The Jews in Christian Europe

A Source Book · 315–1791

Jacob Rader Marcus
Marc Saperstein

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE PRESS
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH PRESS
The Spanish Inquisition Begins Operations

1481

The Spanish Holy Office, or Inquisition, was an ecclesiastical court that inquired into heresy and watched over the morals of Catholics. In this it followed ideological and procedural precedents established some two hundred and fifty years earlier by the institution which moved the investigation of heresy from the jurisdiction of local bishops to the control of the papacy. The medieval Papal Inquisition was responsible for what has been called "the criminalization of heresy," with its investigation of individuals suspected of repudiating established Church doctrine and its most severe punishments implemented by the state. What was new in the late fifteenth century was to give the monarchs direct control over the entire procedure.

Despite widely held misconceptions of the Spanish Inquisition as one of the paradigms of anti-Judaism, like its papal model it had jurisdiction only over Christians, with no authority over Jews per se unless they were engaged in activities such as influencing conversos to judaize. Only a Christian could be a "heretic," not a Jew. It was established in Castile by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, with papal authorization, primarily in order to watch over the conversos (or to use the pejorative term, Marranos), many of whom were accused of practicing Jewish rites and customs, which was permitted for Jews, but was a heresy for Christians. Some of them were great-grandchildren of Jews who had converted during the riots of 1391, but they were still called "New Christians" by many.

Three different dates are listed in the document below. November 1, 1478 was the date of the papal bull Exorti inueniisse devotionis affectus, which — in
response to a direct request from the "Catholic Monarchs" — authorized the appointment of Inquisitors to investigate heresy in Castile. The second date, September 25, 1480, almost two years later, shows that the monarchs did not rush precipitously into action before officially launching the new institution. The third, January 1, 1483, is the date on which the Inquisitors formally publicized the royal decree, and announced their new mission. Following an established tradition, the Dominicans (also known as the Order of Preachers) played a major role in combating threats to the purity of the Christian faith, although the two friars appointed as Inquisitors appear not to have been selected from the intellectual elite of the order.

As the Inquisition began its activities, many of the conversos actually supported the idea, convinced that the investigation and punishment of a minority of insincere Christians would establish their own bona fides. But the effect of this institution, which eventually spread to the New World, was to undermine the security of a large group within Spanish society, as more than a few sincere Christians were caught in its web. In addition, the Inquisition would play a significant role in the justification for the expulsion of all Jews from Spain, as evidence for the spread of heresy, allegedly the result of Jewish initiatives, would be cited in the Edict of Expulsion.

28.1 Investigating Conversos

Rome, November 1, 1478

Seville, January 1, 1483

I, frair Miguel de Morillo, master in holy theology, and frair Juan de San Martin, bachelor in theology, from the order of preachers of St. Dominicus, the judges-inquisitors of the corrupt heresy, have been appointed by the King and Queen of Castile and Aragon, our lords, by virtue of the apostolic authority granted by Pope Sixtus IV, which is hereby enclosed in the letter of appointment by Their Majesties, which reads as follows:

Don Fernando and Dona Isabella, by the grace of God King and Queen of Castile, Aragon... Sicily, Teledo, Valencia, Galicia, Mallorca, Seville [a long list of other principalities and regions]... send you, the honorable priests, frair Juan de San Martin... and frair Miguel de Morillo... peace and blessing.

Know that our Holy Father [Pope Sixtus IV], indicating that in some districts, cities, villages and settlements in our kingdoms and domains were and still are found bad Christians, men and women, infidels and heretics who were baptized and received sacraments of the holy baptism without compulsion or pressure. Bearing only the name and appearing as Christians, they returned and are still returning to the wrong faith and perjury of the Jews, observing the ritual of their religion, Jewish rituals and customs. They abandoned and left the true faith, the honor of our holy Catholic Faith and its commandments which must be kept and believed by every loyal Christian. [With little fear of God and disdainfully forsaking the Holy Mother Church, they have incurred the sentences and censures of excommunication and other punishments that the apostolic instructions and precepts have established for such people.]

The result is that not only these bad and non-believing Christians have remained and persist obstinately in their heresy and blindness, but also their sons, daughters and other descendants and all those who come in touch with them learn from them and stain themselves through the same lack of faith and heresy.

At our request, His Holiness gave us permission to elect and appoint two or three bishops and archbishops, or honest and just men who are priests, secular or religious, above forty years of age, whose life-style is honest and who are men of conscience, [who were Masters or Bachelors in Sacred Theology, or Doctors in Canon Law, or licensed graduates certified by a stringent examination,] to act as inquisitors in any part of our kingdoms and domains... in any place we choose they will investigate and open proceedings against those who sinned and were stained by heresy and disbelief. They will also act against their supporters and helpers [of such judicious heresy]. They can punish them by using their judicial right and the authority given to them by law and also according to the custom as ordinary ecclesiastical judges and inquisitors investigating heresy...
Given in the village of Medina del Campo, twenty-seven days of the month of September in the year 1492 of the birth of our Lord and deliverer Jesus Christ, I, the King, I the Queen; I Gaspar de Arino, the secretary of the King and Queen have ordered to write it in accordance with their command. Registered. Diego Vasquez, Chancellor…

Bibliography

Surveys
Bureau, 13:31–44; Ben-Sasson, 588–90; EI: "Inquisition: The Spanish (Until 1493)," "Statuts IV (Pope)."

Studies

Additional Sources

The Expulsion from Spain

In the spring of 1492, shortly after the Moors were driven out of Granada, Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain formally announced the expulsion all the Jews from their lands and thus, by a stroke of the pen, put an end to the largest and most distinguished Jewish settlement in Europe. The expulsion of this intelligent, cultured, and industrious class was a milestone in the history both of Spain and of the Jewish people. Following the expulsions from England and from France, this would leave all of western Europe (with the exception of Portugal, which would follow suit five years later) without any Jewish population.

The first text is the official Edict of Expulsion, which presents a clear rationale justifying the refusal to allow Jews to remain: the accusation of a massive Jewish outreach program to the conversos, exploiting every opportunity to bring them back to their Jewish roots. The evidence for this assertion is said to be in the inquisitorial accounts of conversos prosecuted for judaizing. Yet there is no consensus among scholars as to whether this was the sole, or even the main justification, or whether it was a cover for other underlying pressures and goals. Was it the religious zeal of Isabella? Was it Ferdinand’s desire to solidify a base of royal power, using religion as a pious work of cruelty? Did the impetus for the expulsion come from the Crown, or were the king and queen pressured by other forces: the nobility, the conversos who wanted to protect themselves against the accusations of judaizing, or the Inquisition - created by the Crown, but quickly emerging as a force that the Crown could no longer fully control? Since it was clear that many Jews would convert to Christianity in order to avoid the need to leave Spanish soil, would that not intensify the very problem that the Edict was supposed to resolve, the
problem of insinucre, judaizing Christians? Was the expulsion planned long in advance, with preparatory policies establishing the groundwork, or was it decided upon hastily following the capture of Granada? These are questions that continue to be debated.

The account that follows the Edict presents a detailed and accurate picture of the expulsion and its immediate consequences for Spanish Jewry. It was written in Hebrew by an Italian Jew in April or May, 1492.

39.1 The Edict of Expulsion, 1492

1. Lord Ferdinand and Lady Isabella, by the grace of God, King and Queen of Castile, Leon, Aragon, Sicily, Granada, Toledo, Valencia, Galicia, the Balearic Islands, Seville, Sardinia, Cordoba, Corsica, Murcia, Jaen, of the Algarve, Algaciras, Gibraltar, and of the Canary Islands, count and countess of Barcelona and lords of Biscay and Molina, dukes of Athens and Neapetria, counts of Rousillon and Cerdanya, marquises of Cristian and of Gociano, to the prince Lord Juan, our very dear and much loved son, and to the [other] royal children, prelates, dukes, marquises, counts, Masters of [Military] Orders, priors, grandees, knight commanders, governors of castles and fortified places of our kingdoms and lordships, and to councils, magistrates, mayors, constables, district judges, knights, official scribes, and all good men of the noble and loyal city of Burgos and other cities, towns, and villages of its bishopric and of other archbishoprics, bishoprics, dioceses of our kingdoms and lordships, and to the residential quarters of the Jews of the said city of Burgos and of all the aforesaid cities, towns, and villages of its bishopric and of the other cities, towns, and villages of our aforementioned kingdoms and lordships, and to all Jews and to all individual Jews of those places, and to barons and women of whatever age they may be, and to all other persons of whatever law, estate, dignity, preeminence, and condition they may be, and to all to whom the matter contained in this charter pertains or may pertain. Salutations and grace.

2. You know well, or ought to know, that whereas we have been informed

that in these our kingdoms there were some wicked Christians who Judaized and apostatized from our holy Catholic faith, the great cause of which was interaction between the Jews and these Christians, in the Cortes which we held in the city of Toledo in the past year of one thousand, four hundred and eighty, we ordered the separation of the said Jews in all the cities, towns and villages of our kingdoms and lordships and [commanded] that they be given Jewish quarters and separated places where they should live, hoping that by their separation the situation would remedy itself.

Furthermore, we procured and gave orders that inquisition should be made in our aforementioned kingdoms and lordships, which as you know has for twelve years been made and is being made, and by it many guilty persons have been discovered, as is very well known, and accordingly we are informed by the inquisitors and by other devout persons, ecclesiastical and secular, that great injury has resulted and still results, since the Christians have engaged in and continue to engage in social interaction and communication they have had and continue to have with Jews, who, it seems, seek always and by whatever means and ways they can to subvert and to steal faithful Christians from our holy Catholic faith and to separate them from us, and to draw them to themselves and subvert them to their own wicked belief and conviction, instructing them in the ceremonies and observances of their law, holding assemblies at which they read and teach that which people must hold and believe according to their law, achieving that the Christians and their children be circumcised, and giving them books from which they may read their [Jewish] prayers, and declaring to them the facts that they must keep, and joining with them to read and teach them the history of their law, indicating to them the festivals before they occur, advising them of what in them they are to hold and observe, carrying to them and giving to them from their houses unleavened bread and meats ritually slaughtered, instructing them about the things from which they must refrain, as much in eating as in other things in order to observe their law, and persuading them as much as they can to hold and observe the law of Moses, convincing them that there is no other law or truth except for that one. This proved by many statements and confessions, both from those same Jews and from those who have been


2 The copy of the edict that has been preserved was directed to the bishopric of Burgos; presumably other copies of the same Edict were sent to the other great cities of the royal realms.

3 The first effort to address the problem was through separation of living districts, with Jews consigned not to a ghetto surrounded by a wall, but to a juderia (Jewish Quarter), in order to diminish interaction with Christians.

4 This accusation is especially astonishing, in every conscience would have known that — unlike the other acts of judaizing — this one was undeniable.
perverted and enticed by them, which has rebounded to the great injury, detriment, and opprobrium of our holy Catholic faith.\footnote{The source of information for these accusations is apparently the confessions of those brought before the Inquisition, who may have found it useful to blame the influence of Jews for their sins.}

3. Notwithstanding that we were informed of the great part of this before now and we knew that the true remedy for all these injuries and inconveniences was to prohibit all intercourse between the said Jews and Christians and banish them from all our kingdoms, we desired to content ourselves by commanding them to leave all cities, towns, and villages of Andalusia where it appears that they have done the greatest injury, believing that that would be sufficient so that those of other cities, towns, and villages of our kingdoms and lordships would cease to do and commit the aforesaid acts.\footnote{The expulsion from Andalusia in 1492, the third policy mentioned to address the problem, is thought by some historians to have been a way of testing the waters for the universal expulsion.}

And since we are informed that neither that step nor the passing of sentences of condemnation against the said Jews who have been most guilty of the said crimes and delicts against our holy Catholic faith have been sufficient as a complete remedy to obviate and correct so great an opprobrium and offence to the faith and the Christian religion, because every day it is found and appears that the said Jews increase in committing their evil and wicked purpose wherever they live and congregate, and so that there will not 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 had fallen but amended and returned to Holy Mother Church, the which according to the weakness of our humanity and by diabolical astuteness and suggestion that continually wages war against us may easily occur unless the principal cause of it be removed, which is to banish the said Jews from our kingdoms.

Because whenever any grave and detestable crime is committed by members of any organization or corporation, it is reasonable that such an organization or corporation should be dissolved and annihilated and that the lesser members as well as the greater and everyone for the others be punished, and that those who perturb the good and honest life of cities and towns and by contagion can injure others should be expelled from those places and even if

4. Therefore, we, with the counsel and advice of prelates, great noblemen of our kingdoms, and other persons of learning and wisdom of our Council, having taken deliberation about this matter, resolve to order the said Jews and Jewses of our kingdoms to depart and never to return or come back to them or to any of them.\footnote{The expulsion applies not only to Aragon and Castile, but to all the locations specified at the beginning of the document.}

And concerning this we command this our charter to be given, by which we order all Jews and Jewesses of whatever age they may be, who live, reside, and exist in our said kingdoms and lordships, as much those who are natives as those who are not; who by whatever manner or whatever cause have come to live and reside therein, that by the end of the month of July next of the present year, they depart from all of these our said realms and lordships, along with their sons and daughters, maidservants and maid-servants, Jewish families, those who are great as well as the lesser folk, of whatever age they may be, and they shall not dare to return to those places, nor to reside in them, nor to live in any part of them, neither temporarily on the way to somewhere else nor in any other manner, under pain that if they do not perform and comply with this command and should be found in our said kingdom and lordships and should in any manner live in them, they incur the penalty of death and the confiscations of all their possessions by our Chamber of Finance, incurring these penalties by the act itself, without further trial, sentence, or declaration.

And we further command and forbid that any person or persons of the said kingdoms, of whatever estate, condition, or dignity that they may be, shall not dare to receive, protect, defend, nor hold publicly or secretly any Jew or Jewess beyond the date of the end of July and from henceforth forever, in their lands, houses, or in other parts of any of our said kingdoms and lordships, under pain of losing all their possessions, vassals, fortified places, and other

\footnote{This is an absolute order, binding on all Jews; no choice of conversion to Christianity as an alternative for remaining in Spain is specified. Yet it was understood that the edict would not apply to those who converted, as they would no longer be Jews but Christians.}
inherances, and beyond this of losing whatever financial grants they hold from us by our Chamber of Finance. 10

5. And so that the said Jews and Jewesses during the stated period of time until the end of the said month of July may be better able to dispose of themselves, and their possessions, and their estates, for the present we take and receive them under our security, protection, and royal safeguard, and we secure to them and to their possessions that for the duration of the said time until the said last day of the said month of July they may travel and be safe, they may enter, sell, trade, and alienate all their movable and rooted possessions and dispose of them freely and at their will, and that during the said time, no one shall harm them, nor injure them, nor wrong shall be done to them against justice, in their persons or in their possessions, under the penalty which falls on and is incurred by those who violate the royal safeguard. 11 And we likewise give license and faculty to those said male and female Jews and Jewesses that they be able to export their goods and estates out of these our said kingdoms and lordships by sea or land as long as they do not export gold or silver or coined money or other things prohibited by the laws of our kingdoms, excepting merchandise and things that are not prohibited. 12

6. And we command all councils, justices, magistrates, knights, squires, officials, and all good men of the said city of Burgos and of the other cities, towns, and villages of our said kingdoms and lordships and all our new vassals, subjects, and natives that they preserve and comply with and cause to be preserved and complied with this our charter and all that is contained in it, and to give and to cause to be given all assistance and favor in its application under penalty of [being at] our mercy and the confiscation of all their possessions and offices by our Chamber of Finance. And because this must be brought to the notice of all, so that no one may pretend ignorance, we command that this our charter be posted in the customary plazas and

10 Following the dire consequences (capital punishment) for Jews who remain in the royal realms beyond the deadline, the edict turns to Christians, who will be severely punished for aiding and abetting such Jews.
11 A strong guarantee of royal protection for the Jews until the deadline, providing a clear message that no Christian should infer that it is open season to attack Jews and their possessions.
12 The Jews did not need to leave penitently. Hard currency could not be taken from the royal realms, but other forms of movable wealth could be taken, including the possibility of bills of exchange that would be honored by merchants in lands of destination. Disposing of immovable property was more difficult in a buyers’ market.
13 The first Spanish visitation was in 1396.
14 The forty-nine days between the second of Purim and Shavuot are called Omer days. The actual decree of expulsion was signed March 31 and announced the 30th of May, the 19th day
that the most generally accepted estimate is 50,000 families, or, as others say, 55,000.15 They had houses, fields, vineyards, and cattle, and most of them were artisans. At that time there existed many [talmudic] academies in Spain, and at the head of the greatest of them were Rabbi Isaac Abaib in Guadalajara, 16 Rabbi Isaac Veçuld in Leon, and Rabbi Jacob Hábib in Salamanca.17 In the last named city there was a great expert in mathematics, and whenever there was any doubt on mathematical questions in the Christian academy of that city they referred them to him. His name was Abraham Zecuto.18...

In the course of the three months' respite granted them they endeavored to effect an arrangement permitting them to stay on in the country, and they felt confident of success. Their representatives were the rabbi, Don Abraham Senoso, the leader of the Spanish congregations, who was attended by a retinue on thirty mules, Rabbi Meir Melemel, who was secretary to the king, and Don Isaac Abravanel,19 who had fled to Castile from the King of Portugal, and then occupied an equally prominent position at the Spanish royal court. He, too, was later expelled, went to Naples, and was highly esteemed by the King of Naples. The aforementioned Rabbi Isaac of Leon used to call this Don Abraham Senoso: "Sonet Or,"20 because he was a heretic, and the end proved that he was right, as he was converted to Christianity at the age of eighty, he and all his family, and Rabbi Meir Melemel with him. 21 Don Abraham had arranged the negotiations between the King and the Queen. The Queen was the heiress to the throne, and the King one of the Spanish nobility. On account of this, Don Abraham was appointed leader of the Jews, but not with their consent.

An agreement permitting the Jews to remain in the country on the payment of a large sum of money was almost completed when it was frustrated by the interference of a prior who was called the Prior of Santa Cruz.22 Then the Queen gave an answer to the representatives of the Jews, similar to the saying of King Solomon, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water. God directs it to whatever He wishes" (Prov. 21:1). She said furthermore: "Do you believe that this comes upon you from us? The Lord has put this thing into the heart of the King."

When they saw that evil was determined against them by the King, they gave up the hope of remaining. But the time had become short, and they had to hasten their exodus from Spain. They sold their houses, their landed estates, and their cattle for very small prices, to save themselves. The King did not allow them to carry silver and gold out of his country, so that they were compelled to exchange their silver and gold for merchandise of cloths and skins and other things.23

One hundred and twenty thousand of them went to Portugal, according to a compact which a prominent man, Don Vidal Benveniste de la Cavalleria, had made with the King of Portugal, and they paid one ducat for every soul, and the fourth part of all the merchandise they had carried thither; and he allowed them to stay in his country six months. This King [John I, 1481-1495] acted much worse toward them than the King of Spain, and after the six months had elapsed he made slaves of all those that remained in his country, and banished seven hundred children to a remote island [São Tomé, off the coast of Africa] to settle it, and all of them died. Some say that there were twice as many. Upon them the Scriptural word was fulfilled, "Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, etc." (Deut. 28:52). He also ordered the congregation of Lisbon, his capital, not to raise their voices in their prayers, that the Lord might not hear their complaining about the violence that was done unto them.

Many of the exiled Spaniards went to Muslim countries: to Fez, Tlemcen, and the Berber provinces, under the King of Tunis. On account of their large numbers the Moors did not allow them into their cities, and many of them died in the fields from hunger, thirst, and lack of everything. The lions and beasts, which are numerous in that country, killed some of them while they

---

15 This would be about 250,000 persons. Other estimates run from 100,000 to 800,000.
16 Probably the greatest Spanish rabbi of his day.
17 Later author of a famous collection of the non-legal parts of the Talmud, the Ein Yovel.
18 This famous astronomer encouraged the expedition of Vasco da Gama.
19 Abravanel (1427-1504) was the most distinguished Jewish leader of the age, an important convert and one of the greatest of Jewish biblical commentators. In his introduction to one of the commentaries he provides a similar account of activities in response to the Edict.
20 "Heir of Light," a Hebraic pun on Senoso. Senoso was actually highly respected by the Jews of Castille, until his decision - at age 80 - to remain in Spain by converting to Christianity.
21 Senoso and his son-in-law, Meir, were converted on June 15, 1492. Ferdinand and Isabella were among the sponsors.
22 Legend relates that Torquemada, Prior of the convent of Santa Cruz and Chief Inquisitor, thundered, with crucifix aloft, to the king and queen: "Judge hastened sold his master for thirty pieces of silver. Your Highness would sell him anew for thirty thousand. Here be 16, take him, and bear him away."
23 Ever since 1492 Jews and gentiles were forbidden to export precious metal, the source of a nation's wealth.
lay starving outside of the cities. A Jew in the kingdom of Tlemçen, named Abraham, the viceroy who ruled the kingdom, made part of them come to this kingdom, and he spent a large amount of money to help them. The Jews of North Africa were very charitable toward them. A part of those who went to North Africa, as they found no rest and no place that would receive them, returned to Spain, and became converts, and through them the prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled, "He spread a net for my feet, he turned me backward" (Lam. 1:11). For, originally, they had all fled for the sake of the unity of God; only a very few had become converts throughout all the boundaries of Spain; they did not spare their fortunes; indeed, parents escaped without having regard to their children.

When the Edict of Expulsion became known in the other countries, vessels came from Genoa to the Spanish harbors to carry away the Jews. The crews of these vessels also acted maliciously and meanly toward the Jews, robbed them, and delivered some of them to the famous pirate of that time who was called the Corsair of Genoa. To those who escaped and arrived at Genoa the people of the city showed themselves merciless, oppressing and robbing them; the cruelty of their wicked hearts went so far that they took the infants from the mothers' breasts.

Many ships with Jews, especially from Sicily, went to the city of Naples on the coast. The King of this country was friendly to the Jews, received them all, and was merciful towards them, and he helped them with money. The Jews who were at Naples supplied them with food as much as they could, and sent around to the other parts of Italy to collect money to sustain them. The Marranos in this city lent them money on pledges without interest; even the Dominican Brotherhood acted mercifully toward them. On account of their very large numbers, all this was not enough. Some of them died by famine, others sold their children to Christians to sustain their life. Finally, a plague broke out among them, spread to Naples, and very many of them died, so that the living wept of burying the dead.

Part of the exiled Spaniards went over sea to Turkey. Some of them were thrown into the sea and drowned, but those who arrived there were received kindly by the King of Turkey, as they were artisans. He lent them money and settled many of them on an island, and gave them fields and estates.44 A few of the exiles were dispersed in the principalities of Italy, in the city of Ferrara, in the [papal] states of Romagna, the March, and Patriminum, and in Rome....

May the One who said unto His world "Enough" also say "Enough" unto our sufferings, and may He look down upon our impotence. May He turn again, and have compassion upon us, and hasten our salvation. Thus may it be God's will!

Bibliography

Surveys


Studies


Gutwirth, Eleazar, Abraham Semoen: Social Tensions and the Court Jew, Michael 11 (1989): 169–219. Along with Beinart [below], the most extensive analysis in English of this important leader before his decision to convert in order to remain in Spain.


---

44 The Turks needed smiths and makers of munitions for the war against Christian Europe.
Additional Sources

Marz, Alexander, "The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain: Two New Accounts," JQR, n.s. 20 (1908), 240–56; JQR, n.s. 2 (1911–1912), 257–58. This is the complete account of which the second passage is an extract.


Historical Fiction


in this almost all the Jews, who, as we before observed, had been converted
to Christianity, were cruelly massacred.1

The affair was as follows: Most of the citizens had left the town because
of the plague, and many French, Belgian, and German ships had arrived
there at this time. On the nineteenth of April [Sunday afternoon about
3 o’clock] many of those who remained in the city went to St. Dominic’s
church to attend divine service. On the left side of this church is the Jesus
Chapel, much frequented by people at their devotion. Placed above the
altar is a representation of Jesus on the cross, and the hole, representing the
wound in our Savior’s side, had a glass cover. When many people had fixed
their eyes and attention on that wound, a lucid brightness shone from it. On
this appearance many said it was a miracle and that the divinity testified his
presence by a wonderful sign.

One of the Jews, who not long before had taken upon himself the profes-
sion of Christianity, with a loud voice denied it to be a miracle, adding that
it was very unlikely that a piece of dry wood should show forth a miracle.2
Many indeed doubted of the truth thereof; yet considering the time, place,
and congregation, it was highly imprudent for anyone, especially a Jew, to
ever endeavor to convince people of a mistake, when they were firmly persuaded
the thing was true. The populace, naturally headstrong, inconsiderate, and
apt to be struck with anything that appears marvelous, upon hearing that a
Jew derogated from the credit of the miracle, began to raise an uproar. They
called him a pernicious, wicked betrayer of religion and an outrageous and
malicious enemy of Christ, and declared him worthy of torture and death.

Their fury arose at last to such a degree that, falling on this unhappy wretch,
they dragged him by his hair into the marketplace before the church, where
they tore him to pieces, and making a fire, threw his body into it.3

All the common people flocked to this tumult, and a certain monk made
a speech too well adapted to their temperament at the time. In this he excited
them with great vehemence to avenge the impiety of the Jew. The mob, too
apt of their own accord to be outrageous, by this means became the more
transported with fury. At the same time, two other [Dominican] monks, hold-

1 In a manner inconsistent with Church doctrine, the author refers to those who had been
baptized nine years earlier as “Jews.”
2 A German Catholic who was also in the church and he saw nothing unusual.
3 The mob was excited also because the king had that very day freed some New Christians
arrested for celebrating the Passover.

other word calling out: “Heresy, heresy! Avenge the heresy, and extinguish
the wicked race!”4

The French and German sailors quickly came ashore, and having joined
the Portuguese, they committed great havoc. This cruel massacre was begun
by five hundred, who were later joined by others. Transported with madness
and boiling with rage, they fell upon the wretched Jews, of whom they killed
great numbers, and threw many half alive into the flames. By this time several
fires were kindled near the place where the first offender had been burnt, for
the mob, moving about the streets with eagerness and alacrity, had brought
fuel from all parts, so that nothing might be wanting to execute this horrible
design.5 One would think that the shrieks and outcries of the women, to-
gether with the piteous supplications of the men, might have softened the
most savage hearts into pity; but the protagonists in this horrid scene were
so divested of humanity that they spared neither by sex nor age, but wreaked
their fury on all without distinction; so that above five hundred Jews were
either killed or burnt that day.

The news of this massacre having reached the country, next day [Monday,
April 30] more than a thousand men from the villages flocked into the city
and joined the murderers, and the slaughter was renewed. The Jews, being
under the greatest terror, hid themselves in their houses; but the blood-thirsty
rabble broke open the doors, rushed in upon them, and butchered men,
women, and children in a most barbarous manner; they dashed the infants
against the walls, and, dragging all out of doors by the feet, threw them into
the fire, some quite dead, and others still breathing life.

Such insensibility overwhelmed this wretched people [the converse vic-
tims] that they were scarce able to lament their ruin or deplore their misery;
but, those who lay concealed, though they beheld their parents or children
dragged away to torture and death, dared not even utter a mournful groan,
for fear of being discovered. In short they became so stupefied with terror
that there was little difference between the living and the dead. Their houses
were plundered, and the bloody rioters carried off great quantities of gold and
silver and several other things of value. The French put their booty aboard
their ships, and had it not been for the desire of plunder, many more would

4 The Dominicans were warned against the New Christians as heretics and wanted to introduce
the Inquisition into Portugal.
5 German sailors brought more fuel when the supply ran low.
have been murdered that day. Several of the Jews, both young and old, fled to the altars for refuge, and taking hold of crosses and the images of saints, in a most suppliant manner implored the divine protection; but the fury of this abandoned rabble proceeded to such a length that, without any regard to religion, they broke into the churches, and, dragging the Jews from thence, either cruelly butchered or threw them alive into the fire.

Several who resembled this people in their looks were in great danger and some were actually killed on that suspicion, while others received many wounds and blows on the same account. Some took this opportunity to vent their malice upon those against whom they had a pique by asserting they were Jews, and before the falsity could be confuted, satiated their revenge by their blood. The magistrates did not have the spirit to oppose the fury of the multitude; however, many worthy persons preserved, with great fidelity, Jews who fled to them for shelter and concealed them in places of safety. Yet above a thousand were massacred this day.

The third day [Tuesday, April 21] those inhuman barbarians returned again to the slaughter; but they scarcely found any to murder, for most of the Jews who survived had either saved themselves by flight or lay safely concealed; yet some slaughter was committed. On these three days above two thousand of the Jewish race were murdered. In the evening Ayres de Sylva [chief justice] and Alvaro de Castro [governor of the civil court], men of the first distinction, who presided in the courts of judicature, came with guards into the city; their arrival put a stop to the fury of the mob. The French and Germans repaired to their ships with a considerable booty and set sail with all possible speed.

D. Manuel, having got account of this massacre, was inflamed by rage and immediately dispatched Diogo de Almeida [Prior of Cenite] and Diogo Lebo [da Silveira, Baron of Alvir] to Lisbon with full power to punish the perpetrators of this horrid villainy. Many now suffered for their madness and cruelty. The monks who had stirred up the people to slaughter, being first in a solemn manner degraded from the priestly office and dignity, were afterwards strangled and burnt. Those who appeared remiss in restraining the popular fury were partly stripped of their honors, and partly fined; and the city was deprived of several privileges.

---

6 The mob did go out of its way to plunder and butcher the hated conserto tax collector João Rodriges Macarenbon, described at length in the German account of the massacre.

---

Bibliography

Surveys
Baron, ii:143–49; Ben-Sasson, 570–71, 631; Ef.: "Lisbon: Persecution and Expulsion."

Studies
Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim, The Lisbon Massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the Shebet Yehudah (Cincinnati: HUC Press, 1976). The narrative of the events written by Solomon ibn Verga is presented on pp. 1–31 the rest of the book incorporates other contemporary Portuguese and German narratives.

Additional Sources

Historical Fiction
The Spanish Inquisition at Work 1568

The Spanish Inquisition authorities, fearing the influence of the unconverted Jews upon the conversos, were instrumental in securing the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. Thousands of these Jews, however, converted to Christianity in order to avoid expulsion at this time, and thereby also came under the jurisdiction of the Holy Office, which watched, tried, and punished them for judaizing.

The question of whether the conversos in 1492 and the following generations were predominately "crypto-Jews," pretending to be Christians but secretly observing as much of the Jewish tradition as possible, or whether once converted they were content to live as Christians and retained Jewish practices and aversions simply as follow-ups, remains fiercely debated by historians. At stake is the nature of the Inquisition. To the extent that judaizing was rampant in Spain, by the doctrines of the Catholic Church the Inquisition was validated and necessary. The alternative – that genuine observance of Jewish practices in order to retain Jewish identity was a marginal phenomenon – suggests that the Inquisition served the function not of addressing a religious crisis but of destroying much of the "New Christian" population, which was essential for making substantial inroads into all areas of Spanish society and culture.

The following account, translated from the Spanish, deals with Elvira del Campo, who in 1567 was caught practicing Jewish rites. She was tried in Toledo for not eating pork and for putting on clean linen on Saturdays. She admitted so doing, but although she was of Jewish origin she denied any intention of committing heresy. Character witnesses, including clergymen, testified that she was a good Christian. She probably was. Her Jewishness consisted simply of not eating pork and of observing some of the Sabbath customs because when eleven years of age her mother had so enjoined her.

Her father and her husband, evidently both of Christian origin, knew nothing of all this. The witnesses who testified against her, servants and neighbors, said she went to mass and confession, was kind and charitable but would not eat pork. The chief witnesses were two of her husband's employees who lived in the house and had spied about the kitchen and in the cupboards. She was arrested early in July 1567, while she was pregnant; her baby was born the end of August in prison and the case was not taken up again till the winter. We do not know what happened to the infant. On April 6, 1568 she underwent her first torture, a moderate one. Below is the official report of this torture as made by the secretary of the Inquisition. It is rather stunning to see the apparent care with which every detail of the investigation through torture was recorded.

This selection has been chosen, not merely because it gives an authenticated picture of the Inquisition at work, but also because it demonstrates how it was possible for the authorities to get innocent people to "confess" to the most horrible of non-existent crimes, such as the poisoning of wells and the murder of children for religious purposes.

31.1 The Trial of Elvira del Campo

She was carried to the torture-chamber and told to tell the truth, when she said that she had nothing to say. She was ordered to be stripped and again admonished, but was silent. When stripped, she said, "Senores, I have done all that is said of me and I bear false witness against myself, for I do not want to see myself in such trouble; please God, I have done nothing." She was told not to bring false testimony against herself but to tell the truth. The tying of the arms was commenced; she said, "I have told the truth; what have I to tell?" She was told to tell the truth and replied, "I have told the truth and have nothing to tell." One cord was applied to the arms and twisted and she was admonished to tell the truth but said she had nothing to tell. Then she screamed and said, "I have done all they say.

Told to tell in detail what she had done she replied, "I have already told the truth." Then she screamed and said, "Tell me what you want for I don't know what to say." She was told to tell what she had done, for she was tortured because she had not done so, and another turn of the cord was ordered. She cried, "Loosen me, Senores, and tell me what I have to say, I do not know
what I have done. O Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!" Another turn was
given and she said, "Loosen me a little that I may remember what I have to
tell; I don’t know what I have done; I did not eat pork for it made me sick; I
have done everything: loosen me and I will tell the truth." Another turn of
the cord was ordered, when she said, "Loosen me and I will tell the truth; I
don’t know what I have to tell — loosen me for the sake of God — tell me what
I have to say — I did it; I did it — they hurt me Señora — loosen me, loosen me,
and I will tell it."

She was told to tell it and said, "I don’t know what I have to tell - Señor I
did it — I have nothing to tell — Oh my arm! release me and I will tell it." She
was asked to tell what she did and said, "I don’t know; I did not eat [pork]
because I did not wish to." She was asked why she did not wish to and replied,
"Ay! loosen me, loosen me — take me from here and I will tell it when I am
taken away — I say that I did not eat it." She was told to speak and said, "I did
not eat it, I don’t know why." Another turn was ordered and she said, "Señor,
I did not eat it because I did not wish to — release me and I will tell it." She
was told to tell what she had done contrary to our holy Catholic faith. She
said, "Take me from here and tell me what I have to say — they hurt me — Oh
my arms, my arms! — which she repeated many times, and went on: "I don’t
remember — tell me what I have to say — Oh wretched me! - I will tell all that
is wanted, Señor — they are breaking my arm — loosen me a little — I did
everything that is said of me."

She was told to tell in detail truly what she did. She said, "What am I
wanted to tell? I did everything — loosen me for I don’t remember what I
have to tell — don’t you see what a weak woman I am! - Oh! Oh! my arms are
breaking." More turns were ordered and as they were given she cried: "Oh! Oh!
loosen me for I don’t know what I have to say — Oh my arms! — I don’t
know what I have to say — if I did I would tell it." The cords were ordered to
be tightened, when she said, "Señores have you no pity on a sinful woman?"
She was told, yes, if she would tell the truth. She said, "Señor, tell me, tell me
it." The cords were tightened again, and she said, "I have already said that I did
it." She was ordered to tell it in detail, to which she said, "I don’t know how to
tell it, Señor, I don’t know." Then the cords were separated and counted, and
there were sixteen turns, and in giving the last turn the cord broke.

She was then ordered to be placed on the potro [a sort of ladder with
sharp-edged rungs]. She said, "Señores, why will you not tell me what I have to
say? Señor, put me on the ground — have I not said that I did it all?" She
was told to tell it. She said, "I don’t remember — take me away — I did what
the witnesses say." She was told to tell in detail what the witnesses said. She
said, "Señor, as I have told you, I do not know for certain. I have said that I
did all that the witnesses say. Señores, release me, for I do not remember it," She
was told to tell it. She said, "I do not know it. Oh! Oh! they are tearing
me to pieces — I have said that I did it — let me go!" She was told to tell it. She
said, "Señores, it does not help me to say that I did it and I have admitted
that what I have done has brought me to this suffering — Señor, you know
the truth — Señores, for God’s sake have mercy on me. Oh, Señor, take these
things from my arms — Señor, release me, they are killing me."

She was tied on the potro with the cords, she was admonished to tell the
truth, and the garrote were ordered to be tightened. She said, "Señor, do you
not see how these people are killing me? Señor, I did it — for God’s sake
let me go!" She was told to tell it. She said, "Señor, remind me of what I did
not know — Señores, have mercy on me — let me go for God’s sake — they
have no pity on me — I did it — take me from here and I will remember what
I cannot here. She was told to tell the truth, or the cords would be tightened.
She said, "Remind me of what I have to say for I don’t know it. I said that
I did not want to eat it — I know only that I did not want to eat it," and this
she repeated many times. She was told to tell why she did not want to eat it.
She said, "For the reason that the witnesses say — I say that I did it and — my
God! — how can I tell it?" Then she said that, as she did not do it, how could
she tell it. — "They will not listen to me — these people want to kill me — release
me and I will tell the truth."

She was again admonished to tell the truth. She said, "I did it, I don’t
know how I did it — I did it for what the witnesses say — let me go! I have
lost my senses and I don’t know how to tell it — loosen me and I will tell the
truth." Then she said, "Señor, I did it, I don’t know how I have to tell it, but
I tell it as the witnesses say — I wish to tell it — take me from here — Señor, as
the witnesses say, so I say and confess it." She was told to declare it. She said,
"I don’t know how to say it — I have no memory — Lord, you are witness that
if I knew how to say anything else I would say it. I know nothing more to say
than that I did it and God knows it." She said many times: "Señores, Señores,
nothing helps me. You, Lord, hear that I tell the truth and can say no more—

1 Ropes, tightened by twisting sticks, garrote, cut deep into the flesh.
2 The court obviously wanted her to confess that she intentionally practised Judaism.
they are tearing out my soul—order them to loosen me.” Then she said, “I do not say that I did it—I said no more.”

Then she said, “Señor, did I do it to observe that (Mosaic) Law.” She was asked what Law. She said, “the Law that the witnesses say— I declare it all Señor, and don’t remember what Law it was—Oh, wretched was the mother that bore me.” She was asked what was the Law she meant and what was the Law that she said the witnesses say. This was asked repeatedly, but she was silent and at last said that she did not know. She was told to tell the truth or the garrotes would be tightened, but she did not answer. Another turn was ordered on the garrotes and she was admonished to say what Law it was. She said, “If I knew what to say I would say it. Oh, Señor, I don’t know what I have to say—Oh! Oh! they are killing me—if they would tell me what—Oh, Señores! Oh, my heart!” Then she asked why they wished her to tell what she could not tell and cried repeatedly: “Oh, miserable me!” Then she said, “Lord, bear witness that they are killing me without my being able to confess.” She was told that if she wished to tell the truth before the water was poured she should do so and discharge her conscience.5

She said that she could not speak and that she was a sinner. Then the linen towel was placed [in her nose] and she said, “Take it away. I am strangling and am sick in the stomach.” A jar of water was then poured down, after which she was told to tell the truth.4 She clamored for confession, saying she was dying. She was told that the torture would be continued until she told the truth and was admonished to tell it, but though she was questioned repeatedly she remained silent. Then the inquisitor, seeing her exhausted by the torture, ordered it to be suspended.

Note

Four days were allowed to lapse,” wrote Leo [Bibliography], “for experience showed that an interval, by stiffening the limbs, rendered repetition more painful. She was again brought to the torture-chamber but she broke down when stripped and pitilessly begged to have her nakedness covered. The interrogatory went on, when her replies under torture were more rambling and incoherent than before, but her limit of endurance was reached and the inquisitors finally had the satisfaction of eliciting a confession of Judaism and a prayer for mercy and penance.6

One of the judges who considered the case voted that she be sentenced to death but the majority decided on a lesser punishment. She was sentenced on June 15, 1568 after having already been jaild for almost a year. She was to abjure her heresy publicly, wearing a penitential garment of yellow on which were two crosses, one on the breast, the other on the back. She was also sentenced to prison for three years, during which time she was to wear this penitential garment if she should ever happen to appear in public. After her sentence was served, this garment, the ambonito, would be hung in the church together with her name to publicize her disgrace. Her property was confiscated, and had she been a man she would not have been permitted to hold office or practice any of the better-known trades or professions. Nor was she permitted ever to wear ornaments of gold and silver, or silken garments, or to carry arms or to ride on a horse. Frequently these disabilities were extended to include children and grandchildren.

After six months she was freed from prison, but “was beggared and ruined for life, and an ineffaceable stain was cast upon her kindred and descendants.”

Bibliography

Surveys

Baron, 1316–44; Ben-Sasson, 588–901, EJ. “Inquisition: From 1492.”

Studies


Benart, Haim, Conversos or Trial: The Inquisition in Ciudad Real (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1981) [1961]. A full description of Spanish inquisitorial procedures in one community during the first years of its operations, with abundant texts from inquisitional documents.

3 The mouth was distended by an iron prong, the nostrils were plugged, the face, a linen funnel, was thrust down the mouth to conduct water trickling slowly from a jar. The victim strangled, gasped, and suffocated.

4 If the torture lasted long enough the court nearly always got the confession it desired.

---


Additional Sources


*The Inquisition and Judaism: A Sermon addressed to Jewish Martyrs on the Occasion of an Auto de Fe at Lisbon 1590, By the Archbishop of Canterbury also a Reply to the Sermon*, by Carlos Vero (Dover: Niño). Translated by Moses Mocatta (London: Wetherim, 1844). This sermon, preached to sixty-six penitents on the square of the Rocio in Lisbon by Archbishop Diego da Annunciação Justiniano, is ninety-three pages long. Rabbi David Nasi’s reply was published in London in 1715 or 1716.

Reuchlin’s Appeal to Bonetto de Lattes

In 1497 Johann Pfefferkorn, a fanatical and malignant converted Jew of dubious reputation, set out to destroy all Hebrew books except the Bible. He succeeded in 1509 in securing authority from the vacillating German emperor, Maximilian I (d. 1519), to confiscate them. However, in June 1507, in order to help an influential courtier under financial obligation to the Jews, the German Emperor himself ordered the confiscated books to be returned.

In July 1497 Johann Reuchlin (1455–1522) of Pforzheim, a distinguished scholar and a student of Hebrew, was commissioned to make a study of the rabbinic writings in order to determine whether or not it was to the advantage of Christianity to destroy them. Reuchlin decided in favor of the Jewish works; in doing so he aroused the ire of the Dominican friars at Cologne, who had aligned themselves with Pfefferkorn. The Dominicans, who were preeminent in combating heresy, looked askance at the study of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew by the humanists. They feared that the new learning would lead people away from orthodoxy and from the authority of the Church.

In the first stage of the conflict (1510) the Jews of Germany triumphed in that they saved their talmudic writings. In fact, Pope Leo X (1513–1521) even permitted a Christian, Daniel Bomberg, to publish at Venice the first printed edition of the Talmud (1520).

The second stage of the conflict affected the Jews only indirectly. The Dominicans, who may have treasured hopes of increasing their inquisitorial functions, attacked Reuchlin for his defense of Jewish writings, and, in the ensuing conflict, Germany was divided into two camps, Reuchlinists and anti-Reuchlinists. This struggle had the effect of bringing the Catholic Church into ill repute and thus helped to pave the way for the Protestant Reformation.