

Converging Histories: The Cherokee and Israel

by Jonathan Rex

While the myth of Christopher Columbus as good man has been thoroughly debunked by modern scholars there is no question whatsoever that he was a great man; great men are not always good nor are good men always great. What isn't commonly known, however, is that he was also a Jewish man. When Cristóbal Colón of Pontevedra set sail from the Spanish port of Palos in 1492 another fleet was leaving the same day. That fleet consisted of Sephardic Jewish families who were expelled from Spain. Columbus had actually been scheduled to depart the day prior but postponed the venture until August 3rd because August 2nd was Tisha B'Av. Rather than being funded by Queen Isabella of Spain, as is commonly assumed, it was two Jewish Conversos along with a prominent Jewish rabbi and statesmen who financed his expedition across in the Atlantic, purportedly in search of a direct route to Asia.

Louis de Santangel, Gabriel Sanchez, and Don Isaac Abarbanel were the primary sponsors of Christopher Columbus' initial expedition and he used a new type of astrolabe along with sixty-five ephemerides (astronomical tables) from *Ha-ḥibbur ha-gadol* ("The Great Book"), written by Abraham Zacuto and completed in 1478. Zacuto was a Sephardic kabbalist rabbi, historian, mathematician, and Royal Astronomer to King John II of Portugal. Columbus did write as a Christian and suggested a Christian motive for his mission in his official letters, yet his private letters make use of the Ladino dialect in Spanish, analogous to Yiddish when compared to German. Those letters of his contain a monogram in the top-left corner, written from right to left, and meaning "b'ezrat Hashem". This monogram, of course, was never used on his letters to non-Jews. If that were not evidence enough of his Jewish identity the letters to his sons and his Last Will and Testament also contain a subtle triangular form of dots and letters resembling inscriptions found on gravestones in Jewish cemeteries in Spain. He even brought with him a Hebrew interpreter named Luis de Torres for the purpose of helping him identify the Lost Tribes of Israel whom he expected to encounter in the uncharted lands to the west. Columbus was accompanied by the African Niño Brothers who were known among the Moors for their explorations of the Atlantic Ocean and their discovery of western islands called Antilia, an Iberian legend since the Muslim conquest of Hispania. Muslims called the Antilles archipelago "Jezirat al-Tennyn" (Isle of Dragons) because it led to another world (North America) ruled by Plumed Serpents (Dragons).

The notion that Columbus' crossing marked a "discovery" of the Americas is a historical revision; his journey merely coincided with the covert activities of men such as Leonardo da Vinci, Niccolò Machiavelli and Amerigo Vespucci who collaborated to bring about a Democratic-Republic free of monarchies. The Nordic people had crossed the north Atlantic five-hundred years before Columbus set sail and they called North America "Vinland" while the Celtic people were crossing from Ireland at least seven-hundred years prior to that during the 4th century. Ancient Egyptian tombs from over 3,300 years before present have been unearthed containing Coptic jars with cocaine and tobacco residue in them, probably acquired from trade with the Olmec Civilization in Guatemala through Phoenicians, and when Plato wrote about the legendary island of Atlantis across the western ocean he quoted the Athenian statesmen Solon who had previously described it as being the size of Anatolia on top of Ancient Libya (north Africa). Tales told to Solon by the Egyptians of the people from Atlantis claimed that they were a powerful civilization 9,000 years before his time who had crossed the Atlantic and attacked the entire Mediterranean repeatedly before they suddenly stopped returning. It was assumed their island continent sank beneath the waters, yet modern scientists have recently discovered that the Hiawatha meteor struck northern Greenland at that precise period.

The impact of the Hiawatha Meteor was so powerful that it rolled back the ice sheets, altered the flow of the Teays River in what is now the United States, and produced the Ohio River. The wild horses native to North America went extinct along with the mammoths, mastodons, giant flat nosed bears, saber-toothed tigers, and giant ground sloths while the large dire wolves were replaced by modern grey wolves. Swamp lands became dense woodlands and Native hunters shifted away from large spears for bigger game to the use of atlatls, bows, blowguns, and traps. Any great ancient civilization that may have existed would have been wiped out entirely around 12,500 B.P. and reduced to scattered isolated villages of

survivors, set back thousands of years technologically. Paleo-Humans of various races (and possibly species) have been moving into and out of the Americas for more than 100,000 years. What made Columbus great wasn't that he "discovered" the Americas since hundreds of millions of other people from various racial backgrounds already inhabited the lands; it was that he made the rest of the world collectively conscious of the existence of the Americas and initiated the modern-era of globalization – setting the stage for the fulfillment of an ancient Jewish prophecy of the future Messianic Age.

When Columbus returned to Spain after his first voyage Luis de Torres, his Hebrew interpreter, remained at La Navidad. Later that year upon his second expedition Columbus reported back to Spain that the entire garrison was wiped out by the local Indians through warfare during his absence (while possible, this was likely a subterfuge designed to excuse the collective disappearance of the Sephardic community who had accompanied him in search of a new homeland). In his book *Sails of Hope*, Simon Wiesenthal proposes that Christopher Columbus' mission across the Atlantic was to find new lands for the dispersed Jews around the world to reunite and begin the work of regaining Jerusalem to rebuild Israel as a nation. Whatever the case may be in determining Columbus' subjective motives it is a fact that the first explorers from Europe to arrive with him in the lands were Sephardic Jews and Muslim Moors, not European Christians. Many of the so-called Christians who followed him across the Atlantic were, like him, Sephardic Jewish Conversos. Measuring the extent of Jewish exploration and resettlement activities, largely missing from historical records - undocumented during that period – requires extensive research and a great deal of cross-disciplinary collaboration between scholars of various ethnicities and languages. Through reverse linear research it is possible, however, to infer where some of those early Jewish explorers and settlers ended up in North America.

In our modern Information Age it is very easy for us today to forget that in the past, not too long ago, the news could only travel as fast as the human beings who carried it. Thanks to the technological innovations of extraordinary men and women now information travels faster than we can and each of us with a smartphone carries in our pocket direct access to a world of knowledge that wasn't stored in our greatest libraries only twenty years ago. It has only been since the year 2000 that the Human Genome Project began. Genealogists can now use DNA databases to fill in family trees and correct faulty assumptions about biological gender, ethnicity, and racial backgrounds. Thanks to websites such as Wikipedia anybody who wishes to learn about niche events and the people involved can with a few keystrokes. Despite Wikipedia's flaws and limitations no published encyclopedia collections would have been able to touch on such a wide range of information and soon apps like Google Earth will allow us to simulate geographic settings and immerse ourselves in them remotely through virtual reality glasses via the Metaverse so that for the first time ever the map actually becomes an extension of the terrain. Our ancient ancestors were limited entirely to an oracular tradition for hundreds of thousands of years until the written word was established and alphabets or syllabaries were created. Until public schools were founded to facilitate the Classical Liberal development of a Democratic-Republic only a privileged elite could read and write. Literacy rates rose, the demand for books manifested, and the technologies developed to mass produce literature and the written word dethroned the spoken word. However, we find ourselves in the Soaring Twenties coming full circle back to a convergence of the spoken and written word with the digital revolution and our newfound capacity for sending and receiving live audio and video feeds to millions who are simultaneously tuned in permits new perspectives and approaches to learning which were never before possible.

This movement forward won't stop or even slow down. A common lower-middle class citizen of any Western nation today lives more comfortably than the greatest Kings and Queens of Europe from the 19th century who had neither indoor plumbing nor running water, no electricity or central air. Even those of us who can remember learning to write on typewriters, listening to music on cassettes and vinyls, calling our friends and family in other places over land-line telephones, and buying only what we could find in physical stores have been caught up in the flow of change to such an extent, adapting to each new advance as it occurred, that it is very easy for us to take this extraordinarily rapid progress for granted and underappreciate our own evolution as individual human beings. When Menasheh ben Yossef ben Yisrael published *Mikveh Israel* (The Hope of Israel) in 1652 and became the first Jewish scholar to suggest some

American Indians were from the Lost Tribes of Israel there was roughly 120 years of post-contact mixing between the Pre-Cherokee Anikituwa (People of Keturah) and the Sephardim whom the Anikituwa referred to as the Aniyvwiya (People of YHWH). His ignorance on the matter was universal; it was a limitation of the time that even the most brilliant men and women couldn't circumnavigate for the next three-hundred years. How could he have possibly known the truth? Who then could have perceived that the Charaqqia began as descendants of Abraham's third wife Keturah reconnecting and mixing with descendants of Abraham's first wife Sarah thousands of years later?

Menasheh was a 17th century Sephardic kabbalist rabbi, author, diplomat, printer and publisher who founded the first Hebrew printing press in Amsterdam. As a friend to the Dutch artist Rembrandt and a mentor to the pantheist philosopher Baruch Spinoza, Menasheh met Antonio de Montezinos in 1640 after his return trip from the New World. Montezinos, a Sephardic Jewish explorer from Portugal, persuaded Menasheh that he had found the missing diaspora among the American Indians. According to Menasheh a man named Alexis Vanegas had previously claimed that the inhabitants of the Americas were descendants of the ancient Carthaginians, an offshoot of the Phoenicians who were known as the greatest merchant-sailors of the open sea during ancient times. Vanegas reportedly claimed that the Carthaginians initially inhabited New-Spain (Mexico and Guatemala) after sailing west across the Atlantic until increasing in numbers. Once numerous and powerful in New-Spain they then expanded to the south into Peru, northeast into the islands, and north into what is now the eastern half of the United States. This, of course, matches what many North American Indian oral stories convey about a great trading network forming in the south roughly 3,300 years ago and then growing outward to include the Inca, Maya, Aztecs, Toltecs, and Mississippian mound-pyramid builders. Where Venegas seems to have made his mistake is that it wasn't the hundreds of millions of American Indians who descended from these ancient Phoenician catalysts that caused a socio-religious paradigm shift in the Americas; it was merely the elite classes among the various tribes, confederacies, and empires which took form. Local indigenous tribes who lived simple foraging lives and knew nothing of great architectural feats, astronomical charts, agricultural terraforming, hydroponics, and lacked written languages of any form entirely told their conquistador and Jesuit inquisitors that their great abandoned cities were constructed by a taller, red-clay-colored people with reddish brown hair who wore beards in the form of goatees and traveled under the protection of "Jaguar Warriors" (most likely Senegalese men from West Africa). Such people can be found only in one part of the world – the Iberian Peninsula and Mediterranean Sea. Every Hebrew linguist knows that the word Adamah refers to the original red-clay colored man from which the Hebrew people (and their various Semitic cousins) claimed an origin in and according to the ancient Sumerians the Annunaki created human beings by mixing clay with their own blood (thus the red-clay man).

Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón was born in 1480 to a Sephardic father named Juan Vázquez de Ayllón in Toledo, Spain. Ayllón is a small medieval village 90 miles north of Madrid. According to the scholar Meir Benayahu of Jerusalem who wrote in the journal *Sefunot*, the entire Sephardic community in the village of Ayllón was expelled in 1492, as Jews were throughout Spain, and the Jewish community took up the name de Ayllón when they left. Although Lucas' father Juan was in Toledo twelve years prior at the birth of his son Lucas, there is little doubt that they were from that Sephardic community later expelled. Lucas received an excellent education in law and his father's position as a councilman and judge gave him substantial insight into the politics of that era. In 1502 Lucas accompanied Nicolás de Ovando, a knight from the Order of Alcántara, on his first trip from Spain to Hispaniola (an island in the Caribbean archipelago) where Christopher Columbus first landed on December 6, 1492. At the age of twenty-two he was made Alcalde Mayor (regional magistrate) over Concepción (La Vega) in the Dominican Republic. In 1520 Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón commissioned another Sephardic man, Francisco Gordillo, to make an expedition to the mainland North American continent and insisted that he cultivate friendly relations with the locals so that future trade and potential Sephardic colonies could be established among them.

Francisco Gordillo sailed north from what is now the Dominican Republic to the Bahamas, joined up with his pilot Alonzo Fernandez Sotil's cousin Pedro de Quejo, a Sephardic Arawak Indian slave catcher, and the expedition made landfall along the Pee Dee River in what is now South Carolina. Curious natives,

clothed only at the waist in buckskins due to the summer heat (it was June in the southeast), gathered along the beach and curiously observed the strange men. As the men approached the shore the majority of them fled back to the cover of the forest but two who were braver than the rest remained and attempted to communicate with Gordillo and Quejo. They were taken aboard a ship, dressed in Spanish clothing, and returned to their people who gathered back on the beach fascinated with the transformation of their fellow tribesmen. The Catawba invited the strangers back to their town, the chief ordered fifty of his people to bring food for them, and then the men were given a tour of the Catawba lands. Seventy of the Catawba Indians were invited aboard the ships and Quejo convinced Gordillo to seize and bind their guests and set sail for the Dominican Republic.

When Gordillo and Quejo arrived in the Dominican Republic with the Catawba Indians and told Ayllón what they had done he was outraged and condemned them both for their treachery toward the Catawba who had received them so graciously as hosts. Ayllón took the matter to Diego Columbus and the commission that he headed. Diego Columbus, working to repair his family name which was severely damaged by his father's self-serving obsession with gold and insane abuse of the Taino Indians, ordered the Catawba set free and returned home. One of the Catawba was exceptionally intelligent, however, and quickly became fluent in Spanish. He asked to be baptized and was renamed Francisco de Chicora. Convincing Ayllón to employ him, Chicora engaged Ayllón for hours on end in deep philosophical subjects of faith, brazenly challenging the Christian cosmological narrative, pointing out the inconsistencies and contradictions and humorously mocking certain behaviors of the Jesuits which amused the Sephardic man. As a masterful storyteller Chicora would debate through elaborately woven folk tales, fables, myths, and parables and so impressed Ayllón that he decided to take Chicora to Spain and present him before the royal court. Viewing Chicora as a sort of sacred-clown or jester, Ayllón anticipated correctly that he would be immensely popular back in Spain. Introduced to the Italian historian Peter Martyr in Madrid, Chicora became the first Native American to tell his story to Europeans in written form through *The Testimony of Francisco de Chicora*.

When asked about his king while in Spain, Chicora called the ruler Datha of the Duhare. He said that Datha was a light-skinned man with long hair like the sun (reddish-brown or golden-yellow), from a race of giants, whose entire body was covered in tattoos made from a brightly colored dye that made him stand out from all others who were also heavily tattooed. Some scholars such as Carl Rafn in his book *Antiquitates Americanae* have proposed that this race of "giants" were actually descendants of Norsemen who had crossed the Atlantic five-hundred years earlier with a mix of Celtic and Slavic allies and settled in the lands with their offspring becoming a ruling class among some of the Iroquoian speaking Mississippians. Another possibility is that they were descended from 7th century Visigoth Christians who fled Europe during the Muslim conquest of Hispania. Theodor de Bry, a Dutch Protestant, produced numerous illustrations depicting the light-skinned and light-haired giants encountered by French explorers Jean Ribault and Rene Goulaine de Laudonnière in the Carolinas (homelands of Francisco de Chicora). In 1904 a French historian, Eugène Beauvois, wrote *La Grande-Irlande ou Pays des Blancs Précolombiens du Nouveau-Monde* (***Great Ireland or the Pre-Columbian White Nation in the New World***). While Chicora's testimony has been deemed too fantastical to be factual it is necessary to point out the fact that Chicora spoke an Iroquoian language and the name Datha is not an Iroquoian name. It is, in fact, an Irish adjective meaning "painted" and was used to refer to the ancient Picts of Scotland who had full body tattoos and painted themselves from head to toe just as Chicora described among the Duhare. Duhare, of course, is Du H'áire – a Gaelic word for the ancient Celtic people who originated between the Black Sea and Caspian Sea and spread out west across northern and Western Europe along with the Slavic, Germanic, and Nordic people.

In 1526 Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón financed and led an expedition with 700 settlers and Francisco de Chicora as their guide and translator. Spending his own fortune on the venture Ayllón and the others made landfall in the Winyah Bay. While the men, women, children and slaves established their settlement and unloaded their livestock Chicora abandoned Ayllón, returned to his people, and disappeared from the historical record. The Catawba removed from the region and left the settlement with nobody to trade with. Due to a lack of amicable neighbors and inadequate soil Ayllón relocated the settlement to the Sapelo

River in modern day Georgia where they established San Miguel de Gualdape. Less than a month later Ayllón died, the slaves fled during an attack on the colony by the Timucua Indians, and the surviving colonists broke off into warring factions. Of the initial 700 settlers only 150 made their way back to what is now the Dominican Republic that winter. The rest either died or defected and joined surrounding indigenous tribes.

The first map depicting the region of the Cherokee lands was produced in 1529 by Diego Ribero (a variation of the Sephardic name Ribeiro). On that map the east coast of North America is mainly outlined with the rivers that the Sephardic explorers had named and claimed for the Spanish crown. An example of Diego's Sephardic surname would be Dr. Samuel Nunez, born in Portugal as Diogo Ribeiro in 1668. Called "Marranos" (Pigs) by Christians and "Crypto-Jews" by modern historians, they were among the elite nobility who appeared to be Christians in the public eye but maintained their Jewish identity privately in secret out of necessity. It was thirty-six years after Chicora rejoined his people that the first ancient Cherokee town was shown on a map. Diego Gutiérrez, also a Sephardic cartographer from the highly respected *Casa de la Contratación* collaborated with the engraver Hieronymus Cock of Antwerp and produced a beautifully illustrated and highly detailed map of the Western Hemisphere in 1562. On that map, at the location of the present Qualla Boundary (Eastern Band Cherokee Indian Reservation in North Carolina) a town named Canagadi is depicted while many others are missing, suggesting Sephardic Jews first settled there. To a non-Cherokee or even a Cherokee unfamiliar with the extremely endangered Tsalagi language, this might not seem to be evidence. However, those who are fluent in the Tsalagi language are well aware that Canagadi or Kanagadi (sometimes pronounced Ganagadi in a dialect variant) refers to a healer, medicine-man, doctor or physician. With the "v" being a guttural "uh" sound kanvgalvdi is to massage or purify, kanadi is a medicine bag, kanvnawa is a medicine pipe, kanvwodi is to heal, kanega is to speak, kanetsv is a word, and kanohelvsgi is a story. A Nvwodi Kanohelvsgi is a "Medicine Story" or spiritual myth, similar to the parables told by Gautama Buddha of India or Yeshua ben Mariam (called Jesus Christ in the Christian Gospels). Canagadi (as spelled on the map) was likely the religious capital of the proto-Cherokee Anikituwa (People of Kituwa) during the pre-colonial Theocratic-Mississippian Era and the Kaduhvi Kituwagadi (Kituwa Capital-City Seat) of the High Priest or Owl King, referred to by all Kituwa as the Ukuweyuhi or Ugvweyuhi.

A common misunderstanding by the vast majority of Americans (and others from around the world) is the historically absurd notion that there were no civilizations in the United States when Hernando de Soto entered from Florida with a Spanish army, raping and murdering his way through the lands before being killed by the Wenatchi (Natchez) and Tsikasha (Chickasaw) on the Mississippi River. Most assume that there were only small scattered villages and towns full of half-naked primitive men and women. Nothing could be further from the truth. The people that the first Sephardic men and women were encountering along the coastal regions lived on the periphery of the enormous Mississippian Civilization whose members constructed tens-of-thousands of mound-pyramid cities from the Mississippi River east to the Appalachian Mountains along various connected rivers and their tributaries. Cahokia in Illinois, for example, had a population of around 20,000 in 1200 C.E. according to conservative archeological estimates – larger than most European cities at the time. Spread out over six square miles and containing over 120 mound-pyramids it rivaled any of the countless cities throughout Mexico, Guatemala and Peru. A city of near equal size was erected near Natchez, Mississippi, and the remnant of the Emerald Mound there remains a popular tourist site. Throughout the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries thousands of Sephardic Jewish settlers mixed with tens of thousands of local American Indians in the southern Appalachians who were also mixing with escaped North and West African slaves from the Tuareg and Senegalese. How did the Anikituwa (People of Kituwa), an ancient warrior tribe claiming ancestry back to the first Beloved Red Woman named Kituwa (Keturah), the third wife of Equahami (Abraham), end up in North America before Columbus set sail from Spain? How did the Anikituwa evolve into the Aniyvwiya'kituwa (People of YHWH and Keturah) to become known as the Charaqqia, Chouraqui or Cherokee Indians? And how has history overlooked such an extraordinary convergence and merging of people? Perhaps through Hebrew-Cherokee Intercultural Studies we may one day have that answer.