Social Portraits on Conversos. Baptism and Royal Clemency in Medieval Castille (1492-1502)

Marisa Bueno
l'étude de la tradition et de la philosophie) est insuffisante pour l'accession à la vérité, puisque celle-ci impose un saut irréversible d'un univers à un autre. Si seule la révélation peut déclencher ce processus, quelle peut être l'utilité, pour les anciens corégionnaires, d'écrits – souvent très longs – qui n'en présentent que la dimension intellectuelle ? Est-ce bien aux anciens corégionnaires, ou même aux nouveaux, que s'adressent réellement ces écrits ?

IV. Conclusions

L'analyse des témoignages relatifs à des conversions non contraintes de Juifs au christianisme dans l'Espagne des XIVe-XVe siècles – confortée par des textes d'autres périodes et aires culturelles – met en évidence l'existence de deux conceptions distinctes, et plus ou moins antagoniques, de ce phénomène :

- le schéma paulinien qui a deux composantes essentielles : la révélation et la dichotomie qu'elle instaure entre ce qui l'a précédé et ce qui lui succède;
- une démarche personnelle mettant en œuvre la faculté intellectuelle, qui instaure elle aussi, un autre type de dichotomie : entre révélation et raison.

Le premier schéma est embrassé par les convertis et par leur nouvelle communauté, tout en étant partagé par l'ancienne et en pouvant ainsi servir de justification. Le deuxième sert aux anciens corégionnaires à délégitimer la conversion en mettant en cause son authenticité. La dichotomie entre révélation et raison, instaurée par l'étude de la philosophie de type aristotélicien ou averroïste, est perçue comme l'une des causes principales des apostasies/conversions librement choisies en Espagne médiévale et elle suscite, à ce titre, maintes réactions polémiques.

Les convertis ont conscience de l'existence des deux modèles et, lorsqu'ils y réfléchissent, ils accordent la prééminence au premier. Mais au-delà de ces schémas et de leurs implications respectives, les textes qui touchent directement ou indirectement le problème de la conversion évoquent une réalité bien plus complexe. La rupture radicale, impliquée par le schéma paulinien, entre le converti et son ancien ego se traduit plutôt par une tension irrésolue avec l'ancienne identité. De ce point de vue, la conversion apparaît comme un processus toujours inachevé, qui condamne celui qui en fait le choix à une forme de schizophrénie dont il ne peut se départir que par des formes plus ou moins violentes de négation de soi « moi » antérieur et de tous ceux qui l'incarnent. L'histoire de l'Espagne en témoigne.

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Abstract: In this paper, the period between 1492 and 1502 is revisited, re-evaluating the social consequences of the Edict of Expulsion and more specifically the problems arising from the conversion of Jews returning to Castile from Portugal. The return of Jews from Portugal to their former residences and new efforts to re-establish themselves by seeking royal protection in order to recover their property will be examined through the analysis of documents from both the Simancas Archive and the Royal Chancery of Valladolid; in total there are some 50 petitions to the Crown by converts attempting to recover the property they themselves or their parents had initially abandoned in Castile.

Keywords: Conversion, Jews, Castile, late medieval Spain.

Don Yuce de Valladolid was moneylender to several different Castilian town councils, such as Riaza, Gumiel de Izán and Hontoya de Valdeareados. He was the most important converso of Coruña del Conde, where he owned a great deal of property, including land. He lived in Coruña del Conde at the time of the Edict of Expulsion. He decided to go to Portugal, but later came back to Castile, noting his conversion before leaving Castile and the extraordinary circumstances that forced him to leave his land. He argued that he had decided to follow his wife and son, who went to the Kingdom of Portugal in order to be able to practice their religion, and that he convinced them to return and convert to Christianity.

To illustrate the history of Don Yuce we have found several documents from 1492 to 1502. In the first document, the Catholic Kings took Pedro Núñez de Santa Fe – Don Yuce’s name after his conversion – and Nuño Núñez de Santa Fe (his brother), under their protection along with all their properties, and the monarchs ordered the Justices of

1 This paper has been written in the framework of Project RELMIN "The Legal Status of Religious Minorities in the Euro-Mediterranean World (5th-15th Centuries)." The research leading to this publication was funded by the European Research Council under the seventh framework program of the European Union (FP7/2007-2013)/ERC contract N° 249416.

2 Description of the condition of Jews in Portugal by Juan de San Esteban, C. Carreño Parvano, Fontes Historiográficos Reales Castellón, 11, El Tribunal de la Inquisición en el Obispado de Soria (1486-1502), (Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca: Universidad de Granada, 1985), N° 351, 144.
Aranda to restore the converso’s rights. In his absence, various people had taken Don Yuçe’s house, property and loans that he owned in and around Coruña del Conde, and was denounced for non-payment of his debts. On his return as a converso, he was further charged with usury, the charges back-dating some 15 years to cover the whole period in which he had loaned money to the different town councils. He was completely impoverished. He sought and obtained crown intervention, a royal order protecting him from new charges and pardoning any debts. The order was issued by the Catholic Monarchs on February 14, 1493, addressing the authorities of Aranda and its surrounding territory that the debts of Pedro Núñez de Santa Fe should be forgiven. In this document it is shown how Don Yuçe left Coruña del Conde without paying his debts or collecting his loans. He stated that he was Jewish, and that after the Edict of Expulsion he had converted to the Catholic faith in Castile before having left for Portugal. Likewise, he had tried to convince his wife to convert as well, but she had refused and had gone to Portugal. This was the only reason that he had left Coruña del Conde, leaving behind some debts and loans.

It seems that he returned to his village, but was always under suspicion from the Inquisition, and was eventually accused of crypto-Judaism. In the early sixteenth century the Inquisition began to take note of indications that the family was maintaining a Jewish way of life. A converso witness denounced the family. Juana, the wife of Juan Paz, declared that Constanzo Núñez, Pedro Núñez de Santa Fe’s wife, removed the Chalaza portion from the dough when she baked bread, and salted meat to make it kosher. According to maestro Diego, a physician resident in the same village, known in Tomar, Pedro Núñez uttered harsh words against the holy Christian faith. Juan de Remeses, neighbor of Aranda de Duero, stated that in a conversation with Pedro Núñez de Santa Fe, the latter confessed that the only real reason he became a Christian and came back from Portugal was so that he could collect all his loans and debts. Another witness, Francisco de Aranda, a Franciscan monk from Aranda, agreed, arguing that Pedro Núñez told him “he became a Christian to collect his debts and loans, and for this reason only he decided to become a Christian even though he did not really want to be converted to the Catholic faith.”

This was not an isolated example of the problems linked to these “conversions” of Castilian Jews after the Edict of Expulsion. The decree was signed in Granada by the Catholic Kings on March 31, 1492. Spanish Jews had only three months to decide between receiving baptism or selling their houses and properties and enforcing or transferring their debt contracts. Many of them initially decided to go to Portugal, but the harsh conditions there caused them to return to Castile, accepting baptism and “conversion” and seeking royal clemency in order to recover their properties. This in turn provoked a large volume of litigation in Christian courts, as the returning conversos attempted to recover their properties in their home towns, with authorization from royal charters (cartas de seguro). The converso issue was one of the most disruptive and outstanding problems for the Spanish monarchs in the 15th and 16th centuries; in fact some scholars have considered that the Jewish problem had enormous consequences for the relocation of social and religious boundaries in Castilian society.

In this paper, the period between 1492 and 1502 is revisited, re-evaluating the social consequences of the Edict of Expulsion and more specifically the problems arising from the conversion of Jews returning to Castile from Portugal, and to a lesser extent from Navarre. The return of Jews from Portugal to their former residences and their efforts to re-establish themselves by seeking royal protection in order to recover their property will be examined through the analysis of documents from both the Simancas Archive and the Royal Chancery of Valladolid; in total there are some 50 petitions to the Crown by converts attempting to recover the property that they themselves or their parents had initially abandoned in Castile.

I. The Edict of Expulsion and Different Historiographical Visions

On March 31, 1492, Fernando and Isabella signed the Edict calling for the expulsion of the Jews from all their realms by July 31 of the same year. Two different decrees for Castile and Aragon were signed by their respective monarchs, based on a draft written by the Grand Inquisitor, Tomás de Torquemada. If we look at the text carefully, no alternative to expulsion appears to be offered to the Jews. In the edict there is no explicit mention of conversion and baptism as an alternative to exile, but we must look beyond

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3 Archivo General de Simancas (AGS), Registro General del Sello (RGS), Leg.14902,133, September 7, 1492. L. Suárez Fernández, Documentos acerca de la expulsión de los judíos, CSIC (Valladolid, 1964), doc. 221, 468-469.
4 AGS, RGS, Leg.14902,133, February 14, 1493, Suárez, Documentos, N° 244, 506-507.
5 Carretto, El Tribunald de la Inquisición en el Obispado de Soria, Nº 80, 91-92.
6 Carretto, El Tribunald, Nº 90, 102-103.
7 Carretto, El Tribunald, Nº 231, 107.
8 Carretto, El Tribunald, Nº 308, 131, AGS, RGS, 150202, 201.
12 Some of these cases have been mentioned by L. Suárez Fernández, Documentos acerca de la expulsión de los judíos, CSIC (Valladolid, 1964), and by H. Beinart, The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain (The Littmam Library of Jewish Civilisation: Oxford, 2002), 338-412; “Vuelta de los judíos a España despues de la expulsión”, Judíols, sefardíes, conversos. La expulsión de 1492 y sus consecuencias, A. Alcalá, (Ambito: Valladolid, 1995), 181-194.

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the printed decree: it was clear that conversion rather than expulsion was the primary objective, the only way for Jews to remain in their realms. This is confirmed by the chronicler Bernáldez: Fernando and Isabella "ordered that the Holy Gospel and the Catholic faith and Christian doctrine be preached to all Jews of Spain and their realms, and those who wished to convert and be baptized should remain in their realms as their subjects with all their belongings."13

The Edict of Expulsion established that the Jews’ property and loans should be liquidated, allowing them to take them cash, but no other gold or silver objects, nor jewelry. The deadline of just three months was very short, unrealistically so for the collection of debts, while properties were sold off for a pitance. Within a month of the deadline expiring, we come across a host of cases of Jews being accused of trying to smuggle gold and silver out of Castile, a phenomenon studied by Beinard.14 The expulsion also affected Christians who had applied for loans from the Jews but suddenly found their credit had been cut.

The decree is quite explicit as to the reasons for its promulgation: communication between Jews and Christians had led to apostasy and Judaizing. The Edict gave a clear portrait of Jews as incessant propagandists for their religion and enemies of Christianity, with echoes of the theological polemics in force in Spain from the 14th century.15 The book of Alonso de Espina, *Fortalitium Fidei*, was extremely important in the construction of anti-Jewish polemic. His position concerning Jews was imposed over the moderate vision of Alonso de Cartagena, Bishop of Burgos. In his book, Alonso de Espina intension was to provide a manual of arguments that could be used by Christians in ideological battles with the enemies of the Christian faith, and identified the threats to Christian society: heresy, Jews, Moors and the devil. In his second chapter, he denounces both the continuity of Jewish practices among new Christians, and philosophic rationalism, considered as heretical and a menace to Castilian society.17

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15 Concerning the concept of Judaizers, F. Márquez Villanueva, "Sobre el concepto de judaizante: Encuentros y denunciamientos. Spanish Jewish Interactions throughout History*, ed. C. Cervera Parrondo et al. (Tel Aviv University Projects; Tel Aviv, 2000) 12-25. This idea was expressed in the Edict of Expulsion: "...because every day it is found that the said Jews increase in committing their evil and wicked purpose wherever they live and congregate, and so that there will be any place where they further offend our holy faith, and corrupt those whom God has until now most desired to preserve, as well as those who have fallen but amended and returned to Holy Mother Church, the which according to the weakness of our humanity and by diabolical astuteness is in suspicion that continually wages war against us may easily occur unless the principal cause of the same is removed, which is to banish the said Jews from our kingdoms." Translation from E. Peters, *Jewish History an Gentle Memory: The Expulsion of 1492*, *Jewish History*, 9, 1 (1995), 26, other version.

The enemies of the Christian faith and Castile as *armatura omnium fidelium* Fortalitium Fidei, Ms. 154 Archivo y Biblioteca Capitular del Burgos de Osma

The Jews had only three months in which to settle their affairs, with the order stating that the Jews could sell their possessions and take with them their goods other than gold, silver, precious stones, horses and arms. However, the constraints of time compelled many Jews to sell both property and loans for less than their real value.

Several different interpretations have been proposed by scholars to explain the promulgation of the edict. The classical view emphasizes a growing wave of popular anti-Semitism closely linked to an upsurge of religious fervour in Castile, itself linked to the reform movement. Amador de los Ríos explained that the expulsion derived from the "mass support of all segments of the population". This theory was followed and developed by A. Castro, who considered that pressure from the old Christian society led the royal couple to order the expulsion. This theory has been criticized by Bataillon, who considers that a system of mystical beliefs held by a small minority in Spain could hardly inspire mass hostility. From a materialist perspective, Henry Kamen regarded the expulsion as the result of pressure from the feudal nobility and of the class struggle between traditional privileged groups, while Stephen Halcliizer saw the urban gentry in the leading group and explained the expulsion as the consequence of the alliance between the anti-Jewish urban oligarchies and the monarchy.

The whole purpose of the expulsion for Baer was "to excise from the body politic a foreign racial element which the Spanish Christians were unable to assimilate," a measure of religious coercion linked with the Inquisition as an instrument of religious homogeneity and a key to achieving political unity. For authors such as M. A. Laderas or H. Beinard, the real cause was the elimination of crypto-Judaism. The problem of Judaizing conversos was considered a cancer on the Spanish Christian body. The Inquisition proved unable to control relations between new converts and Jews; the only way to avoid contamination was the elimination of the Jewish presence. José Pérez held a similar position, arguing for religious reasons and inquisitorial pressure.

Luis Suárez considered the Edict of Expulsion as a cohesive measure necessary for the Catholic Monarchs’ political project of creating a modern state. In this sense,


T. Azcona, Isabel la Católica (Madrid, 1964), 642.


religious unity was one of the priorities of the political programme, and the Inquisition was created not as an ecclesiastical tribunal but rather as a political instrument for controlling religious problems.

It is difficult to give a precise number of exiles from Castile, but if we accept the Jewish total for Castile as being around 70,000 persons in 1492, following the analysis of Suárez y Ladero Quesada, it is possible that over half of these emigrated; but indeed it is possible that in the end, emigration from Castile may not have been much more than 30,000 persons.

2. Baptism and Conversion or Expulsion

Conversion was an old problem in Iberia that must be considered in terms of the extensive scholarly debates about the nature of the Spanish converso population, which analyze the subject as the result of both missionizing and socio-political pressure before the expulsion and after 1492 as the only alternative to expulsion. The conversion to Christianity of many thousands of Jews caused by the massacres, forced disbursements and segregations that marked the period between 1391 and 1492 produced a violent destabilization of traditional religious identity in medieval Castile. The expulsion did not solve the converso problem, but intensified the contradiction between the external religion that Jews were compelled to embrace through forced baptism, and the inner beliefs of the newly baptized. For decades the Inquisition persecuted Judizers, expecting hypocrisy and false conversion.

When dealing with conversion, the profound changes in attitudes towards the Jews and conversos that took place during the later medieval period must be taken into account. It could be accepted that in the thirteenth century, Spain enjoyed a period of relative tolerance, but despite this tolerance some anti-Semitic archetypes were present in Castilian society. Forced conversion in this period was not allowed in the legislation of Alfonso X "the Wise." The Jews are seen as souls to be saved by Christ, so peaceful methods of converting Jews are emphasised in Las Siete Partidas. This idea was
glossed by Don Juan Manuel in the Libro de los Estados (Book of States), informing us that “Jesus Christ never ordered anybody to be killed nor forced anyone to take his own law, because he does not want forced service, but rather that it is done freely and in good grace”; it was also reflected in Castilian laws even during periods of the most oppressive legislation against minorities, for example Catherine of Lancaster’s law of 1412, issuing under the influence of Vicente Ferrer’s preaching in Castile in 1411-1412.

“If any Jewish men or women or Moorish men or women, inspired by the Holy Spirit, decide to be baptized or converted to the Catholic Faith, they should not be converted by compulsion or by force to our Catholic faith; they should be converted neither by Moors, nor Jews nor Christians, whether man or woman, whether they are their father, mother or brothers, nor by any person they are indebted to. Whoever disobeys this disposition or goes against it in any way should be sentenced with the severest punishment, both criminal and civil, possible by law.”

This optimistic vision was echoed by the fifteenth-century converso and royal secretary of Juan II, Fernán Díez de Toledo, when he defended the equality of conversos and old Christians through baptism. He argued that baptism made the baptized a new person, cancelled any obligation of atonement and eliminated their previous blame and sin. However, peaceful conversion was not easily achieved, and peaceful persuasion turned into conversion under pressure, facilitated by the intransigent positions of the mendicant orders and the eschatological belief that all infidels would be converted to Christianity before the last day. But, despite conversion during and after the persecutions of 1492, during the campaign of Vicente Ferrer and during and after the expulsion, the converted Jews were always under suspicion from Old Christians, and came under the control of the Inquisition, which was charged with detecting false conversions.

In the Biblical lexicon, conversion involves “returning to the starting point”, “turning back”, a changing of position and behaviour, but in Christian terms it involves becoming a new creature in the image of Christ. This change was proven through ritual baptism, the ritual providing the convert with a new name and symbolizing rebirth into a new spiritual community. But the efficacy of baptism was called into question. The mass conversions produced between the end of fourteenth and during the fifteenth century were described by Bernáldez as “sprinkling”, which was later supplemented by a priest with additional baptisms. In this case the baptisms of conversos were invalidated because they had no effect, and because of Judaising.

Sometimes such baptisms also had legal consequences, such as dissolving existing marriages or affecting the ability to inherit. Concerning marriage, different opinions were held by rabbis and Christian institutions: for the rabbis, a sanctified marriage remained valid but a convert was allowed to leave his or her partner. In the words of Shelomo ben Abraham ben Adret, the Jewish spouse should flee the convert as one “would a serpent” in order to avoid giving birth to a “child of violence” who might oppress the Jews. In 1415, Benedict XIII (Papa Luna) allowed all couples in this situation to continue living together for a year after the date of conversion. During this time the Christian spouse might convince the recalcitrant partner.

However, in the examples we are going to analyze, it is difficult to evaluate the sincerity of conversions which were necessarily couched in ritualized notarial expressions written by Christian notaries, such as: “Our Lord Jesus Christ was pleased to light up the true path for our conversion into Christians.” Once baptized, though, the converts could claim back their previous property and seek clemency to return to Castile.

The Catholic monarchs did not employ cruel and shocking measures to force Christianity upon the Jews as was done in Portugal a few years later. An intense campaign of preaching and exhortations began during the weeks following the Edict, promising benefits to those who were baptized. According to Bernáldez, “many sermons were preached in all the synagogues and in the squares and churches and in the countryside, by the learned men of Spain.” There is a report concerning Luis de

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“Jesus Cristo nunca mando que matasen nin aprensasen a ninguno porque tomase la suya le, que no quiere servir forzado, sino el que face de buen talante y de buen grado”, Don Juan Manuel, Libro de los Estados, ed. Robert Brian Tate, (Castilla: Madrid, 1991) Cap. XXX.


“Otroas, si algunos judíos o judías, o moros o moras por inspiración del Espíritu Santo, se quisieren bautizar o tornar a la santa fe católica, que no sean tenidos ni embargados por fuerza ni por manera a la santa fe católica, que no sean convertidos por moros ni por judíos, ni por cristianos, a veremos como mujeres, aunque sea padre o madre o hermanos, o otra cualquier persona, agora se dendo con él o non: e que aquel que contra esto viniere, o el contrario ficiere, se proceda con ellos a las mayores penas, así civiles como criminales, que se fallieren por derecho”, Fernández y González, Estado social, doc. LXVI, 400-409.

He used the theological arguments of Alonso Díez de Montalvo against the status of “blood purity” in Instrucciones del rey for the bishop of Cuenca Lope de Barrrientos. See the text of Instrucciones del rey, Alonso de Cartagena, Defensorium Unitatis Christianae, ed. P. Manuel Alonso (Madrid, 1943).

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Señoría’s negotiation with the Jewish community of Torrijos and Maqueda when conversion and baptism was proposed instead of exile. In case of conversion they would be well taken care of and supported if they stayed.\(^{47}\) The monarchs also encouraged conversion, enacting certain laws for the benefit of converts, promising them aid and protection and exempting them, for a time, from the control of the Inquisition in order to accustom them to their new faith. According to Bernáldez, only a few of the Jews converted, and among them only the poorest.\(^{48}\) This theory was criticized by Baer, who considered that Bernáldez’s only intention was to prove how stubborn the Jews were and that they were not deserving of mercy.\(^{49}\) Contemporary sources like Abraham Salomon Ardishki considered that “most of the Jews and their great men and their nobility and their magistrates remained in their homes and converted...a chief among the multitude of heretics was the rabbi of the Spanish community, the Rabbi Don Abraham Senneor and his children, and there were thousands and ten thousands of like occurrences...”\(^{50}\) This argument is not original to Spanish Jews; in Sicily “a great part of Sicilian Jewry and the upper classes embraces Christian religion.”\(^{51}\)

During this period there was a lot of conversion. All available municipal records contain lists of the names of those who converted during these months. One of the most famous cases of conversion is the rabbi Abraham Senneor. He was Court Rabbi of Castile and royal tax-farmer in chief. He was so highly respected by the grandees that in 1480 he presented him with 50,000 maravedís from the revenues collected through his agency. In the farming of the royal taxes he associated with Isaac Abrabanel, who soon became his intimate friend. During the war between Castile and Granada, especially in the conquest of the city, Senneor rendered the Spanish army valuable services as a factor-general. When the decree expelling the Jews from Spain (March 31, 1492) had become generally known, Senneor, together with Isaac Abrabanel, hastened to the queen implored her to spare them. They were not heeded, however, and Senneor yielded to the queen’s request to abandon his brethren; Isaac preferred exile. On June 15, 1492, Senneor and his son-in-law Mayr Malamed were baptized in Valladolid, the king and queen and the Archbishop of Spain acting as sponsors. They then assumed the name of Fernand Núñez Coronel, and Fernando Pérez de Coronel, respectively.\(^{52}\) Subsequently, Senneor became a member of the Royal Council and treasurer to the Crown Prince. Indeed, his conversion led to the social advancement of his family, increasing their wealth during the late fifteenth and throughout the sixteenth centuries, and their integration into Segláu’s urban oligarchy and the Castilian elite. Fernando Pérez de Coronel (previously, Mayr Malamed) became associated with Luis Alcala, thus creating one of the most important money-lending businesses.\(^{53}\)

In other cases Jewish families did not accept conversion and preferred exile, as indeed was the case with Isaac Abrabanel’s family. In this particular case they had to sell their properties and cash in their loans. Thus they gathered together one million maravedís and were authorized to leave with up to a thousand ducats of gold and silver from the port of Valencia.\(^{53}\)

Contemporary sources tell us that in the early summer of 1492 Portugal was flooded with 93,000 Castilian Jews. Andrés Bernáldez describes this exodus, and the different new lands where they emigrated\(^{54}\); in the case of Portugal it seems that it was not the final destiny for all of them, from the hundreds of families that had gone to Portugal, much of them shipped to Italy, Turkey or they decided to convert, be baptized and return to Castile. According this author, 30,000 Jews departed from Zamora and crossed the border passing through the Portuguese town of Miranda do Douro, 3000 Jews departed from Benavente passing through Berganza, 35,000 Jews decided to leave Castile from Ciudad Rodrigo passing through Villar, 15,000 departed from Miranda de Alcántara and 10,000 departed from Badajoz passing to Portugal through Maroa.\(^{55}\) The admission of such an influx of refugees was almost impossible; Portugal could not afford such a move that would create chaos and disequilibrium from socioeconomic, health and religious perspectives. Nevertheless, João II who needed money to finance Portuguese’s North African campaigns decides to admit the Jews. Most of them obtained a license and were admitted for an eight month period for a payment of eight Cruzados, but remained socially excluded until their final expulsion in 1496. Only important families were admitted on permanent basis negotiating a special fee.\(^{56}\) Such harsh conditions were the principal reason why so many chose to return to Castile, seeking protection by royal decrees.

\(^{47}\) AGS, Diversos Castilla, leg. 8, fol. 127: “Las cosas que vos Luys de Sepulveda avia de placar os Gravilo de Tapia e con Gomes Robles y con os otros mis criados son las siguientes: 1 Primeramente entender con los judíos de Maqueda y Torrijos si se queroan tomar cristianos, y los que se tomaran cristianos serán ayudados y bien tratados”, Sánchez Fernández, Documentos, N° 213, 454.

\(^{48}\) Bernáldez, Memorias, Cap. CX. “Los judíos rechos hacia la corona de la salda de los judíos pobres, y usaban los usos con los otros medias curios, aless que en ninguna manera se quisieron convertir, salvo algunos, muy pocos de los mas necesitados.”

\(^{49}\) Baer, History of the Jews in Christian Spain, II, 510.

\(^{50}\) A. Ardashki, Avverse Zikarvan, ed. G. Scholem, Qiryat Sefer, VII (1930), 457.


\(^{55}\) Netanyah, Don Isaac Abravanel, 54-56.

\(^{56}\) Bernáldez, Memorias, Cap. CX, 255-264. He shows a detailed discussion of the distribution of the emigration.

\(^{57}\) Bernáldez, Memorias, Cap. CXI, 265.

3. For Those Who Decided to Convert and Come Back to Castile... Royal Clemency

The end of tolerance in Portugal and later in Navarre in 1498 encouraged a reverse exodus of those who had previously converted to Christianity. The difficulty of surviving in exile, added to the harsh conditions in Portugal and the subsequent expulsion in 1495, contributed to a large re-emigration that is difficult to quantify. Ferdinand and Isabella, who had always defended conversion rather than expulsion, actively encouraged the return of exiles. They issued different edicts granting royal protection for those who decided to convert and request royal mercy. One of the first applications for such treatment was issued in Barcelona by a group of Jews from Zamora, on 10 November 1492. This letter serves as a model for most of the subsequent decrees and describes how the return was to be carried out. As part of the narratio in the document's structure, firstly they should recognize the error of their ways, then, "knowing the mistake of their religion, the Holy Spirit they wanted to come back to Castile and be converted to the Holy Catholic Faith." The Crown accepted the petition and established the conditions for their return: they needed to come back reproducing exactly the same route they had taken months ago, being baptized either in Portugal or in any one of these Castilian crossing-points (Badajoz, Ciudad Rodrigo or Zamora). In any case, their baptism should be witnessed by the local authorities and local bishop, who should certify the conversion, thus avoiding any fraudulent claims. They guaranteed for the returns that "the houses and goods that they sold and left to be returned to them by the persons who presently hold them, at the price paid for them, paying extra only improvements." The edict of "return and conversion" was not limited in time and it should be viewed as a response to specific pleas.

In this spirit the Crown issued a second order on 30 July 1493. These conditions were established for Jews in general coming from both Navarre and Portugal, and later, on 20 March 1498, following the Jewish expulsion from Portugal in 1496, the Catholic Monarchs likewise granted a protection letter to all the Jewish families who wanted to come back to Castile and Aragon after their conversion.

On 5 September 1499 the Crown forbade the return of Jews to Spain and imposed the death penalty for those who decided to return, unless they declared in advance their intention to convert to Christianity.

Concerning returnees, we find a wide variety of scenarios, each family's circumstances being different. Many of the returnees were relatively modest money-lenders, artisans and shop-keepers from different Castilian towns, each seeking through royal clemency to recover their properties. In other documents, though, we come across widows who had lost their husbands in Portugal, sons and daughters who had lost their parents, and in general families made desperate by the harsh conditions of their exile. However, another example would be that of the relatively wealthy family of Jacout Galtón, who, on 18 April 1493, obtained permission to return to Segovia. After his baptism he was known as Pedro Sáez de la Concha and, as a rich money-lender, controlled a Shylock figure by his debtors, figures in a huge number of cases brought to the Crown Court.

The return was a long process and it is difficult to quantify how many came back to Castile. Partial analysis has been done for different Castilian cities, for example in Toralaguna, north of Madrid "approximately half of those who left returned." In other cases, such as San Martín de Valdegóis, also near Madrid, or Palencia, scholars report that the Jews returned both from Portugal and Africa but gives no figures of the proportion. Nevertheless, we may follow several cases of emigrants who decided to convert and the different reasons that they gave for returning to their home lands. Nonetheless, in all the documents analysed, the structure is the same: the documents were issued by Castilian authorities, and relate how the Jews declared their religious error and their intention to be converted to Christianity. All of them seek permission and obtained protection. Through some of these letters, we explored the different situations of those who returned from exile.

a. The Converted Exile Reclaiming the Property of Their Ancestors

Converts made claims for property under-sold by their parents or relatives at the time of the expulsion. The process of family property claims by converts is huge; nephews legitimately claimed the properties of their uncles, and relatives recovered property and possessions sold at low prices by their families at the time of the expulsion. In all cases there are common patterns: families who went into exile together, some of whom decided to convert, return and recover their properties. The documentation emphasizes the idea of conversion by divine inspiration in tune with Spanish legislation.

The decree of expulsion came into force on 31 July and the first claims date from 8 August 1492, barely a week later. This is the case with Antón Rodríguez from Herrera de Pisuerga, who "was Jewish but became a Christian, while his father and mother remained Jews and went out from Castile, leaving behind their houses and properties in the town and its surroundings, such as houses, vineyards, lands... all of which could be..."

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59 AGS, RGS, LEG149211, 40, November 10, 1492, Suárez, Documentos, N° 231, 487-488.
60 AGS, RGS, 149307, 51, July 30, 1493, Suárez, Documentos, N° 288, 536-527.
62 The Edict of Expulsion from Portugal was issued by King Manuel in Muga, 5 Dec 1496 and deportees were given ten months to depart, Amador de los Ríos, Historia social, 1009-1010.
63 AGS, RGS, 149909, Suárez, Documentos, N° 266, 534-535.
64 AGS, RGS, LEG149304, 21, cit. Suárez, Documentos, 513; Beinart, The Expulsion, 338-339.
66 F. Cantera Burgos, "La judería de San Martín de Valdegóis", Séforad, 29 (1969), 217-232, "a considerable number of Jews who returned from exile and rebuilt their lives".
67 P. León Tello, La judería de Palencia, Publicaciones de la Institución Tello Téllez de Meneses, 25 (1967), 1-169.
68 EGS, RGS, 149307, 51, July 30, 1493, Suárez, Documentos, N° 231, 487-488.
reclaimed by him according to the law for becoming Christian and being the legal heir. Likewise he could inherit the property of his siblings and relatives (up to the third degree) if they had left Castile and Castilian jurisdiction.68

Sometimes claims focused on recovering properties sold by Jews for a pitance at the time of expulsion but subsequently reclaimed by relatives arguing abuses and misfeasance. This is the case with María de Acosta, daughter of Osu Namias from Brihuega (Guadalajara), who reclaimed her father’s properties in 1495:

“Know that Fernando Brihuega, resident of this town, told us that he bought some houses and some vineyards in this village from Osu Namias for 200 hundred reales at the moment of the expulsion, and that he sold his own houses in Cogolludo in order to pay him. Later he had to sell the purchased houses, but now María de Acosta, daughter of Osu Namias, reclaim from him the houses and vineyards arguing that they were sold at half price.”69

We may follow the history of some cases between 1492 and 1495 in different Castilian towns, like the case of Francisco Madrid, a converso from Ávila who claimed all the properties sold by his mother in the village of Santa Olalla near Toledo,70 the case of Diego Sánchez, a converso from Coruña del Conde who made a claim to recover the dowry of his daughter, who had been widowed in Portugal and subsequently converted,71 or the petition of Juan Martínez de Valagón in his own name and in the name of his nephews in order to recover their house, sold at the time of the expulsion to Luis Velasco, lord of Balerado, “cavallerone cuna poderoso.”72

Sometimes the request was presented by a legal representative, like the case of Fernando Contreras of Ávila, in the name of Guismar of Toledo, María of Toledo and her brother Fernando Álvarez, both minors, all of them the offspring of the deceased Rabbi Maoz and his wife Cad Buena, for houses sold to Alonso Vargas at the time of the expulsion.73

In certain cases we find women who had decided to go into exile following their parents or husbands, but after the death of their relatives they were widowed or orphaned in Portugal and decided to convert to Christianity and sought royal protection to come back to Castile. In other cases, the entire family went into exile and then decided to come back together after their conversion. This is the case with María Gómez, from Huete (Cuenca), wife of Juan Gómez and daughter of Ysaco Tainzim. She had gone into exile with them. The family returned to Spain and converted to Christianity, and some time later Ysaco Tainzim died. María was the sole heiress of her father and she petitioned the Crown for permission to repurchase her father’s property, which he sold at the time of expulsion for the same sum that he had received for it. The new owner was opposed and wanted a higher price. On 19 March 1493 the Catholic Monarchs instructed Sancho Frías, the Corregidor, to do justice and arrange the return of the property.74

Other cases can be reviewed, such as that of María de Acosta, resident of Hita, reclaiming her father’s property sold him at the time of expulsion. She departed into exile with her father who had sold a house, parts of a vineyard, casks of wine, household effects and other items for less than their value to Fernando de Cogolludo. When her father died, María was alone in Portugal and decided to come back, seeking royal protection in order to recover her father’s property for the same value at which he had sold it, although the new owner was opposed. The Crown granted the return of the property in April of 1495.75 Similar circumstances faced María Díez and Violante Álvarez, who claimed all the property previously belonging to their Jewish relatives, sold by them at the time of the expulsion.76

In other cases they made claims to recover the full price of their properties sold for a song at the time of expulsion, as is shown in the petition by the converso Francisco López of Ayllón, who tried to recover the full price for his father-in-law’s properties that had been sold for a low price at the time of the expulsion.77

b. Original Owners Recovering Properties

In other cases we find the original Jewish owners claiming their property after conversion. The case of Doctor Cãçaque Abuacar is illustrative of the example of many who converted to Christianity, returned to Castile from Portugal, and petitioned the Crown for the return of their property, in return for the price paid at the time of the expulsion and compensation for improvements. Cãçaque Abuacar was a physician and he and his wife went into exile to Portugal, bringing with them all their books in Hebrew and Arabic, important sources for his profession. In Portugal they decided to convert and to come back to their native hometown. When they converted, the Crown assented to return their property and related claims, granting them royal protection and allowing them to return to Castile and recover their property at the same price for which they sold it, adding compensation for improvements and increased value. They could retain all their books “in Hebrew and Arabic they wanted, excepting those book concerning Moses and his law or commentaries about them.”78

Many Jews from different Castilian towns were baptised and obtained royal protection to come back to their home lands and recover their own property. Different letters were issued by the Catholic Monarch in order to protect the new conversos. We

68 AGS, RGS, LEG. 149208, 180, Suárez, Documentos, No. 216, 459-461.
69 AGS, RGS, LEG. 149903, 262.
70 AGS, RGS, LEG. 149307, 286, Suárez, Documentos, No. 257, 525-526.
71 AGS, RGS, LEG. 149930, 299, Suárez, Documentos, No. 246, 509-510.
73 AGS, RGS, LEG. 149904, 211, P. Lecu Tello, Judios de Avila, (Avila, 1963), 293.
74 AGS, RGS, LEG. 149303, 226, cit., Suárez, Documentos, 509; Beinart, The Expulsion, 344.
76 AGS, RGS, LEG. 149303, 293; AGS, RGS, LEG. 149405, 78, cit. Suárez, Documentos, 509.
77 AGS, RGS, LEG. 149409, 86, cit. Beinart, The Expulsion, 382.
78 AGS, RGS, LEG. 149301, 52, Suárez, Documentos, No. 242, 504-505; Beinart, The Expulsion, 242.
find some examples of recent converts in Luna (León) protected by the bishops of León, Astorga and Oviedo and the Countess of Luna.\footnote{AGS, CCA, Diversos Castilla, 149208, 98, Suárez, Documentos, N° 239, 498-500.}

Many Jews from Plasencia went into exile in Portugal and sold their houses, vineyards, lands and property to Christians. A group of deportees composed of Diego Pérez, Igino López, Diego Ruiz, Fernán Gutiérrez and Vasco Chomiquen converted in late 1492 and decided to come back to Plasencia. They made a claim to the Crown to recover their property at the same price they had received for it, with additional payment for improvements. The Crown accepted the appeal on 10 August 1493 and ordered the correder of Plasencia to restore this property to the new conversos.\footnote{AGS, RGS, 149308, 164, cit. Beinard, The Expulsion, 358.} The Crown also ordered the return of the property of the recently converted Alonso García of Balsián, upon his return from Portugal, on condition that he pay back the amount he received from buyers, plus compensation for improvements and expenses.\footnote{AGS, RGS, 149310, 32, cit. Beinard, The Expulsion, 364.}

We found 79 similar cases in Beinart’s analysis and 17 in the study of Luis Suárez. This was a very common situation for all those who decided to convert.

But not all converts’ claims for recovering properties sold at the time of expulsion were fruitful. It is easy to find cases in which some converts, taking advantage of the favourable conditions they enjoyed, attempted to improve their economic situation by initiating fraudulent claims, which could easily succeed if they went unchallenged. One example is the trial of Isaque Barquete, known as Diego Hurtado, a furrier from Guadalajara. He alleged that his neighbour, Gonzalo del Castillo, had bought from him some houses at the time of the expulsion valued at 50,000 maravedís, but paid only half their value. For the remainder he signed a letter of credit for 1,660 maravedís per annum until the total – minus improvements valued at 5,000 – was met. Isaque Barquete now claimed the 25,000 maravedís Gonzalo owed at the time of the expulsion. The judge initially ruled in favour of Isaque Barquete, but Gonzalo del Castillo refused to pay, arguing that he had contributed more than 25,000 maravedís in improvements because the house was almost a ruin. Gonzalo del Castillo appealed, arguing that Isaque Barquete had never even left Castile, and so had no need to settle his debts. The Royal Chancery appeal judge ruled in favour of Diego del Castillo, agreeing that the seller had never left Castile.\footnote{Real Chancery of Valladolid, Registro de Ejecutorias, Box. 135, 30.}

c. Devolution of Income and Debts

The decree of expulsion surprised many Jews who were creditors or debtors and had a very limited time to settle their business and recuperate their loans. In this case the Jews who decided to go into exile transferred the payment of their loans to conversos who continued functioning as lenders. An example of this is found in Ciudad Rodrigo, near the Portuguese frontier, where the Jew Yuqe Abu Yuxen transferred the recovery of a debt to the convert Antonio de Paz. The debtor, Alfonso Bocán of Salamanca, subsequently appealed against the transfer, but was unsuccessful, and it is only because of his appeal that we know of the case.\footnote{AGS, RGS, LEG.1493, 116.}

On other occasions, the transfer of debts led to much litigation as returning Jews found themselves liable for debts they regarded as having been settled. This was the case for the converso Francisco Sánchez de la Cueva from Cuéllar, who owed some money to the Duke of Alburquerque before the expulsion and had settled his debt by transferring some loans to the Duke. However, on his return to Cuéllar, the Duke’s heirs claimed the money was still owed to them. In this case the converso requested royal clemency explaining his situation.\footnote{AGS, RGS, LEG.149301, 248, cit. Beinard, The Expulsion, 340.}

4. Remission of Penalty for Crossing the Border with Gold and Silver or Illicit Goods

The authorities took note of smuggling activities at the time of the expulsion at crossing points between Spain and Portugal. The Crown intended not only to punish the delinquents who removed items forbidden by the Edict of Expulsion, but also to punish those who advised and helped them smuggle valuables out of the country. Those Jews who had gone into exile with forbidden items could seek royal permission to come back to their hometowns. In those cases, the safe-conduct letters issued by the Catholic Monarchs to all Jews who left Castile carrying gold, silver, jewellery and other items forbidden by the Edict of Expulsion are also worthy of attention. Whereas the preceding cases were legitimate claims by converts who wanted to recover their property, the following cases involved royal pardon for infringement of the rules governing the expulsion. Several cases indicate the high social profile of the conversos who requested royal clemency and royal protection to return to their hometowns with all the precious metals they had taken to Portugal.

When Don Mayr from Plasencia, promising to convert, asked for royal clemency and protection to come back to his hometown, he also requested that he be allowed to return with the gold, silver and jewellery he had previously and illicitly taken to Portugal. On 3 March 1493, the Catholic Monarchs granted him protection and royal mercy, dependent, of course, on his conversion.\footnote{AGS, RGS, LEG.149303, 65, Suárez, Documentos, N° 248, 512-513.}

Also well known is the case of Jacob Galifón and his sons Levi and Abraham, from a very important family in Ávila. All the family converted, Jacob becoming known as Pedro Juárez de la Concha and his sons Cristóbal and Fernán. All of them asked for royal clemency and protection to move back to Ávila with all their illicit wealth, and once again, on 4 April 1493, the Crown assented.\footnote{AGS, RGS, LEG.149304, 21, cit. Beinard, The Expulsion, 338.}
All these letters had the same structure as those seen earlier: the monarchs recognized and acknowledged the conversion; the conversos were baptized in Portugal or in the three Spanish frontier towns; the bishop and other local authorities certified the baptism; and the returnees followed the same route they had taken when they left Castile.

4. Status of Converts in Castilian Towns

Those who stayed behind (and converted), whether wealthy families like the Coronelas or more modest ones, were relatively successful in terms of maintaining their status and property, even though there were often doubts about the authenticity of their conversion. By contrast, the small landowners who returned from exile in Portugal encountered a much more complex situation. Their attempts to recover their properties provoked tension and envy, reflected in an edict of 27 October 1493, issued by Isabella and Ferdinand to the authorities of the dioceses of Osuna, Cuenca and Sigüenza, which refers to the Christian perception of the conversos: "they were insulted and called Jews, tornadizos and other names and for this reason neither they nor their servants dared leave their houses. They complained about this situation and sought special protection from the Monarchs." 87

Such intervention by the monarchy was not an isolated case. On 26 March 1493, there was an outbreak of violence against the converts in Alcalá de Henares, and as a result the Catholic Monarchs ordered the local authorities to protect the victims. These conversos had complained about their situation, some of them having been insulted and beaten by their Christian neighbors, while others had been wounded or even killed. They were insulted on a daily basis when going to the butcher's and they were marginalized and victimized by the priest of the church of Santiago in his sermons. 88

Despite the trust invested by the monarchy in the conversion process, a series of measures were implemented to monitor the situation of the conversos and ensure the authenticity of their Christianity. At the end of 1493 the Catholic Monarchs issued a special law – cédula real – containing all the measures that the priests and corregidores should apply in Castilian towns in order to promote the Christian religion in the newly converted. 89 Compulsory indoctrination was introduced in different towns to combat the suspicion of false conversion, as is made clear in a letter dated 20 October 1496 to the judges of Burgos preventing the conversos from farming out their loans until they had completed a three-year long period of indoctrination into the Catholic faith. 90

Years later the fear of false conversion and contamination was still reflected in royal dispositions, as is clearly shown in Isabella and Ferdinand’s 1500 decree governing...

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87 AOS, RGS, LEI.149310, 146, Sudest, Documentos, N° 260, 528-529.
88 AOS, RGS, 149512, 173.
89 Published by A. Millares Carlo, Índice y extractos del Libro Horadado del Consejo madrileño (siglos XV-XVI) (Madrid,1927), N° 167, 37.
90 A. García Gallo, Libro de las bulae y las pragmaticas de los Reyes Católicos (Madrid, 1973), XVI-XVI.
91 bam XVII-XVIII.
93 M. Orfali Levi, Los conversos españoles en la literatura rabínica: problemas jurídicos y opiniones legales durante los siglos XII-XVI, (Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, Salamanca, 1982).
94 TO BE OR NOT TO BE A JEW (1999)
95 ONCE MORE TO BE OR RECONCILING JUDEA
There were no enquiries into an appeal for protection. The policy of the Catholic Monarchs was to promote conversion and the return of the old Jews with “a new faith.” Despite this original intention, the construction of the Judio-converso’s identity by the Christian theologians and the civil authorities was a phenomenon with a development parallel to that of the idea of heretic.\(^4\) Conversos were always under suspicion, were considered by the Inquisition to have converted in the context of heresy, and were therefore a threat to Christian Spanish society in the 16th century.

**Doubtful Origins: Conversion to Judaism in Provence and Catalonia (XII\(^{th}\)-XIV\(^{th}\) Centuries)**

Nadezda Koryakina

**Abstract:** This paper addresses the issue of proselytism as discussed in the responsa literature of Southern France and Catalonia in the XII\(^{th}\)-XIV\(^{th}\) centuries. Sephardic writings provide scant and mostly negative references to conversions actually taking place. In the present paper it will be shown that, in fact, Sephardic sages give sufficient notice to describe the attitude of Spanish Jewish tradition towards proselytism by accepting the Jewish faith, proselytes entered Jewish communities and gained the right to marry and to hand down legacies to other Jews. However, their real status was very different from that granted by Jewish tradition. They were not considered to be equal to other members of Jewish communities and, due to a number of causes, they were small in number.

**Keywords:** Jewish proselytism, responsa literature, XII\(^{th}\)-XIV\(^{th}\) centuries, Southern France, Catalonia, Sephardic Jews.

Beginning with Marcel Simon, the phenomenon of conversion to Judaism in late antiquity has been well-studied.\(^1\) Louis H. Feldman mentioned a certain Domnus who converted from Christianity to Judaism during the persecutions of Christians in Egypt at the beginning of the third century, as well as a number of converts referred to in Dio Cassius.\(^2\) Norman Golb in his study showed through the investigation of old Hebrew manuscripts that Jewish proselytism continued into the early Middle Ages.\(^3\) He

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\(^3\) N. Golb, *Jewish Proselytism – A Phenomenon in the Religious History Early Medieval Europe, The Tenth Annual Rabbi Louis Feinberg Memorial Lecture* (University of Cincinnati, 1987), p. 1. See also:
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TO BE OR NOT TO BE A JEW

On Conversion to or Renunciation of Judaism

Andrei Cornea & Manuela Stanclu, editors