jews coming from north immigrations, mainly from Portugal. They lived a crypto-jewish life within Secret Societies, therefore easily moved away to Oriental Countries where large Jewish Communities had been established.



A number of Marranos remained mostly in Livorno, Ancona, Ferrara whereas in Puglia Marranos had close opportunities to emigrate to Greece, and Turkey, therefore a small number of them remained in that area, in fact most of the Synagogues are Medieval, and not from Sefardi Spanish period. A typical example of how Anusim Jews transmitted the traditions is clearly demonstrated into their way of living. When they lived in a complete Anusim Community, they normally imported entire Villages with their Spanish Sefardi traditions. "*San Salvatore, St. Andrea*" for examples were names of Anusim Villages, as well as "*Serre*" which in Spanish means forrests or woods. But also the term *Toro* often hid the real meaning of *Torah*, in fact the two villages in question in the Naples' area present in the nearest area of "*Santa Maria del Toro*" typical Conversos Jewish traditions dedicated to the Saint, where the Saint in this case indicated the Torah itself. The villages maintain also observance traditions with the hanging in the right side of the front doors small pictures of "*Maria del Toro*" as such as a *Mesuzah* on the three quarter of the door's side. St Lucia the light Saint celebration, comes around the 13-16<sup>th</sup> December, and the Community celebrates a tradition with the eternal light with pure oil called "*Luce Eterna*", and at the same time have the tradition to distribute doughnuts boiled in olive oil with laurel leaves. During that week it is custom to light candles at the windows. In February there is a tradition to plant trees for each first born, and a Festival in January "*Pacchianelle*" which recalls many of the Spaniard traditions: with typical Spanish costumes over 200 hundred people come walking down the mountains with all Kosher foods and all belongings and domestic animals. Often they call themselves *Spagnoli* which is the modern version of Spaniards-Sefarad. They maintain this tradition for over 100 years as well as the Converso tradition to celebrate "*Processione del Venerdì Santo*", like the well known in Seiano di Vico Equense which is held every three years, with "*Incappucciati*"-Inquisitors, a

Community Event with over 350 people recalling the day when Inquisition looked for the Conversos Jews in Spain and took them to death. They still have pomegranate trees *melograni*, in their gardens and the Villages maintained the structure of *Spanish Boroughs* with the Temple in the highest part of the Borough or in the Central Square. Conversos traditions are rarely known or acknowledged, as they meant to be known only within the Anusim group. The Anousim of *Moiano di Vico Equense* still maintain a *rudimental Tefillin tradition* wearing before saying their prayers, use few *Ladino terms* and way of saying, keep Jewish names and surnames, such as Giuditta, Palma, or Marisa, Marianna and AnnaMaria, which were the Converso substitute for Miriam, or for man Giuseppe, Vittorio, Beniamino, have *typical mourning traditions*, in some cases slaughter animals within *kosher sochet traditions* and *intermarry* between villages' families. Kasherut tradition is the same as used by the Anusim Families in the Calabrian Serre "*Serre-Calabresi*".



They use fish, olives, and olive oil, and clean vegetables with lemon or vinegar "*netillat*", to prepare artichokes, aubergines or other vegetables like lettuce and so on, or look into rice, lentils one by one, to see if there are any impurities, or use eggs which have been carefully checked to see if they contained any seed therefore thrown away. They taught women to be very careful of cleanliness and purity, and had tradition to boil cloths and all washings before taking them to the river to clean, or clean everything in the river. The presence of surnames as Coen or Longobardi Ferraro, Cuomo in the area demonstrates well enough that a mixture of Marrano Jews from the north mixed with these Anousim of the Sorrento Peninsula. Often the villages had the same names or typical Sefardi or Conversos indication as in Spain, that permitted them to identify even after many generations, the provenience, therefore to be able to identify if they had the same costumes as the Sefardim  
| who came from that same place in Spain. This

because surnames were not always a secure way to guarantee identification. Another typical Anusim tradition was to give children's Jewish names from mother and father's sides, where often these names like Jiole, Carmelita, Andreana or Teresa, were typical Spaniards Jewish names of the Conversos which made it possible to identify if they came from Spain already as converted Jews. Many of these still keep Shabat candle lighting traditions, both as crypto-jews, like the ones in Serra Stretta, and Serra San Bruno, or as simple candle tradition in Naples' Old Jewish Quarter, where woman would keep the use as an *unconscious sign of faith* in some cases also called "*superstizioni*" These traditions wanted that they mainly took the father's heritage, both as costumes and as Jewish observances.

Although education came both from mother and father's lineage, the prevalence of father's tradition indicated the strong educational system which determined the group's Jewish identity. This was intended to make sure not only that traditions could be maintained, but particularly that the ones coming from the most observant families would be kept within the group. This was an important way of identification: according to the names and surnames and traditions, they could identify to which group they came from. The cases when Anusim mixed with the Marrano traditions like happened in many of the groups in Napoli areas, meant that Marranos were integrated into the Anusim Community, easily able to find husbands and wives within the group, still maintaining the typical Marrano tradition which was to keep the *matrilinear* Jewish heritage. Marranos women in fact often married even non Jews particularly in Italy, by knowing that women from wealthy families could still generate other Jews who could contribute to their Secret Society. This second tradition if not controlled brought further and further to assimilation, because particularly in the South Secret Societies did not exist any longer since most of the Marranos had emigrated and did not remain in the country unless they had strong desire to slowly assimilate and give up the chance of a possible return. The Anusim system therefore in South Italy seemed the only working system to maintain the Jewish identity and many times the stronger tradition could recuperate Marranos by identifying them as Jews and including them into their eradicated Jewish traditions. This explains the reason why Anousim and Marranos in the Naples area remained a close group knit, at the same time it also explains why there is no Marranos' traditions within the Calabrian Anousim. These Calabrian Jews remained the exact group of families who came from Sicily. *Calabrian "Serre"* and some of the *Sorrento's Peninsula* villages, store this precious heritage. There is no like it in other areas in the Country. The Jewish traditions are very similar within these groups, and it is certain that most of these families are the same families who in the past shared the same path and from generations continue to be observant Anousim Jews.

Source: <http://diariojudio.com/bin/forojudio.cgi?ID=8841&q=28>