Conversos: A Convenient Alibi

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As King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella captured the last Muslim city of Granada, they became the sole Christian rulers of Spain. It would prove only to be the beginning of a long battle to unify their kingdom under Catholicism since they had inherited a complicated social structure infused with religious issues. Spain had been ravaged by crusading warfare during the *Reconquesta* or Christian reconquest of Spain for generations, and in its aftermath the Crown had to find a way to meld various cultural and religious differences into the mold of a unified Christian Spain. As a result, the Crown's first order of business was to expel all the Jews from their country in an alleged attempt to protect the *converso* community. These conversos were Jews who had either forcefully or willingly accepted baptism to become a unique class of Spanish citizens referred to as the 'New Christians.' In the 1492 Expulsion Edict, which informed the Jews of their expulsion, the Crown stated "we have been informed that...there were some wicked Christians who Judaized and apostatized from our holy Catholic faith."[1] The edict

[1] Edward Peters, trans. *Edict of the Expulsion of the Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia, 1997), http://www.sephardicstudies.org/decree.html, originally published in *Documentos acerca de la expulsion de los Judios*, no. 177, edited by Luis Suarez-Fernandez (Valladolid: C.S.I.C., 1964), 391-395. One necessary emendation has been made based on Fidel Fita, "Edicto de los Reyes Catolicos (31 Marzo 1492) desterrando de sus estados a todos los Judios," *Boletin de la Real Academia de la Historia II* (1887): 512-528. English text from Edward Peters, "Jewish History and Gentile Memory: The Expulsion of 1492," *Jewish History* 9 (1995): 9-34, at 23-28. Reprinted in Olivia Constable, ed. *Medieval Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania UP, 1997).

then went further to explain that these were not singular accidental incidents but rather a planned and deliberate plot on behalf of the Jews since they habitually "steal faithful Christians from our holy Catholic faith."[2]

It appeared as if the Crown sought to safeguard this fledging community of New Christians. However, what the Crown claimed and what it did were two very different things. Even before the Expulsion edict, through royal and local government decrees conversos' citizenship rights were slowly degraded until they became parallel with that of the Jews' second-class citizenship. It should also be noted that the Spanish Inquisition specifically targeted conversos through accusations without legal backing and that Old Christians of all social classes and the Crown profited when conversos were inevitably found guilty. Lastly, if not more tellingly, one should observe how royal authority completely reversed its stance on the protection of the converso community after the expulsion. One has to question then why the Crown would go to such lengths to banish Jews who were their greatest taxable source of income; especially since the Jews' taxes had largely financed the war against Granada in the first place.[3] By focusing on how Christian Spain handled its converts, we will be able to bring to light the real reason why the Crown expelled the Jews from Spain.

When studying converso history, many writers skip straight to the mass murders and forced conversions that happened during the 1391 riots.[4] Though this is a considerable milestone in our story, it is important

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[2] Peters, *Edict*, http://www.sephardicstudies.org/decree.html.
[3] Norman H. Finkelstein, *The Other 1492: Jewish Settlement in the New World* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989), 3.
[4] Chaim Raphael, *The Road from Babylon: The Story of Sephardi and Oriental Jews* (Cambridge: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985), 111.

to realize that Christian rulers acted contemptuously towards conversos even while Christianity was still a minority in Spain. As Christians reconquered lands in Toledo, the Jews who had previously been under Muslim protection were attacked by Christians during the massacre of 1109.[5] The Jewish communities were given the choice of conversion or death, and those who chose to convert serve as our first converso communities of interest whose social standing was not yet set in stone. This lack of definition created a considerable amount of tension in the community, and it is difficult to determine who pushed for the conversos' second-class citizenship first. One possibility is that the Old Christian community complained to their king or alternatively the king was independently alarmed at the fact that many Jews in Toledo were now Christians. Regardless of the origin, in response to the situation on December 16, 1118 the king of Toledo, Alfonso VII, proclaimed in his *fuero* (law) that no Jew or recent convert could have authority over any Christian.[6] Alfonso VII's law was popular among the people and spread to Cordova (1241), Carmona (1247), and Alicane (1215) a town whose local government received it so enthusiastically that it extended the law to apply to all conversos both old and new, adding a touch of derogatory language by calling them *tornadizos* (turncoats).[7] From this first wave of anti-converso sentiment one can see that not only royal authority but local communities sought to define conversos as legally inferior to Old Christians.

In 1255, King Alfonso X of Castile wrote the *Fuero Real* in an attempt to have a uniform treatment of conversos throughout his

[5] Benzion Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain* (New York: Random House, 1995), 257.
[6] Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition*, 257.
[7] Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition*, 259, 261.

kingdom at a time when each town had its own *fuero*. The conversos had not met with a warmer reception as time wore on, so the king stated that he would fine twenty *moravedis* each time any Old Christian called a converso a *tornadizo*; this created a nice surplus for the royal treasury since these fines went straight to the Crown.[8] Creation and enforcement of this law hints at the negative attitudes Old Christians fostered about conversos and how often they displayed their disdain against conversos. One also cannot help but draw parallels between the need for royal protection of conversos and Jews from their hostile Christian neighbors. According to historian Jonathan Ray, "For the Jews, such safeguards and protective measures were the principal benefit of royal sovereignty."[9] Though it is technically a gracious action on behalf of the Crown, more than anything else, it demonstrated how the Crown similarly viewed Jewish and converso communities' legal standing as being equal.

Despite the treatment of conversos up to this point, local Christians were still eager to convert the Jews living in their midst and suffered from a type of baptizer's remorse directly afterwards. The year 1348 saw a plague, economic hardships, and a Castilian civil war between King Pedro who worked hard to protect his Jews, and his half-brother Henry who used popular anti-Jewish sentiment against him. Jews were an easy scapegoat, and these circumstances fused together to create legendary pogroms in Seville, Cordova, Madrid, Toledo, Segovia, Burgos, and not to mention the fact that the Catalonian Jewish community was completely destroyed all in the same year.[10] When one

[8] Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition*, 260.
[9] Jonathan Ray, *The Sephardic Frontier: The Reconquista and the Jewish Community in Medieval Iberia* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2006), 95.
[10] Renée Levine-Melammed, *A Question of Identity: Iberian Conversos in Historical Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8-9.

takes into account the charismatic archdeacon of Ecija, Ferrán Martínez, preaching for the complete conversion of Spain's Jews, it is not hard to imagine when riots erupted again in 1391 why the rate of conversion was so successful. This is especially the case when offered the choice between baptism and death.[11] Though numbers vary in different accounts, most historians can agree

> that a third of the entire population refused to surrender their religion and died sanctifying the Name of God; approximately another third of was forced to accept conversion and only one third of the Jewish population survived. These included some entire communities, and refugees who managed to flee from their homes to places of safety.[12]

Hasdai Crescas, a Jewish scholar in Aragon, wrote his eyewitness account during the riots, recording that "the Lord bent His bow like an enemy against the community. Many changed their religion; Many died to sanctify the Holy Name, and many violated the holy covenant."[13] Therefore, many conversos began their new Christian lives as targets of Old Christian violence just as much as they were to live and eventually end them the same way. As New Christians, conversos were initially able to attain jobs that were not available to them as Jews. Reasonably enough, many former Jews attained positions of power to regain a sense of empowerment and stability in their lives much to the dismay of Old Christians.[14]

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[11] Linda Martz, *A Network of Converso Families in Early Modern Toledo: Assimilating a Minority* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 21.
[12] Haim Beinhart, "The Converso Community in 15th Century Spain," in *The Jews in Spain and Portugal Before and After the Expulsion of 1492,* vol. 1 of *The Sephardi Heritage: Essays on the History and Cultural Contribution of the Jews of Spain and Portugal,* ed. R. D. Barnett (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1971), 425.
[13] Raphael, *The Road from Babylon*, 111.
[14] Martz, *A Network of Converso Families*, 23.

In 1392, a mere year after the mass conversions, the citizens of Burgos complained that "the Jews who recently turned Christian oppress them and do them much harm."[15] The following anti-converso riots that openly expressed this resentment and the aftermath that ensued provide an interesting study for the treatment of Jews and conversos at this time. In the heat of the riots, Old Christians illegally imprisoned both Jewish and converso survivors alike. In response, King Enrique III sent a strongly worded letter telling the locals to free all the imprisoned Jews. The locals followed his instructions to the letter but kept the conversos who had 'oppressed them' in jail. A few months later, on October 14, 1392 he sent another strongly worded letter to the locals that outlined in no uncertain terms that Old Christians were not allowed to "dare seize the person or property" of conversos and "that, furthermore, if any of them be arrested as indicated...that he be put in the customary place of imprisonment, and in no other place."[16] This episode demonstrated how Christian Spain dealt with the converso issue up to this point. Old Christians would treat conversos the same as Jews, only treating them differently as it benefited them, like in this case, the few extra months of prison hospitality they offered their local conversos.

Between 1412 and 1414, another ambitious preacher, Vincent Ferrér, incited riots that massacred and converted many remaining Jewish communities throughout Spain.[17] Recent conversos, much as they had after the conversions in Burgos, attempted to stabilize their lives

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[15] Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1997), 17.
[16] Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition*, 267.
[17] Solomon David Sassoon, "The Spiritual Heritage of the Sephardim," in *The Jews in Spain and Portugal Before and After the Expulsion of 1492,* vol. 1 of *The Sephardi Heritage: Essays on the History and Cultural Contribution of the Jews of Spain and Portugal,* ed. R. D. Barnett (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1971), 4.

after a period of violence by attaining offices and positions of power. The Old Christians in the Segovia community were not pleased, and a Christian Chronicler, Alonso de Palencia, lamented that conversos "shamelessly took over all the public posts and discharged them with extreme contempt of the nobility and with grave harm to the state."[18] These conflicts were not isolated rivalries in a single community. Diego de Valera in Cordoba, a converso historian himself, recorded this same attitude in reference to power struggles over city council issues: "There was a great enmity and rivalry, since the New Christians were very rich and kept buying public offices, which they made use of so arrogantly that the Old Christians would not put up with it."[19] King Juan II, the inheritor of Enrique III's kingdom, faced "a new stream of converso complaints about their mistreatment by the Old Christians," but the most he could or tried to do was remind his subjects of the *Siete Partidas* (The Law of the Jews).[20] He also added onto the law by saying "that it was to be observed in all its points and in every respect, and for all time."[21]

A generation later, conversos had been more successful in infiltrating middle and upper-classes of Christian society. "Intermarriage with families of the local nobility became increasingly common and their control over positions in the city government so marked that it created popular resentment and opposition."[22] The Church had even stepped in to erase the old argument that converts were not 'real' Christians and dictated that Old Christians should "accept these converts as brothers and

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[18] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 29.
[19] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 29.
[20] Alfonso X, "Las Sietas Partas," *The Medieval Sourcebook*, trans. Paul Halsall, 1997, http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/jews-sietepart.html.
[21] Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition*, 271.
[22] Ruth Pike, *Linajudos and Conversos in Seville: Greed and Prejudice in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Spain* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc, 2000), 13.

equals."[23] Old Christian nobles and merchants, who found themselves in economic and political competition with conversos, had to find a new argument on which to safeguard their place in society. Therefore, if one's religious classification could no longer be a mechanism to determine socio-economic status, then the Old Christians would have to make a defensive stance against conversos using 'purity of blood' or race as the new class divider.

This 'purity of blood' argument began to sprout its roots in the Toledo anti-converso riots on January 17, 1449. What began as a standard tax collecting assignment to gather funds for war between Aragon and Castile exploded into scenes of violence as Old Christians refused to allow converso tax collectors to gather payments from Old Christians. In fact, in retaliation Old Christians plundered and confiscated converso property around the city.[24] After falsely imprisoning a group of conversos, fourteen of the more notable ones "were put on trial. Estéban García de Toledo appeared as *procurador* (attorney) for the town of Toledo, in the name of its judges, *alguazil* (constable) and other functionaries, to protect the town's rights, as well as those of its prominent citizens."[25] Of course, the citizens he aimed to protect were exclusively the Old Christian nobility of the city. The trial resulted in the dismissal of these conversos from their positions in local government and Mayor Pedro Sarmiento's creation of the *"Sentencia-Estatuto de Toledo"* (Pure-Blood Statutes of Toledo).[26]

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[23] Martz, *A Network of Converso Families*, 23.
[24] Martz, *A Network of Converso Families*, 24.
[25] Beinhart, "The Converso Community," 428.
[26] Levine-Melammed, *A Question of Identity*, 18.

The *Sentencia-Estatuto de Toledo* was one of the first documents that sought to put conversos in their place by using their Jewish lineage against them when it declared

> that all the said conversos descended from the perverse line of the Jews, in whatever situation they may be...be held as incapable and unworthy to hold public or private office in the said city of Toledo and in its lands, by means of which they would be able to hold lordship over Old Christians believing in the holy Catholic faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ and cause damage, injury, and to be incapable and unworthy of giving testimony and faith as public notaries or as witnesses.[27]

Not only were conversos blamed as the cause for the riots against them and dismissed from their offices, but all conversos from then onwards were to be denied many basic aspects of Christian citizenship. They would no longer be able to hold positions of authority in and around Toledo, and their word as a Christian no longer held weight since conversos' blood was 'impure' or polluted due to their Jewish heritage. This decision reverted conversos back to the legal standing of middle or lower-class Jews who were also not allowed to be office holders or testify against the Old Christians since "legislature on Jews holding offices of any jurisdiction over Christians...stated: 'anyone giving an office to them lowers himself into blasphemy'."[28]

At this point, one might argue that these racial limitations were only a by-product of economic competition and that we should presume that these were very special circumstances to be taken in its historical context as a kind of fluke. However, as the records show, this *limpieza*

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[27] Kenneth Baxter Wolf, trans. *Sentencia-Estatuto* de Toledo, 1449, originally published in Eloy Benito Ruano, *Toledo en el siglo XV*, (Madrid, 1961), http://sites.google.com/site/canilup/toledo1449.

[28] Beinhart, "The Converso Community," 430; Ray, 67.

(pure-blood) argument soon transcended past the secular sphere of converso life. The Bishop of Cuenca, Don Diego de Anaya, was a prominent head of a religious studies college in Spain. He declared that

> since it has always been our will and intention that no person of Jewish origin should be allowed entrance to this college, and since we cannot permit this wish of ours to be forgotten in the course of time, we have stipulated and we order that no one who originates in the said stock [of Jews], whether from both sides or one, be admitted to the collegiate and chaplaincy of the said College, and that in this matter no difference be made whether the grade of origin is remote or near.[29]

Therefore, conversos, who had been defined and defended by Church authorities to be valid Christians as much as any of the Old Christians, were discriminated against with the same pure-blood argument that barred them from success in the secular world. This double-standard of classifying conversos as Christians while at the same time treating them as Jews did not go unnoticed even during the time that these events took place.

In 1449, the royal secretary Fernán Díaz de Toledo responded to the Bishop of Cuenca when he argued "that all the leading noble lineages of Castile, including the Henríquez (from whom Ferdinand the Catholic descended) could trace their descent from conversos."[30] Therefore, it put into question how the bishop could dare declare this racial limitation for the Church when the king, Ferdinand the Catholic, himself came from a converso heritage. In 1450, the year following the creation of the Pure Blood

[29] Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition*, 272.
[30] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 32.

Statutes of Toledo, converso Bishop Alonso de Cartagena wrote his "*Defensoriam unitas Christianae*" (The defender of the unity of the Christian). He was disgusted by the treatment of his fellow conversos and voiced the theological argument that through the martyrdom of Jesus Christ and the process of baptism "that from that point onward no distinction among ancestors based on carnal birth should be observed, but only a spiritual unity based on rebirth."[31] He was only one in a series of conversos in positions of power that argued for the equal treatment of New Christians.[32]

However, valid arguments for their cause both logical and theological in nature landed on deaf ears. By 1451, the practice of racially dividing conversos from their Old Christian counterparts was in full swing, and "the pope was asked by King Juan II to suspend his excommunication of those practicing racialism."[33] This contrasted with previous years where either Church or royal authorities had in their turn in some measure attempted to protect the conversos, though they were usually too weak to make good on their commands. The Old Christians gained a further political edge over their converso rivals on August 13, 1451 when "the king formally gave his approval to the Sentencia-Estatuto" that had been developed in Toledo, now displaying how royal and local governments were working together.[34] The year 1467 showed no signs of this tide slowing as anti-converso riots exploded in Toledo

[31] Bruce Rosenstock, *New Men: Conversos, Christian Theology, and Society in Fifteenth-century Castile*, (London: University of London, 2002), 22.
[32] Beinhart, "The Converso Community," 429.
[33] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 35.
[34] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 35.

and Ciudad Real, and "King Henry IV confirmed in office in the city all holders of posts formerly held by conversos."[35]

In 1468, the archbishop of Toledo, Alonso Carrillo, noticed "there are many guilds and brotherhoods of which some under pretense of piety do not receive conversos and others do not receive Old Christians."[36] Therefore, this line of racial division was not limited only to the upper-class, but had begun to be the status quo among middle-class artisans as it further cemented the societal divide. The violence against converso communities worsened in the years leading up to the beginning of the Spanish Inquisition. The year 1473 saw riots and massacres in multiple towns throughout southern Spain with a focus especially in Córdoba. In Jaén, while conversos cowered in a cathedral for sanctuary against rioters, the converso Constable of Castile, Miguel Lucas de Iranzo, was "cut down at the high altar of the cathedral as he attempted to defend the conversos."[37] This incident in itself served as an omen for things to come. It hinted at the reality that the Church and their faith would no longer protect conversos from the mark of their Jewish lineage.

The converso community of Spain, regardless of each individual's socio-economic standing, found itself in an impossible situation that thrived in a grey area between Judaism and Christianity. Old Christians thrust a conversion opportunity on them that was deadly to refuse; yet at the same time conversos were not supposed to enjoy any of the benefits of being a Christian citizen without incurring the same wrath that was incited by their former practice of Judaism. Through the endless progression of violence and legalized racism, the status of a

[35] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 36-37.
[36] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 35.
[37] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 36.

converso in Spanish society was repeatedly reduced to the second-class citizenship of a Jew. However, it would only prove to be the beginning of their troubles as the Inquisition loomed venomously ahead.

The Inquisition began haphazardly in random spots throughout Spain under the direction of the Church. The Church believed its purpose was to safeguard Christians from themselves in case they should start to hold unorthodox beliefs, and more importantly from those who would pull good Christians away from their faith. It began to raise the question of what a 'good' Christian was in communities all over Spain. As the concept of blood purity permeated throughout the country, Old Christians began to scrutinize their fellow Christian neighbors who had Jewish lineage for signs of 'Jewishness' to report to the Church authorities. The Christian chronicler, Andrés Bernáldez, recorded that conversos began to be burnt at the stake, and many tried to leave in a panic. "A penalty was imposed on them, that they could not flee the city under pain of death, and guards were put at the city gates; so many were seized that there was no place to put them."[38] In mid-October 1480, Queen Isabella found the Inquisition quite useful when it came to settling old political scores. She used it to wipe out the opposition she had faced in Seville's civil war, both by targeting the rebel nobles and their converso supporters, who found their dedication to Catholicism questioned just because they allied themselves with the wrong politician.[39]

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[38] *Bachiller* Andrés Bernáldez, "Chapter 44: How they began to seize, burn, and reconcile Jewish heretics in Seville. And the great pestilence of 1481," in *The Spanish Inquistion, 1478-1614: An Anthology of Sources*, ed. and trans. Lu Ann Homza (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2006), 6-7.

[39] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 46.

After Queen Isabella's success, it comes as no surprise that King Ferdinand took a strong interest in the Inquisition as well. After a considerable amount of arguing with the Pope, Ferdinand eventually wrested control of the Inquisition from the Church in 1482.[40] It was now officially a mechanism of the Crown. King Ferdinand was well aware of the fact that the Inquisition targeted conversos, and stated himself that "many wish to become Christian, but are afraid to do so because of the Inquisition."[41] Some historians may argue that the Inquisition was a force into itself and that there was no specific agenda in mind. However, when it was all said and done, the records indicate that in Catalonia of the 1,199 who were tried all but eight were conversos. In Barcelona, the records from that area show 99.3% had Jewish origins in their family histories, and in Valencia 91.6 % had Jewish origin in theirs as well.[42]

If all other evidence was to be ignored, the Inquisition itself could make the argument for Spain's targeted abuse of the converso population. Firstly, conversos often faced ridiculous accusations that would never have been put to Old Christians. Secondly, trial records show that the Inquisition was used as a tool by both Old Christians from all socio-economic classes as well as by the royal government to profit from conversos being falsely accused. Lastly, condemned conversos as well as their offspring were faced with a series of punishments meant to degrade them socially, legally and economically. Though the pure-blood argument had enjoyed numerous successes in both the secular and religious realm up to this point, such victories would appear as a mere fad when compared with the long-standing effects of the Inquisition.

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[40] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 48.
[41] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 22.
[42] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 53.

To begin to understand the nature of the Inquisition, one must try to first determine what conversos were being accused of. They were told that they were not true Christians, but were really *Judaizers* or supposed Christians who were practicing Judaism in secret. When converso Pedro de Villegas was accused and brought to trial on January 2, 1484 he testified to the inquisitors as follows:

> I am a loyal and Catholic Christian and have such a reputation. And that I do the works of such a man: I have gone to churches and heard Masses and divine sacrifices; I have confessed and received the Eucharist in times of affliction and at the times so commanded by the Church; I have held, believed, and confessed all that the Holy Church commands us to hold and believe, and commands us to perform and observe.[43]

This statement is what many would consider a textbook definition of a 'good' Christian. However, just having a reputation for being a good Christian was not a good enough defense for a converso. When there was repeatedly a lack of religious evidence, inquisitors had to rely on slight cultural differences on which to accuse conversos of judaidizing. Defendants were brought in for charges such as relaxing on a Saturday since it was the Sabbath or the Jewish day of rest.[44] They were also charged with cutting one's meat a certain way or not eating pork.[45] Sometimes, they were brought in on charges not having to do with them at all, but for being acquainted with the wrong person; thus they were guilty by association as Pedro de Villegas. He was forced to swear in his

[43] Fernando Rodríguez de Barco, "January 2, 1484. Interrogation of Pedro de Villegas for his Defense Witnesses," in *The Spanish Inquistion, 1478-1614: An Anthology of Sources*, ed. and trans. Lu Ann Homza (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2006), 20.
[44] Diego de San Martín, public scribe of Toledo and the Holy Office, "Inquistition Trial of Marina González," in *The Spanish Inquistion, 1478-1614: An Anthology of Sources*, ed. and trans. Lu Ann Homza (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2006), 36-43.
[45] San Martín, "Inquistition Trial of Marina González," 36-40.

testimony, "I never talk with Jews, nor was I raised to have such an inclination."[46] All of the above was not to judge the criteria of what made a good Christian as much as what made a possible secret Jew. Furthermore, "if the crime appears half proven, the inquisitors, in consultation with the *ondinario*, shall consider putting the accused to the question of torture" until accused conversos admitted to whatever crime the inquisitors wanted.[47]

According to historian Henry Kamen, "The basic ignorance of Jewish law shown by the inquisitors meant that by default they accused people of offences which were cultural rather than religious."[48] This fact was extremely frustrating for conversos as they were falsely arrested, imprisoned, and tortured for violations of which Old Christians would never be accused[49] In fact, Old Christians were given much more freedom when it came to religious matters as well. "Blasphemies against Christ, the Virgin, and the mass were (as the inquisitors knew very well) common among the Old Christians. Yet in the anti-conversos trials they carried a mortally heavy assumption of guilt."[50] However, we have seen even when conversos were upstanding practicing Christians, they were treated with as much contempt and suspicion as Old Christians would have treated Jews. An imprisoned Castilian converso, Maria López, best

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[46] Fernando Rodríguez de Barco, "Interrogation of Pedro de Villegas," 19.
[47] Gaspar Isidro de Argüello, "Compilation of Instructions of the Holy Inquisition, Produced by the Very Reverend Lord Friar Tomás de Torquemada, Prior of the Monastery of Santa Cruz of Segovia, First Inquisitor-General of the Kingdoms and Lordships of Spain; and by the Other Most Reverend Lord Inquisitors Who Succeeded Him, Concerning the Order that Must Be Observed in the Exercise of the Holy Office. These Instructions Were Complied... by the Order of the Most Illustrious Reverend Lord Alonso Manrique, Cardinal of the Twelve Apostles, Archbishop of Spain, Inquisitor-General of Spain," In *The Spanish Inquisition, 1478-1614: An Anthology of Sources,* ed. and trans. Lu Ann Homza (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. Cambridge, 2006), 66.
[48] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 39.
[49] San Martín, "Inquistition Trial of Marina González," 45.
[50] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 40.

questioned the purpose of the Inquisition when she lamented "Oh, Holy Lady Mary of Monserate, protect me, Lord Jesus Christ, for I have been a good Christian. Oh, look, Our Holy Lady Mary, why did you consent to such a thing?"[51]

This leads us to question what benefit it was for the Inquisition to target innocent conversos. The same year King Ferdinand took control of the Inquisition, Pope Sixtus IV released his bull that declared

> that in Aragon, Valencia, Mallorca and Catalonia the Inquisition has for some time been moved not by zeal for the faith and the salvation of souls, but by lust for wealth, and that many true and faithful Christians, on the testimony of enemies, rivals, slaves and other lower and even less proper persons, have without any legitimate proof been thrust into secular prisons, tortured and condemned as relapsed heretics, deprived of their goods and property and handed over to the secular arm to be executed, to the peril of souls, setting a pernicious example, and causing disgust to many.[52]

One may think that this was a pure character attack on Ferdinand since he had taken control of the Inquisition away from the Pope. The Pope's statement may also seem increasingly suspect when one notices the contemptuous way he writes about the "secular" prisons and arms. However, this does not take away from the fact that one can discover through Inquisition records that it was mainly upper-class, and upper-middle class conversos who were targeted by the Inquisition. Historians note that "conversos penalized by the Inquisition between 1493 and 1599 came from professional and commercial classes. They held posts ranging from that of mayor and municipal officer to the lesser occupations of

[51] Renée Levine-Melammed, "Maria López: A Convicted Judaizer from Castile," in *Women in the Inquisition: Spain and the New World,* ed. Mary E. Giles (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 70.
[52] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 59.

physician, lawyer, trader, shopkeeper, and manufacturer."[53]The higher socio-economic position of these conversos made them targets of three different groups during the Inquisition.

The first type of people who habitually falsely accused conversos was naturally the ones who were in direct economic and political competition with them, the upper-class Old Christians. As such, there are endless records of conversos defending themselves, saying different variations of the following like "he sold wine and was my neighbor. When I began to sell wine, he became so angry that he threatened me, saying if we did not stop selling it, it would cost us dearly."[54] In the best ruling outcomes, such obvious bias was recorded in the inquisitors' ledger as a side note but was not considered as a valid counter-argument. The fact that most of these upper-class Old Christians were able to make monopolies in places where conversos had been strong economic or political rivals was a fact ignored during Inquisition trials. Furthermore, these same testimonies showed that first-hand accounts were unnecessary, and Old Christians could testify based solely on rumors or hearsay.[55]

The second group of individuals who took their turn to falsely accuse conversos was lower-class Old Christians. Normally, servants or people of lower-class were not allowed to legally bear witness against people medieval society considered their betters. However, the Inquisition lifted the ban to allow Christian servants to testify against their converso masters.[56] Accordingly, records bloomed with accusations from those who were eager to vent resentment in a way society had never

[53] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 30.
[54] San Martín, "Inquistition Trial of Marina González," 43.
[55] San Martín, "Inquistition Trial of Marina González," 37.
[56] Levine-Melammed, *A Question of* Identity, 22.

previously allowed them to do so. The trial of Marina González included a long list of witnesses along with numerous reasons why they would bear false witness against her given by her husband in her defense.[57]

The first witness had been a fired servant in their household who had "said publicly that she would make sure my wife would not come back from Toledo, but would die in the process" in front of the whole neighborhood as she stormed out.[58] This part of his defense best represents the practice of Old Christians who used the Inquisition to settle old personal scores often and successfully. The second character witness against Marina was "a whore, a drunk, a pimp, and most days is worse than addle-headed. A short time ago, in Almargo, they whipped her through the plaza and the streets for being a public pimp."[59] This further proved that the accuser did not even need to be of strong moral or religious character themselves to accuse a converso. The third witness was not only another fired servant, but one who had been dismissed under suspicion of having had an affair with Marina's husband. Apparently, after Marina threw her out she "went away and threatened my wife, calling her a Jewish whore and saying that she would make her burn; she said this to many people who from hearsay will be able to depose against my wife."[60] The fact that a servant was allowed to publically make such threats without fear of repercussion and then later be allowed as a witness against Marina shows a unique power shift in which a lower-class Old Christian held the power of life and death over her rich converso masters. The final witness presents perhaps the most interesting piece of legal evidence that illustrates how conversos were

[57] San Martín, "Inquistition Trial of Marina González," 40-41.
[58] San Martín, "Inquistition Trial of Marina González," 40.
[59] San Martín, "Inquistition Trial of Marina González," 40.
[60] San Martín, "Inquistition Trial of Marina González," 40-41.

treated similarly to Jews. The servant Mayor was a poor Old Christian woman who had initially befriended Marina. Mayor had made a habit of 'asking' for gifts, and when Marina "did not give her what she wanted, she left the house cursing that my wife was a Jewish heretic, and swearing that she would pay her twice over."[61] Mayor extracted bribes from this upper-class converso woman much like Christian noble and royal authorities had taken protection money in the form of specialized taxes from Jewish communities.[62] When Marina refused to pay, Mayor knew exactly what to say to threaten her by calling her a "Jewish heretic", an offense punishable by being burnt to death at the stake. The fact that inquisitors needed little to no real proof to judge conversos as guilty was well known, and a converso in Aranda swore that "most of those burnt by the Inquisition were burnt because of false witness."[63]

The third group which profited quite well from the Inquisition's targeting of conversos was the Crown itself. King Ferdinand must have had incredible foresight when he decided to commandeer the Inquisition since the Inquisitors' Manual stated that "the goods of those heretics shall be confiscated and applied to the Treasury and Exchequer of the King and Queen, our Lords."[64] Almost as profitable were the shake downs during the edict of grace. This was a time period specified for conversos to have a chance to confess without penalty. The Inquisitors' Manual made sure to add in fine print

> Still, if it seems appropriate to the inquisitors – given the quality of the reconciled person, the crimes confessed, and the duration and seriousness of those crimes– then they must order the

[61] San Martín, "Inquistition Trial of Marina González," 41.
[62] Levine-Melammed, *A Question of Identity*, 5-6.
[63] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 41.
[64] Gaspar Isidro de Argüello, "Compilation of Instructions," 69.

> reconciled to give a certain part of their goods as an offering in addition to any other penalties.[65]

This of course gave inquisitors free reign to "order" such an "offering" if it appeared that the accused converso was of a certain "quality," or more commonly referred to as "rich." Between 1486-87, 4,300 conversos made cash payments to inquisitors in an attempt to wipe the slate clean during the edict of grace, and many would consider this bribery a small price to pay if it saved one from a gruesome execution. However, "several were subsequently brought to trial for offense committed after their rehabilitation."[66] In the past, Jews had been able to pay the Crown for protection. However, the converso community found itself in a difficult situation since they had paid the Crown's inquisitors handsomely, yet were called on to defend themselves regardless.

The economic exploitation of conversos tells us a lot about the predatory nature of the Inquisition. However, the punishments meted out to the survivors had the most damaging effects on the converso community as a whole. In this way, the Inquisition sought to determine for that generation and all following generations the social, legal and economic position of conversos in Spain. More important than economics, was the necessity to keep a remnant of the old social hierarchy. It was profitable to make money off conversos, but it was more important that they know their place in the social order.
The first standard Inquisitor's manual was written by Friar Tomás de Torquemada, Prior of the Monastery of Santa Cruz of Segovia and was used as the instructions for standard operating procedure during the

[65] Gaspar Isidro de Argüello, "Compilation of Instructions," 65.
[66] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 59.

Inquisition.[67] Though it did not specify the mistreatment of conversos specifically in writing, the track record of the Inquisition shows the targeted treatment of the converso population and it should be assumed that these were punishments meant for conversos.

When conversos came forward of their own free will, all confessions were to be made publicly; none were allowed to be done in private.[68] This was only to be the start of a drawn-out and degrading series of punishments for all suspected and convicted conversos during the Inquisition. After the confession, conversos were paraded about in public as the victims of insults and ridicules from their on-looking neighbors.[69] During the procession, conversos were to wear a blackened *san benito* (penitential garbs). Afterwards, these would be put on display at the church they attended.[70] This form of psychological warfare served to remind conversos that they were spiritually marked every time they walked through the doors of their church. If conversos chose to stop attending because of this embarrassment, they risked much more than reddened cheeks and an averted gaze. The whole penitential ceremony informed the Old Christian community that these individuals were to be put under constant surveillance for any signs of backsliding for as long as they should live, and when conversos stopped attending church, then the inquisitors were readily informed.[71]

After accused conversos made the processional rounds, the seriousness of their supposed crimes began to set in. They were to be informed that they may not "wear any sort of silk or camlet, nor carry it

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[67] Gaspar Isidro de Argüello, "Compilation of Instructions," 69.
[68] Gaspar Isidro de Argüello, "Compilation of Instructions," 65.
[69] Levine-Melammed, *A Question of Identity*, 23.
[70] Levine-Melammed, *A Question of Identity*, 27.
[71] Levine-Melammed, *A Question of Identity*, 23.

on their clothes or belongings."[72] This was the first social-dividing tool that the inquisitors used to put conversos in a lower-class position. The Inquisition meant to stunt the rising middle and upper-class converso population; so it made sure to deny them access to expensive clothing that may allow them to be mistaken for and treated like upper-class Old Christians. These sumptuary laws were also applied to Jews as well throughout Spain's history, and such class distinctions were even further defined by the "yellow star" badge Jews were meant to wear on their clothing to separate themselves from their Christian neighbors.[73] This was only the first restriction, and others were to prove far more devastating to the converso community than a limited clothing selection.

Any remaining stragglers who had managed to make an admirable living, despite the pure-blood limitations that economically constricted the converso community, were relieved of their professions and positions by the Church. Even after performing the humiliating penitential procession these "reconciled individuals" were never again "to possess public offices or benefices; nor may they be advocates, landlords, apothecaries, spice dealers, physicians or surgeons, or bleeders or public criers."[74] It was one thing to deny conversos' ability to wear expensive clothing, but it showed an amazing level of maliciousness to cut off their ability to afford such luxuries in the first place.

Conversos were no longer protected by the symbols or the reality of high social status. Their safety in a very real sense was to be threatened with further restrictions as well. The medieval period was a dangerous time to be alive, and this went doubly so for conversos who

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[72] Gaspar Isidro de Argüello, "Compilation of Instructions," 65.
[73] Sassoon, "The Spiritual Heritage of the Sephardim," 3.
[74] Gaspar Isidro de Argüello, "Compilation of Instructions," 65.

were no longer allowed to "carry arms their entire lives."[75] Some may argue that these restrictions were only meant to eliminate the political and economic competition that conversos offered in certain urban areas. One might assume that conversos possessed the ability to move on and seek greener pastures anywhere else in Spain's expansive territory. However, a closer study of the restrictions that inquisitors placed on conversos shows that this is not the case.

The accused "may not ride horses," not even when they belonged to someone else.[76] The lack of transportation forcing many to travel on foot coupled with the arms restriction would prove a long and dangerous journey for any converso wanting to start afresh somewhere else. The restrictions went further to eliminate the right to "carry gold, silver, corals, pearls, or other things, nor precious stones." This eradicated the possibility of conversos paying Old Christians from outside of town to guard them or even the ability to pay for sea passage.[77] Not only were conversos essentially economically nullified through employment restrictions ranging from upper-class to lower middle-class professions, but their ability to move and flourish elsewhere became severely limited as well.

We have analyzed expansive evidence in the years leading up to the Inquisition that has proved that conversos were treated equally to Jews. When one considers the economic limitations placed on conversos during the Inquisition, one can notice an amazing similarity in the Expulsion Edict of 1492 when it proclaimed that expelled Jews were not allowed to "export gold or silver or coined money or other things

[75] Gaspar Isidro de Argüello, "Compilation of Instructions," 65.
[76] Gaspar Isidro de Argüello, "Compilation of Instructions," 65.
[77] Gaspar Isidro de Argüello, "Compilation of Instructions," 65.

prohibited by the laws of our kingdoms."[78] Therefore, it appears that the Crown did not want conversos or Jews to leave Spain. Instead, the Crown intended conversos to occupy the lowest stratum of society assigned to them by the Old Christians. These restrictions were written with the intent to help conversos "complete their penances with humility, and feel the pain of their errors," and if conversos did not follow all of them to the letter of the law then they would be labeled as "relapsed" and would be exposed to the dangers of another trial and possible execution.[79]

Working as a tool of the Crown, the real sinister genius of the Inquisition was not only in restricting the social, legal, and economic standing of individual conversos. It was how the inquisitors managed to legally implement the punishment of the offspring of the accused as well. The total population of 'guilty' conversos was not limited to the living who could actually attempt to defend themselves. "Even the deceased were tried and their corpses exhumed and burned at the stake as family members watched."[80] In the midst of these public burnings, one can easily assume that the moral and spiritual reputation of the corpse's family would follow them like a curse for the rest of their lives.

The Inquisition took no chances in the family of the accused escaping real and economic repercussions for this 'relapse' as well. The goods and property of the deceased Judiazer "shall be confiscated and applied to the Treasury and Exchequer of the King and Queen our Lords."[81] This was not limited only to the goods and property that the

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[78] Peters, *Edict,* http://www.sephardicstudies.org/decree.html.
[79] Gaspar Isidro de Argüello, "Compilation of Instructions," 65.
[80] Gretchen Starr-Lebeau, "Mari Sánchez and Inéns González: Conflict and Cooperation Among Cryto-Jews," in *Women in the Inquisition: Spain and the New World*, ed. Mary E. Giles (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 27.
[81] Gaspar Isidro de Argüello, "Compilation of Instructions," 69.

dead had passed on to their heirs, but "their fruits that the condemned left to any heirs and successors in whose power those goods may be found."[82] Therefore, if one used even just a small fraction of their inheritance to invest in any venture then the property, goods, and businesses that their descendents had built would be forfeited to the inquisitors in its entirety. After all, such goods were a spiritually bad seed that needed to be pulled out by its roots even if it had spawned an entire garden on its own through the course of time. The inquisitors directly punished a guilty party's offspring when they ruled that "the direct descendents of the guilty had numerous limitations, ranging from inability to attain public office, bear arms, serve in various professions, and what clothes they might wear"; despite the fact that these conversos were never put on trial to defend themselves, let alone be proven to be anything besides good and honest Catholics.[83] If a family member was guilty, then the association was the only proof the Inquisition needed to judge another converso of being as equally guilty.

The Inquisition, through the direction of the Crown, gives us invaluable insight as to how the royal government was able to unify both local governments and Church authority under its rule. By heading and controlling the Inquisition, the Crown had tested the limits of its power and had not found it wanting for anything. Through the Inquisition, the Crown was able to define once and for all the social, legal, and economic second-class citizenship of the converso community. As one studies the Expulsion Edict of 1492 that followed the Inquisition, it seems that the protection of the converso community could not have possibly been the real reason for the Jews' expulsion from Spain. In fact, what protection

[82] Gaspar Isidro de Argüello, "Compilation of Instructions," 69.
[83] Levine-Melammed, *A Question of Identity*, 27.

the converso community truly needed was from the Crown itself. However, some historians may still attempt to cling to the argument that all the evidence leading up to this point was purely circumstantial. They would argue that the Crown truly cared for the spiritual well-being of the converso community, and at worst they simply pursued the Inquisitorial trials with a certain level of religious overzealousness. Therefore, the most convincing argument that refutes this claim is the evidence of how the Crown handled the Jewish Expulsion of 1492 and the continued mistreatment of the converso community afterwards.

When the Expulsion Edict was posted everywhere throughout Spain, "priests and demagogues roamed the countryside, trying to woo the heavy hearted and despondent exiles to stay, if only they would agree to baptism."[84] After all, if Jews were to join the established converso communities then the edict would no longer pertain to them, and they would not have to leave Spain. We have already analyzed how the Crown restricted Jews and conversos' ability to leave Spain by limiting what economic assets they were allowed to take with them. Even if Spain's Jews were to leave the country voluntarily, the Crown was not about to let the nation's wealth leave with them. This push for the Jews' conversion instead of their actual expulsion became more apparent not only as we have seen at the level of church authority with attempts at mass conversions, but at the level of royal authority as well.

Even seven years after the Expulsion of 1492, the Crown allowed Jews who had left to return if they converted or promised to eventually convert to Christianity.[85] Royal policy had created and enforced an entire Inquisitorial process to root out potential 'Jewishness'

[84] Levine-Melammed, *A Question of Identity*, 43.
[85] Levine-Melammed, *A Question of Identity*, 45.

from Spain's conversos. The whole purpose of the 1492 Expulsion Edict had been a last ditch effort to finish what the Inquisition had allegedly started in protecting the converso community from the Jews' influence. Royal policy had suddenly completely reversed itself the same year of the expulsion, and actively tried to recruit Jews to join the converso community. This total break in logic calls into question why the Crown would want Jews to join the conversos. The nature of their baptism would have been questionable at best, since they would have converted out of a complete lack of options. Theoretically, these future secret Jews would contaminate the converso community that the Crown had worked to purify during the Inquisition for years.

The conversos' welfare in Spain had worsened considerably after the expulsion, and in 1493 King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella noted that Old Christians used "intimidation to the point that some New Christians were afraid to leave the confines of their own houses."[86] This shows that, unlike the victims of mass conversions in the past, Jews would have little to gain by becoming New Christians. It was incredibly dangerous to be a converso, and the Crown had personally seen to it that the conversos' citizenship rights were practically none existent. This second-class citizenship is all that the Jews in question could hope to aspire to. Therefore, given the evidence, one could view the Expulsion Edict of 1492 as a little better than a form of forced conversion. The Crown wanted the best of both worlds. They would have theological dominance by coercing Jews into 'willingly' giving up their religion and submitting to the Catholic faith. This in turn would finish the victory they had begun in Granada at a much deeper and meaningful level. They would also have their cake and eat it too through social, legal and economic

[86] Levine-Melammed, *A Question of Identity*, 47.

dominance over the new conversos by treating them as they had the older ones, and not as 'true' Christians with all the rights and privileges that entailed. In short, they would treat them like second-class citizens. Like Jews.

This was a policy left entirely up to royal authority since the king had fully taken over the functions of the Church in this regard through his control of the Inquisition. Royal authority also benefited from a strong centralized government that Christian Spain had not seen for hundreds of years that allowed for this level of control to be possible. As we have seen from incidents like the declaration of the Bishop of Cuenca, the Crown also had the support of many authorities within the Church who did not agree with the Pope's protective stance on the converso issue, not to mention the endless evidence of anti-converso sentiment that thrived at the local government level as well. All of these factors contributed to the popular support of the Crown's policy towards conversos. Though morally and arguably spiritually reprehensible, it was a brilliant political maneuver that accomplished what the Crown had set out to do: unify Spain under an unwavering devotion to what the Crown interpreted as the Holy Catholic faith.

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