

Work/Cited Episode 8 Transcript

Ian Fowler: Thank you all for joining us. My name is Ian Fowler, I am the Curator of Maps at the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building of The New York Public Library. Work/Cited is a program series that showcases the latest scholarship supported by the rich collections of the New York Public Library with the behind-the-scenes look at how the finished product was inspired, researched, and created. I'm posting a link in the chat right now and through that link, you can find blog posts for our prior episodes and you can watch video recordings, read transcripts, and explore related resources. In this our final episode of the season, Lyudmila Sholokhova, Curator of the NYPL's Dorot Jewish Division will be joined by Jonathan Schorsch, Professor of Jewish Religious and Intellectual History at the University of Potsdam. We'll discuss Schorsch's new book, *The Remarkable Life of Luis Moses Gomez*. Our guests will speak for about 30 minutes and then we'll open up the conversation. Please use the question and answer function rather than the chat function to share your questions and comments. Questions can be submitted throughout the talk. If you wish to remain anonymous please click that option before submitting the question. If you'd like to chat and share your comments with all of our attendees, please switch your chat audience over to the panelists and attendees. Right before we jump in I'd like to launch a small poll, so that we can learn more about you and how we can best tailor our programming to our wonderful audience. And now I will turn it over to Lyudmila and Jonathan.

Lyudmila Sholokhova: Hi, Jonathan. Welcome to the Library, I'm thrilled to have you here and have a conversation with you today. And today we want to talk about your new book and actually the stories that you reflected in this book, the story of Lewis Moses Gomez and his family. So who was Lewis Moses Gomez and where did he come from and why did he and his family stand out among other early Jewish immigrants to the United States? And of course, what were resources, specifically from the New York Public Library, you were able to incorporate into your book?

Jonathan Schorsch: Well, thank you so much Lyudmila for having me here, I'm really delighted and honored. Lewis Moses Gomez was a Jew of Portuguese origin, born we think in 1660. He, like many other Spanish and Portuguese Jews, was actually raised as a Catholic, he was a converso. His family came from Marrano or converso background meaning that their ancestors had been forced to convert to Catholicism way back when. He ends up coming to New York in 1702, he's a merchant. He becomes one of the more active Jewish merchants in New York. Like many of these Jewish merchants in the American colonies, he's of Sephardic background, Spanish-Portuguese background, which is kind of an interesting fact. Most of the Jews who came to the Americas in the 17th or 18th-centuries were in fact of Sephardic background. His family, he had six sons. They went on, also, most of them to become merchants, and in the 18th century, they were really among the more prominent Jews in the city and among the more prominent merchants in the city. And they really reflect in a wonderfully rich way life in colonial

New York and Jewish life in colonial New York. So that's fast and, of course, we can get into much more detail as we go along. Needless to say, I did -- well, it is important to say actually I take that back. Most of the research I did for this project, which was funded by and initiated by the Gomez Mill House Foundation, which is responsible for maintaining this house up in Ulster County along the Hudson River that had belonged to Lewis Moses Gomez and some of his sons and which still stands today, a remarkable fact, probably the oldest standing Jewish house in the United States, and they funded this research to find out more about Moses and his family. And I used really The New York Public Library's resources for a lot of the research and we can again get into that in a few moments. So how's that for a brief introduction?

Lyudmila: Yeah. Well, thank you very much. And perhaps you can describe in more detail the breadth of the businesses of the Gomez family and their business strategy and their main contributions to their new country and particularly New York City, and what was the secret of their success?

Jonathan: Excellent questions, with pleasure. So let's get into -- let me get my slide here, hopefully, you can all see it without the pull in front of it. Yeah. Do you see it there? My nice slide. Okay. I'm hoping you do. So just -- what?

Ian: It looks great.

Jonathan: Okay. Good. Thanks. So this is a petition, so there was a petition of Lewis Moses to be denizenized in England and what that meant was Jews were considered foreigners to England and its colonies and they had to apply for special permission to become -- I wouldn't use the term citizen because there was no concept of citizenship at the time. But to become a resident meaning they were given privileges and rights to conduct trade, for instance, to own property and even to bequeath that property to their children. So here we see the response which grants him permission and indicates that he will in fact be given this permission. And as I said, he still lives in New York in 1702 and he'd been living there for a few years and he had applied for this permission most probably in order to continue to conduct his trade, his business. Here we see a portrait of his son, I'm just showing you this for some visual accompaniment to what I'm talking about. His son Benjamin although the truth his grandson Benjamin it's not clear to me yet which figure this actually is. His son Benjamin was a merchant, as he was, he owned a shop and I'll get into the details. So here we see, for instance, a record of ships that came into the port of New York and you see here I circled Lewis Moses --

Lyudmila: Yeah.

Ian: I apologize everyone, looks like we are having a little bit of technical difficulties with Jonathan. We will wait and see if he can rejoin us. In the meantime, Mila, not to get ahead of Jonathan, but how does the work that he does relate to the collections that are in the Dorot Division here at The New York Public Library?

Lyudmila: Well, first the Dorot Jewish Division actually is located in The New York Public Library and our foremost task actually to promote the history of Jewish people in New York City. And actually, that actually makes the work of Jonathan Schorsch is very, very related to what we're doing now and actually to our priorities at the moment. So I think the early history of Jewish people in New York City is not so well known and we don't really know much about the personalities who actually helped to build rich Jewish presence in New York City and this actually goes to the Gomez family as well. For example, I knew about the Gomez family a lot but actually it never connected to me so well until I actually read the book that Jonathan wrote. And then all of a sudden it's -- this book is really very engaging and is really has a lot of interesting detail. And so basically after reading this book I kind of understood it so much better. And this book, this little book actually mentions many, many subjects that we just started talking. We're going to talk about -- we're planning to talk about how the Gomez family built relationships with the non-Jewish merchants and then we're going to talk about the differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardic immigration waves. How they build their life in New York City. And then we're going to talk about some interesting topics that actually not so much we know about that this family also owns the slaves and how this happened. And so this is interesting. And then we will talk also about how the American Revolution influenced the Gomez family and their future. So that's actually everything -- all this is very much related to the history of Jews in New York City. And once again this makes Jonathan's research even more relevant to our priorities at the moment. And I will definitely incorporate the information from this book in my future presentations on Jews in New York and hopefully on many other projects as well, as online exhibits and --

Jonathan: Hi there.

Lyudmila: -- lectures and presentations.

Jonathan: Hi, I'm back.

Ian: Jonathan is now back. So we --

Jonathan: I'm so sorry.

Lyudmila: It's okay.

Ian: Totally understandable.

Jonathan: The typical Zoom reality. Anyway, speaking of business moving from 21st-century business to the 18th century. So again he really, he did many, many things in terms of business, he traded with the Caribbean, places like Curaçao, and Jamaica where he had extended family. He imported wine from Portugal. He exported wheat to places like Portugal. He dealt with Amsterdam, London. Even his son, Daniel, dealt with Ireland among many other places. They sold retail goods. They sold tobacco. They manufactured snuff, some of them traded cacao and

chocolate, some of them manufactured chocolate. They dealt even with unkosher meat like ham and pork, and they sold the typical things like textiles, clothing, a lot of foodstuffs. So they really had their hands in a lot of different areas. His son Mordecai actually tried to obtain a monopoly for whaling in the waters of Connecticut or off of Connecticut obviously. So they really tried to do many, many things, which of course was a good business model, in case one area did not do so well, then one could rely on other areas. So that covers a lot of their business trade in the next generations meaning his grandsons and his younger sons. They opened retail shops around New York. They also were -- unusually, they also commissioned the building of ships for themselves, and they had a number of ships that were built for them, one of them was even named the Jacob, after the oldest son of Lewis Moses who had died in a tragic accident. And I will talk about that in a few moments. Another of the ships was named the Esther after Mordecai's wife, Esther. So they were a fascinating example of the kinds of things that Jewish and non-Jewish merchants did in the 18th century. They also imported slaves here and there, which was typical of the time. So yeah, that gives you a good idea of some of the things they were involved in.

Lyudmila: Yeah. So Jonathan, my next question is, is it possible to describe the differences in American life making between the Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jewish communities in the beginning of the 18th century?

Jonathan: So another excellent question. A lot of the prominent merchants were Ashkenazic Jews but really, numerically, most of the Jews in the Americas at the time were Sephardic almost overwhelmingly. And you could really call the period up until about 1740 or so, the Sephardic period of American Jewish history. In some ways we should really call it the Portuguese Jewish period because most of these Jews were -- many of these Jews were of Portuguese background. But in any case, the Portuguese Jews dominated and they imposed [inaudible] the Portuguese style, the Portuguese right on all of the synagogues throughout the Americas even though they were technically called Spanish and Portuguese synagogues just like Shearith Israel here in New York, but they were really dominated by the Portuguese style of prayers. And the Ashkenazic Jews at first really did not have communities. They came over as individuals or as families, whereas the Sephardic Jews really managed to build communities, they [inaudible] all of the infrastructure that was needed, cemeteries, mikvah for ritual immersion, and the [inaudible] themselves. And the Sephardim really dominated so it's interesting. And yet at the same time obviously they were both Jewish, the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim, but they had very different styles of prayer. For instance, a lot of the Sephardim, like the Gomez family, they wrote letters in Spanish well into the 18th century for instance. The official language of the synagogue Shearith Israel in New York was actually Portuguese for quite a surprising number of decades into the 18th century. So it really was this kind of Spanish-Portuguese Jewish diaspora, which was quite distinct from the Ashkenazic diaspora. The Talmud was much less prominent among Sephardic Jews. They saw themselves as being much more worldly, much more cosmopolitan. They really dressed like the non-Jews in whose midst they lived. They saw themselves really as part and parcel of their world and they were. So they were much less insular than the Ashkenazim, much less kind of introverted collectively. So

and in some ways, their religion also reflected more of a kind of definitely an Iberian style but more kind of rationalist approach in some respects. The Ashkenazim tended to be often more mystical and more steeped in kind of Jewishness and Judaism, religiously speaking. I'm really generalizing here but on the whole, that kind of gives you an idea of some of the differences.

Lyudmila: This is very interesting, really just -- and to put it out to understand how the communities established themselves in the United States and here is my question. I think the Gomez family put out even the more among the Sephardic community. For example, what prompted Lewis Moses Gomez to buy land in Ulster County outside of New York City and it was not typical for [inaudible] Jewish immigrants who tended to stay in large metropolitan areas. And this is where the oldest building, Jewish house stands till now. Could you please tell us about this a little more?

Jonathan: I will be glad to do so. So here is a map of these lands that Lewis Moses and a few of his sons bought up in Ulster County right along the Hudson River. You can even see here a creek called Jews Creek that was right at the property which was clearly named after the family. They owned some -- at the peak, they owned some 3,000 acres. They bought it around 1717, I believe, 17 -- sorry, about 1714 or so, 1716. They built a house around 1717. By the 1730s, he was already trying to sell it and it was -- most of the land was sold in the 1740s already. Why did he buy the land? It's not exactly clear. He probably bought the land like many Christians of the time who had the money. He probably bought it as a landed estate or in other words a country residence or most -- more likely he bought it in order to extract the resources. There was a lot of timber on the land. It was heavily, heavily forested, obviously. And he probably made use of that timber, harvested it and shipped it -- floated it down the river and sold it. He built a lime kiln and he supplied a lot of lime to the city. Lime was fundamental for building up the city, and we even have receipts of him selling lime in order to build walls in certain -- outdoor walls in certain parts of the city. He might have been one of the more prominent suppliers of lime to the fledgling and developing city at the time. We know that he had a sawmill on the river. We know that there was a farm on the -- sorry, on one of the creeks here a sawmill. And there was also a mill by which he ground flour probably. There was a farm that was actually -- the labor was produced by slaves, but there were -- it was clearly producing agricultural goods. So I suspect that he bought it again for the natural resources there. And as you said, it was quite unusual for Jews to own land outside of cities. We do have to remember that the Spanish-Portuguese Jews had tremendous experience with agriculture --

Ian: Well, I do apologize, it looks like we are still having a little bit of transatlantic technical difficulties. So Mila, I must say as I got excited for the slide show when we first previewed it as the map curator here. Can you tell us a little bit about -- is this map in our collection or your collection or --?

Lyudmila: Well, I don't know.

[Laughter]

It was before I came onboard to The New York Public Library, I'm not sure. I say it's probably from your division.

Ian: Yeah. I think it is too. This is all extremely fascinating. So how are -- I think just from an archival research standpoint, so like these like genealogical records and like the shipping manifest and all of that stuff, is that all in the Dorot Division or is this research that was conducted across the Library, do you know?

Lyudmila: It's not specifically in the Jewish Division. I think that Jonathan drew broadly from the wealth of all the collections as well, not only the Jewish collection. Yeah. That's the point. But that actually made this book so, so, so interesting, all these details for this really. So Jonathan is showing us only just a few of the illustrations but in the book, there are many, many more and in really good quality and actually it's really very, very interesting. I can show you just some samples that's really very well illustrated. You can see many, many images here of the archival resources.

Jonathan: Okay. I am back.

Lyudmila: Actually including maps. So that --

Jonathan: Okay. Hi. Mila, I'm back.

Lyudmila: Jonathan, you're back. I keep promoting your book.

Jonathan: Good. I'm so glad. I'm sorry to keep interrupting you, I'm sorry to keep disappearing. It's of course, you know, this is Murphy's law, I've been doing Zoom conversations all week long with no problem. And of course, now that I'm doing a high profile public conversation everything falls apart with my internet, c'est la vie. So anyway, so I hope we finished with that question about the land upriver.

Lyudmila: Right. But this leads me to the next question. You mentioned that the Gomez family traded slaves and actually owned some slaves. Could you please comment on this a little bit more?

Jonathan: Yes, with, I shouldn't say with pleasure because it is, of course, a very heavy and intense topic. So yes, the Gomez's, the sons, in particular, Daniel and Mordecai, who were the major merchants of the next generation in the family, did import some slaves, usually, you know, small numbers one slave on a ship, two slaves maybe, three or four slaves on a ship. Overall, in the 18th century, from about 1715 to 1765, if I remember the dates correctly, I think over 91% of the slaves were imported by non-Jews, by Christians of Dutch and English background. But some of these Jewish merchants, of course, were involved as well. We have to remember at the time this was just good business. And so they, unfortunately, so they did import some slaves.

They also owned slaves. We know that they used slave labor, for instance, Daniel, I believe, manufactured candles and that was done by slaves. As I mentioned the land upriver, up the Hudson in Ulster County was worked by some slaves. It might have even been a family of slaves. And if you look here at this advertisement that I pulled up from the *New-York Gazette* from 1736, we see one of the advertisements that Lewis Moses placed when he was trying to sell his lands up there, he calls it a plantation, up in Ulster County, near the town of Marlborough, by the way. And you see here that it lists some of the slaves there. He had a slave, an enslaved Black man who could operate his sloop, his -- one of his ships. And he also had some slaves that he was selling who, as it says here, they were fit for plantation work. He has a woman, a Black woman, who was fit for town or country with a child. So again, this is horrific to us today, very justifiably, but at the time slavery was ubiquitous and Jews participated in the slave economy along with many, many Christians.

Lyudmila: Wow, yeah, I didn't know much about that. That's very important that we talk about this now. So let's go back to New York City, and how did the family contribute to establishing the Jewish community in New York City? And we talked a little bit about their religious practices, but could you please tell us a little bit more how they actually financially helped to establish a Jewish community in New York City?

Jonathan: Absolutely. So let's just go back a little bit. So here again is Benjamin Gomez just so you can get a glimpse of what these people looked like. We don't have portraits of many members of the family. Here is a map showing lands that Mordecai and David Gomez, two of Lewis Moses' sons, owned in Greenwich Village, Greenwich Village, which was back then literally a village far from the main town. And you see here surrounded in blue, circled in blue the name and the plot, the big square around it. So they were quite wealthy and really owned a lot of property but at a certain point in the mid or late 18th century, I think, I counted some nine houses that they owned collectively, the different members of the family. They were by no means the wealthiest family among the Jews or among the Jewish merchants but they were certainly quite prominent. And therefore, as wealthy elite members of their community and of their congregation Shearith Israel, which means the remnant of Israel, which alludes to, of course, the Jewish, the diaspora of the Jews, and also more particularly to the diaspora of the Sephardic Jews, the Spanish and Portuguese Jews. So as wealthy members of the community they were quite active in founding and supporting the community. Many members of the family, males of course, including Lewis Moses himself, his sons Daniel and then some of the next generation served as parnasim, as leaders of Shearith Israel. They contributed financially to philanthropic campaigns to raise money for the synagogue. Members of the family contributed along with others to buying land that was used for the cemeteries. And as -- if you know the history of Shearith Israel in New York, they had a few cemeteries in the city as they moved uptown. And in fact coincidentally or not, yesterday I was in the village with my family and we passed the second of these cemeteries, I took a photo of it which I guess I should've shown you but I didn't add to my PowerPoint, which is down on 11th Street. And they were very active in the congregation to the degree that, for instance, Daniel, the congregation, of course, because New York was such a large Jewish community for the northern colonies that became later the

United States, it was actually quite a backwater compared to Curaçao and Suriname or even Barbados at the time. But Shearith Israel was quite active in supporting the congregation up in Newport, Rhode Island, where very famously Aaron Lopez was a merchant there. And Daniel, Lewis Moses' son, was actually so supportive and helpful with money and other forms of contribution that a special prayer that was said every Yom Kippur every Day of Atonement, actually mentioned him by name. The Gomez family was so prominent and powerful within Shearith Israel that the women actually had a special bench in the synagogue, it was known as a banco in Spanish because again so many things were called by Spanish and Portuguese names. And they had their own personal bench which was a sign of their status, a sign of their sway in the community. So they were really leaders of the community. There's even a fascinating anecdote which I will just relay here. That later a Jewish historian who actually is from the Sephardic community recounts of Lewis Moses of coming to synagogue with his slaves walking behind the family carrying all of the ritual objects that the family needed in synagogue such as prayer books and the tallitot, the prayer shawls because one was not supposed to carry on Sabbath. Or it was just a sign of kind of a show of, you know, the status of the family and this was apparently a regular kind of procession every Sabbath. So you know, this is not the most pleasant thing to talk about. But as you said, it is important to talk about, this rounds out the picture of the reality, but again, it shows what kind of family we're talking about. They were very, very proud of their Sephardic background, very proud of their Spanish and Portuguese heritage. They were very proud of their Jewishness. We know that Mordecai, for instance, had a -- it's called a Ten Commandments that was somewhere on one of his walls, we found it -- it's mentioned in his will. We know that they -- the male members of the family were trained to be ritual circumcisers and they often circumcised their sons personally. Some of them were trained as ritual slaughterers. We don't know if they knew Hebrew, I don't -- I haven't found evidence of that but they were quite active in their community life. We know that they had menorot or hanukkiot. They had kiddush cups, you know, the ritual cup for sanctifying the Sabbath or the holidays with wine. So they were completely practicing members of their congregation. Later on in the 18th century, Benjamin, one of the sons and Benjamin -- a grandson named Benjamin -- printed books, sold books and printed books. We know that they sold books that were -- they sold Jewish books mostly, although they did sell non-Jewish books and they also sold and even printed kind of rationalist books. In the 18th century, some of the rabbis and Jewish thinkers and writers were very influenced by rationalism. The Enlightenment had happened or was coming about, and like many Christians, they were swept by the same trends. So they were now printing -- we have a record of one particular book that was printed that was kind of more in the vein of humanism, in the vein of rationalism, explaining religion that it should conform with our understandings of reason, for instance. So as the decades went on the family also reflected the trends of American culture. By the time the revolution comes along, we have some members of the family who are loyalists, quite, quite attached to the monarchy, the monarchist movement, siding with England. One Ashkenazic member of the family who married in, one of the daughters or granddaughters of Lewis Moses actually left to go live in England because she was so upset about the revolution. Other members of the family were sided with the American forces, with the rebels, and were very proud to fight for the American revolutionaries. And in fact, Daniel, if I'm getting -- if I'm remembering correctly, Lewis Moses' son was quite an old man

at the time of the revolution, and he insisted -- he tried to enlist and they sort of laughed at him they said, "What can you do as an old man in the revolutionary forces?" And he said famously, within the family oral history, he said famously, "I can stop a bullet as well as any young man," meaning he could be shot at along with anyone no matter what age. So he was very eager to serve his adopted homeland, this new fledgling country. So let me just stop there and we can maybe move to other topics.

Lyudmila: So he is young -- but we still have time.

Jonathan: Great. So let me just, unless you have questions, let me just go through some of the other slides and I'll answer some of the things we spoke about when we talked earlier. So, you know, there's so much to say about Sephardic merchants. Like many merchants of the 18th century and the 17th century, these incredible transatlantic networks that they operated were mostly family networks. And they had relatives all over the place with whom they traded in Jamaica, Barbados, Curaçao, London, among many other places. So most often, the trader, the partners with whom they traded were in fact also family members. One of the things that actually made the Gomez family unusual was that when it came to trading in the New York City region, they actually traded mostly with non-Jews. And this was quite unusual for Sephardic merchants, who of course, tended to trust members of their own community, of their own people. Another interesting aspect of these family networks is that very often the sons would be sent off to serve as representatives of the family business in distant communities, distant cities, or towns, right? So, if you were a merchant in New York, you might send one of your sons to Barbados to act as an agent of the family there, you might send another son or his family and his wife to London or et cetera, et cetera, right? So the oldest son, Jacob, who we see here mentioned here in this newspaper story from 1722, he was an agent for the family seemingly in Barbados. He had power of attorney for his brother, Daniel, which was given to him in 1718. In 1722, he was tragically killed. And here we have a report of this incident which was, of course, of great interest to all of these other merchants who were also dealing with the Caribbean. And what happened was he was on a ship off of Cuba, and I don't know how well you can read this, but hopefully if you can actually read it while I'm talking. And the ship was attacked by pirates, you know, Spanish pirates from Cuba which was known at the time as Hispaniola. And the captain was killed and Jacob Gomez, again, Lewis Moses' eldest son was actually cut up, he was quartered, which was a typical kind of punishment, a gruesome punishment of the period. And if you look here to the right-hand column, you see that they -- in addition to this report that was kind of officially submitted, you know, to the newspaper by one of the correspondents, that's how newspapers worked at the time, we also have mentioned here in this box in red of a private letter that says the following, "The board -- the ship was boarded by the Spaniards and Mr. Gomez, the Jew, whom they killed and cut up into quarters was principally concerned in the cargo." So what we've learned from this is that Gomez, Jacob was probably there keeping an eye on the family cargo, right, that was his job. He was supervising all of the holdings that they were transporting. And he's called the Jew here, again, you know, most merchants were Christians, right? And it's possible I suspect that the pirates might have also known that he was a Jew. They might have found this out and that is possibly why he was given such a harsh

punishment, why he was treated so horribly. Because of course, the Spaniards were probably good Catholics, and this Jew who came from Spanish and Portuguese background, you know, was the enemy in some sense, right? This is why they had established an inquisition in Spain and Portugal to chase after those Catholics who were of Spanish and Portuguese Jewish background but who were not living as good Catholics. There was a tremendous amount of enmity, of animosity between the Sephardic Jews and the Spaniards and Portuguese, of course. So it's very possible that this was one of the -- kind of the price he paid for being a Jewish merchant on a ship in the Caribbean. Here we have -- I want to talk about some of the resources I used and talk about how amazing the New York Public Library is. So the shipping returns, right, the manifests of all the ships that the Gomez's used and what they were transporting on them was something that you could find in an English archive and you can search it online because now amazingly like so much material is digitized. And so here you can see the shipping returns, right, I looked for certain years, this is part of the former Public Records Office, so-called Colonial Office. And again, it's just available and all you have to do is contact them and they send you, you know, a great digitized version of the original, which is remarkable. Here we have an ad from the later 18th century, Rebecca Gomez, the widow of Mordecai Gomez, Mordecai being one of the prominent merchant sons of Lewis Moses. And she sold chocolates among many other retail goods at a store she called the Chocolate Manufactory. Unusual amongst sellers of chocolate, she actually manufactured it herself as well. And there were other members of the family who also got into the chocolate trade. One of the ways I found all of these early American newspapers is in a database that the New York Public Library owns, you know, subscribes to and that any subscriber can use, it's called America's Historical Newspapers. And so you put in a search like Jacob Gomez and then you come up with this, you know, early newspaper report that I showed you earlier about his tragic death in 1722 in the Caribbean. Here again, is the newspaper advertisement that Lewis Moses printed to sell his plantation. And that concludes my slideshow, so now if we have any time I am very happy to take questions, talk about anything anyone would like to ask or know. And I think I'm going to stop sharing here so I can see all of your wonderful faces.

Ian: Thank you so much, Jonathan and Mila. This has been fantastic and extremely informative. We indeed have a number of questions. So I'll start down here at the bottom. You mentioned that Lewis Gomez was raised as a Catholic and as an adult became a prominent member of Shearith Israel in New York. Can you say anything more about his shutting up his Catholic upbringing, did it happen more or less automatically without note, or was there some private or public mention of it?

Jonathan: Great question. Unfortunately, we know very, very little about him and his background in terms of his birth, where he grew up. Supposedly, according to the family oral history he grew up in France. His father or ancestor sent him and other members of the family out of Spain, supposedly, this ancestor was an advisor to the king. We really don't know if any of this is true. Again supposedly, Lewis Moses left France in 1685 because the Treaty of Nantes was revoked. The Treaty of Nantes actually allowed protestants to live in France openly, when it was revoked there was a lot of then persecution of the protestants once more. And there was a lot of

persecution of the Huguenots, for instance, and a lot of that sort of militant Catholicism also ended up meaning that the Jews were quite -- were also attacked in certain ways. And so he left for England supposedly where he might have lived, we have no -- I've not found any evidence that he lived there. And then shortly thereafter, we find him in the Caribbean. His sons, his oldest son, seem to have been born -- the evidence again is murky -- but seem to have been born in Jamaica or Barbados. There were other family relatives or people who seem to be family relatives who also were living in Barbados and Jamaica. So we know very little about how he became Jewish, again, whether he had been, his family were Marranos, secret Jews or not. This is all very complicated. A lot of the people of Jewish background who left or fled Spain and Portugal left for obviously religious reasons, they were afraid of the inquisition, they were very devoted to Judaism. But also a lot of them left for purely, for economic opportunities, a lot of them left because they were afraid of the inquisition because even if they were not secret Jews but they came from Jewish background the inquisition might well prosecute them or persecute them so not everyone who fled was a secretly loyal Jew. We know that many of these families were circumcised, the men were circumcised, for instance, in London we have records of all the circumcisions of these adults who came from Spain and Portugal. We know that Daniel Gomez when he was then born, we have a family prayer book that mentions his circumcision that was attended seemingly by Lewis Moses' father and godmother. So we know that they were already practicing Judaism quite early in the text records of the city of New York which you can look at in microform at the New York Public Library. And he starts showing up in 1702, within the same year 1702, in one tax record he's called Lewis and another one, another month in 1702 he's called Moses. So that tells us he was going openly by a Jewish name. So we can put together the pieces and we can see parallels from many other similar Sephardic families. We know Mordecai at a certain point bought a family bible that was actually a very well-known bible that was printed by a printer in Amsterdam where there was a huge Jewish community that was really the mother community of the Sephardic diaspora in the Atlantic World. So hopefully that addresses a little of it but I'm leaving out a lot here because I want to get to other questions too, but it's an excellent question.

Ian: Very fascinating history here. We have a couple of research method questions, one is: did you find any material at the American Jewish Historical Society or the Shearith Israel Synagogue?

Jonathan: Yes, so excellent questions. Shearith Israel I embarrassingly confess I haven't looked at yet, I had so much other material that I knew about that I didn't go directly to them which I plan to do. I will be hopefully releasing a scholarly version, a full-length book on all of, you know, this whole history, this whole family as well, hopefully soon. So the American Jewish Historical Societies Holdings are now at the center for Jewish history on 16th Street if I remember correctly the location. And they have a lot of that -- Gomez family holdings but a lot of them are from later in the 18th century. Obviously, the earlier you go the harder it is to find material that is still extant that is still preserved. But yes, there's a lot of material there. And then there's a lot of material scattered around, you know, all kinds of archives around the Atlantic World, the Caribbean, London, Amsterdam, and New York also. So for instance, I found a lot of documents

at the New York Municipal Archives including lawsuits that Lewis Moses was involved in or Mordecai was involved in. Mordecai by the way was actually officially translator for the -- one of the courts in New York City in the 1730s. Daniel, his brother, was officially appointed translator because of their knowledge of Spanish for the Supreme Court. In the 1730s, Mordecai was assigned to be translator when there was a slave revolt in 1741 and he was the official translator because some of the slaves had come from Spanish territories and therefore needed a Spanish translator. So yeah, there's a lot of material, it's just fabulous. And then, of course, you know, I go through all of this kind of antiquarian books, you know, the History of old New York, History of Old Philadelphia, History of the Prominent Families of New York, you know, you never know where you'll find things. So it's always a fun kind of, you know, you feel like a kind of a private gumshoe like a detective, you know, digging, digging up whatever you can find. And I wish I could find a lot more, there's a lot of documents that I wish I could find. I haven't seen references to, you know, Daniel's birth certificate which supposedly says he's born in France which I would love to find but I haven't come up with it. Mordecai's death certificate, supposedly, in the New York Municipal Archives which I have not been able to locate and they insist it's not there, supposedly, says he's born in Barbados which I would love to be able to corroborate. So you know, the job of a historian is a tough one.

Ian: We definitely understand that. I mean we love working for historians all the time. A quick one, the Greenwich Village 1746 map, is that here at NYPL?

Jonathan: That is at the, you know, what's it called? I'm totally blanking, here I am a native New Yorker. The New-York Historical Society up on Central Park West. It's one of their holdings, yeah, they do have holdings relating to the family but again most of the holdings are from later in the 18th century into the 19th century. By the way, I should say quickly just to get it in there. Isaac Gomez who wrote a family history who is a great-grandson of Lewis Moses was one of the founders of the New York Stock Exchange. So the family continued to be quite active, quite prominent in all kinds of endeavors that New York is famous for or infamous for.

Ian: I think that ties in pretty well with the next question that we had, which is for such prominent men, why do you think there are no paintings or likenesses of them apart from the one that you showed?

Jonathan: Excellent question. It could be they were and they were lost not preserved, it could be there's a few others that I -- that exist within the family. I just saw a chat like someone who's a direct descendent of Lewis Moses Gomez or one of his kids. So yeah, I don't know that I have the answer to that. You know, there's a lot -- there's always more things that are out there but you have to make the connections with the people or stumble across the right archive or someone has to know about it. So it's not often easy to find these things and, of course, we all know of the stories where someone goes through their attic, you know, in 2019 and then comes across this incredible find from the 1730s, but often a lot of these things can remain unknown. They might, in fact, be portraits of others including some of the women of the family. And we actually do, there are some references to other things like, for instance, there's the David, one of

the sons of Lewis Moses was very keen on an Ashkenazic woman which was unusual because, in fact, most of the Spanish Portuguese Jews of the time would not marry an Ashkenazic girl or boy. And a lot of the communities themselves actually forbid it, interesting bit of internal Jewish history there. So David actually was keen on this one girl and we have a letter from her mother who -- it's written to someone else, not in the Gomez family. Who says basically, over my dead body, and she kind of insults him. She says he's a wretch, he's stupid, and she sort of says no matter how much money he had I would never let him, you know, marry her. So there is a lot of, you know, real interesting personal material, there are a lot of ritual objects and a lot of other kinds of objects like, for instance, we have Rebecca Gomez's molds that she used to make chocolate, you know. So and there's a lot of things at different museums and the Gomez Foundation has shown over the last few years, so yeah. And if you know of anything, please get in touch with me or the foundation that would be wonderful. I would love to get -- dig up more information and find more portraits and objects and so on.

Ian: Yeah. So we have a question. Let's see. We have a lot of questions about connection. So one is looking for connections to the Nathan family who were stockbrokers et cetera, not merchants.

Jonathan: Okay. Now you're really pushing my memory here. Yeah. I'm sure there are connections, I confess I don't remember, you know, all the details. I will say that as I mentioned, Daniel and Mordecai were the most prominent merchants who were the next generation, sons of Lewis Moses. They were -- they had partnerships with all kinds of people. Paul Richards, who was a very prominent Christian merchant, who was also mayor of the city in the 1730s. They dealt with the Schuylers, who we all know from *Hamilton*, right, or some of the Schuylers. They, of course, had dealings with other merchants, Lewis Gomez was, for instance, the executive on the estate of Joseph Bueno de Mesquita if I'm getting the name correct who was another prominent Sephardic merchant whose daughter married in the family as was typical. The Nathans, I don't really remember so please forgive me. Oh, this is what I wanted to say, that Daniel and Mordecai were actually not really the most prominent merchants. You can literally go through all the shipping records and see how many voyages they sponsored. And some of the other Jewish families actually were quite -- much more active, and needless to say the Christian merchants also were almost on another level. So even though we talk about these Jewish merchants being wealthy and prominent, really they're almost a second-tier if I generalize compared to all of the Christian, you know, that is the Dutch or English or other merchants. Yeah. Next?

Ian: Okay. I think we have time for one last question, maybe another one depending. What dialect of Spanish and/or Portuguese do they speak, Ladino? And why would they not know basic Hebrew?

Jonathan: Okay. Good question. So the Western Sephardim meaning most of these Sephardim in places like France, London, Amsterdam, and then the Americas, none of them spoke Ladino. Ladino was only dialect spoken by Eastern Sephardim in North Africa or the Ottoman regions.

It's a long, complicated story, but basically, Ladino is a mixture -- it's also called Judeo-Spanish. It's a mixture of Spanish and Hebrew. It's really kind of medieval Spanish. The Western Sephardim, we have to remember most of them, overwhelmingly, they were raised as Catholic. Their knowledge of Judaism, when they came from Spain or Portugal to London or to Amsterdam or to Bordeaux, et cetera, their knowledge of Judaism was minimal. They might have had some customs, they might have known some prayers, they might have known they were Jewish, but they knew very, very little about Rabbinic Judaism, for instance. Most of them, I'm almost positive, knew no Hebrew whatsoever. So they spoke Spanish and Portuguese because they were really -- ironically, paradoxically, they were good Spaniards and Portuguese. They were super proud of being of Spanish and Portuguese background even though they hated the inquisition and they hated the militant Catholicism that had persecuted and ruined the lives of their family. So it's hard for us to -- it's a fascinating complex kind of identity and it's kind of hard for us to wrap our minds around it, I think, these days. So anyway, so hopefully that answers the question. They basically spoke or wrote in totally standard Spanish or Portuguese.

Ian: All right. Unfortunately, that's as much time as we have for today. I think we could go on for at least a couple of more hours and a wonderfully fascinating topic. So thank you both very much. I just have a few closing words here for all of our guests. There will be a blog post as I mentioned coming up in the next couple of weeks or so that will contain a transcript, a video of this conversation as well as some links to additional resources that can be used for research. We also would like all of you to stay in touch with us, so I'm going to put in the chat here just some ways that you can do that. So we have a blog channel that has all of the blogs that we have for this program as well as you can find some other programs there. And this is as I mentioned our last Work/Cited for the season, but please do follow us on our newsletter, online, social media, all of which I'll put in the chat. And we can be well abreast of our exciting fall programming which is coming up quite soon right after our short and much-needed summer break. Again, Mila and Jonathan, thank you both so very much. It's been extremely fascinating and very important.

Jonathan: Thank you. Thank you so, so much for the invitation. And please anyone get in touch with me, I'm at the University of Potsdam in Germany. Look up my email address and if you have more information about the family I would really love to find out more, but thanks to you all.