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Introduction: Beginnings, Endings, Myths

The creation of the Spanish Inquisition belies easy explanations. Monarchs Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile inherited a highly complex social, political, and religious environment when they married in 1472 and thereby joined their two kingdoms, though their “unification” of Spain was far from total. Castile preserved its own legal code, while each of Aragon’s three territories – Aragon proper, along with Valencia and Catalonia – had its own legal systems and privileges vis-à-vis the Aragonese monarchy. Grasping why Ferdinand and Isabella decided to ask Pope Sixtus IV in 1478 for permission to establish an inquisition that eventually would encompass nearly all their territories requires a quick survey of nearly 100 years of earlier history.

Modern scholars agree that one of the most important precipitating factors behind the Spanish Inquisition was the tremendous religious violence of 1391. Up to that date, Spain had Europe’s largest population of Jews. But in June of that year, a local ecclesiastic in Seville incited fellow Catholic Christians to attack the city’s Jewish quarter, whose residents were forced to choose between Christian baptism or death. News of the assault spread; similarly violent riots traveled along the Mediterranean coast, reaching Valencia, Barcelona, and the island of Mallorca, as well as Castile, touching Cuenca, Madrid, Toledo, Soria, and Logroño.¹ The respective monarchs of Aragon and Castile tried to protect their Jewish subjects without success.² The aggressors in the attacks appear to have come from all socioeconomic levels. The violence did not ebb until the autumn of 1391.

We know very little about how the Jewish communities in Spain reacted to the attacks, but the outcome was clear. Surviving Jewish enclaves were in ruins, and Spain now had a population of involuntary converts to Christianity. The fact that baptisms had been carried out by force did not nullify them, since the Christian sacraments were effective simply by being performed. The scale of the conversions was unprecedented; there were no measures in place to facilitate the converts' integration into the new religion. Families throughout Aragon and Castile found themselves "mixed," with some members continuing to be Jewish, and others newly identified as Christian.³ Moreover, the waves of conversion in 1391 seemed to augur an impending apocalypse, and renowned preachers such as Vincent Ferrer took advantage of the moment to intensify their missionary efforts.

Historians of Spanish Judaism agree that after 1391, any remaining Jews were subjected to some twenty years of additional pressure to convert. One pivotal moment occurred in January 1412, when the Castilian crown issued the Laws of Valladolid: Those mandates called for the complete segregation of Jews and Muslims from Christians in towns throughout the kingdom and allowed only eight days for the relocations to occur. The same Laws also severed all economic contacts between Christians and infidels, and prohibited emigration. The ultimate goal of these powerful mandates was to force conversion to Christianity.⁴ The king of Aragon, Ferdinand I, who was also co-regent in Castile, blocked the implementation of the Laws of Valladolid three weeks after they were issued. He also prohibited officially the application of those Laws in Aragon in July 1412.⁵

Meanwhile, a disputation, with papal approval, was arranged for the city of Tortosa in Aragon, beginning in 1413 and extending through 1414. The disputants were Christian theologians – some of whom had converted from Judaism – as well as rabbis. The discussion was hardly open-ended: Its point was to prove that the truths of Christianity were apparent in the Talmud. Jews were forced to attend. The pressure to convert was extraordinary; many families did so en masse.⁶ A year later, in 1415, Pope Benedict XIII, who was residing in Aragon during the papal schism, issued a papal bull that endorsed a weakened version of the Laws of Valladolid. That bull also spurred conversions.

Thus the 25-year period between 1391 and 1415 produced an entirely new stratum of people within Castile and Aragon: individuals who had converted from Judaism to Christianity, and who became known as conversos. With conversion, professional opportunities opened up significantly; furthermore, there was no ban on noble status for the converts. Conversos became bishops, tutors to the royal family, and highly-placed administrators.⁷ As they rose, they inspired resentment from both their former co-religionists and especially so-called “Old” Christians who had no historical connection to Judaism.⁸ Concerns with genealogy surged.⁹ In June 1449, rebels in Toledo promulgated a controversial ordinance that was approved by the city council: It prohibited any “converso of Jewish descent” from holding a political office or ecclesiastical benefice in the city or its surrounding territory.¹⁰ Known as the “Sentencia-Estatuto,” the Toledo order also prohibited the legal testimony of conversos against old Christians. Despite an adamant papal bull and a chorus of theological writings that rejected such distinctions among Christians, kings of Castile endorsed the racist principle of the Sentencia-Estatuto in 1451 and 1468. Social tensions did not abate; there was more conflict between conversos and old Christians in Toledo in 1467, Sepúlveda in 1468, and Seville and Jaén in 1473.¹¹

Old Christians justified their hatred of conversos by claiming the converts were secret Jews who continued to practice Mosaic Law, even if the conversos in question were great-grandchildren of individuals who had been forced into Christianity in 1391. The alleged link between conversos and Judaism was dangerous because baptized Christians – including those baptized involuntarily – risked being labeled heretics if they followed the beliefs or rituals of a non-Christian religion. Heresy was deliberate, persistent, and public religious error against the Catholic faith. What conversos were accused of doing was called “judaizing”: if they practiced circumcision, adhered to Jewish dietary laws, or appeared to be observing Saturday as a holy day by not working or cooking, they were liable to accusations of heresy. Modern scholars have spent decades debating whether the converso population of Spain was “truly” Jewish or Christian: If the former, then the eventual persecution of them appears justifiable from a standpoint of Christian orthodoxy; if the latter, then the Spanish Inquisition becomes a racial

rather than religious project. The best studies today allow for a broad range of cultural preferences and religious convictions among Spain's converso population and insist that it cannot be interpreted in terms of uniformity to a single religious outlook.

How, then, did the Spanish Inquisition come into being? Even while distracted by a war of succession to the Castilian throne, in the 1470s Isabella and Ferdinand had to have been aware of the social and religious tensions between conversos and Old Christians.¹² The two rulers called a council in the winter of 1477 for Castile's leading ecclesiastics: Their intent was to improve the education and performance of the clergy; their group met in Seville. The council passed measures on Latin learning (now required); a basic level of literacy, as well as legal and theological training (now required); a minimum number of yearly Masses at the parish level; a prohibition on carrying arms or having concubines; and an obligation of clerical residence for parish priests.¹³

Yet as Isabella and Ferdinand oversaw their council, they heard multiple anecdotes from a Dominican friar, Alonso de Hojeda, about the judaizing that allegedly was rampant among Seville's conversos. The monarchs took Hojeda's comments seriously; they consequently wrote to Pope Sixtus IV, requesting a bull that would allow them to name two or three bishops or priests to act as inquisitors in their kingdoms. Sixtus IV replied with the bull on November 1, 1478: The document gave Ferdinand and Isabella permission to name two or three inquisitors over the age of forty who had theological or law degrees. Remarkably, the monarchs' right to name inquisitors was granted in perpetuity, and no other mandate was allowed to block the papal bull. Sixtus soon realized his error in giving the king and queen too much autonomy; he tried, but failed, to reverse his trajectory and place inquisitors under episcopal control.¹⁴

The Spanish monarchs did not act instantly upon receiving Sixtus's document; instead, Seville's archbishop, Cardinal Pedro González de Mendoza, launched a campaign to instruct the city's conversos in Christianity, on the grounds that religious instruction had been lacking.¹⁵ In the end, in September 1480, in the northern Castilian city of Medina del Campo, Isabella and Ferdinand named two Dominican friars as inquisitors. Those inquisitors arrived in Seville in November 1480; they carried out their first public sentencing of

judaizing heretics, in which six individuals were burned at the stake, in 1481. Unfortunately, all the trial evidence for the earliest inquisition trials in Seville has disappeared.

It is an open question as to whether the Spanish monarchs envisioned their new Inquisition as simply a temporary strategy or a permanent institution, but there is no doubt that the converso population was its original target. The fact that conversos in Seville fled when the first inquisitors arrived justified expanding the Inquisition's reach, not least because bishops in Castile, who had traditionally monitored the presence of heresy, were bound geographically to their dioceses. Although the first Spanish inquisitors were supposed to travel, it quickly became apparent that they would be more effective if they were based in tribunals in particular cities. The location of the tribunals sometimes changed over the first several decades of the Inquisition's existence; they also could be merged. Ultimately, the Kingdom of Castile ended up with twelve permanent tribunals, while the Kingdom of Aragon had three on the mainland, with an additional three for the islands of Mallorca, Sicily, and Sardinia, and then eventually yet three more for the American outposts of Mexico City, Lima, and Cartagena de Indias.

Simply counting the number of tribunals might lead us to think that the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition was seamless, but it certainly was not. Castile had no history of medieval papal inquisitors, which meant there was no historical precedent to block Isabella's innovation, but Castilian cities could still resist. The inquisition tribunal in Valladolid, for example, was approved in 1485 but not begin work until 1488 because the city's royal court of appeals suspected inquisitors would interfere with its cases and jurisdiction. It took a royal visit from the monarchs before Valladolid would allow inquisitors to enter.¹⁶

The Kingdom of Aragon presented far more difficulties. There, medieval papal inquisitors had existed, but historical precedent dictated that they could only be named by popes or masters-general of the Dominican order, not by Aragonese kings. Furthermore, the *fueros* or privileges of Aragon, Valencia, and Catalonia prohibited non-Aragonese officials from serving in their territories. When Pope Sixtus IV named Castilian Tomás de Torquemada as inquisitor-general in October 1483, with Isabella and Ferdinand's explicit support, the appointment violated

Aragon's constitutional norms. Torquemada and his royal patrons did not back down. In April 1484, Torquemada held a meeting in the Aragonese town of Tarazona, where the Aragonese parliament or Cortes was in session: There, he announced the impending appointment of inquisitors to various places within Aragon itself. In May 1484, Torquemada followed up by naming two Dominican friars as inquisitors for Aragon's capital, Zaragoza. One of those inquisitors, Pedro Arbués de Epila, was subsequently murdered in the Zaragoza cathedral on September 15, 1485, in a plot concocted by some of the city's conversos.¹⁷ The legal and political response to the Arbués assassination was ferocious, but that did not stop residents in Barcelona and Valencia from resisting, either.

The most famous example of defiance toward the Spanish Inquisition occurred in the town of Teruel, in southern Aragon. In April 1484, Inquisitor-General Torquemada named a Basque Dominican, Fray Juan de Çolivera, as Teruel's inquisitor; on May 24, Çolivera entered the city. While Teruel's citizens were quick to admit the right of an inquisition to exist, they asserted that they already possessed the legal mechanisms to monitor heresy. The city's lawyers and notaries also immediately cited legal barriers to Çolivera's presence. He was only twenty-four and thus too young to act as an inquisitor, since the position had a minimum age of forty. He was uneducated. There were grave doubts about the authenticity of his powers, because he did not present original documents with the required seals. Finally, he was not from Aragon.

By June 14, Çolivera had left Teruel for the nearby town of Cella: There, he attempted to start heresy investigations into Teruel's converso community, opened a case against Teruel's counselors for sedition, and placed an ecclesiastical interdict on Teruel itself.¹⁸ In August 1484, Teruel's citizens appealed to Pope Sixtus IV, not knowing he had just died. Sixtus IV's successor, Pope Innocent VIII, tried to allow Spaniards to appeal to Rome for relief against the Spanish Inquisition, but in 1484 Ferdinand decreed the death penalty and confiscation of goods for anyone making such an appeal without royal permission and then repeated this prohibition in 1509.¹⁹ In February 1485, Ferdinand issued a call to arms against Teruel's rebels. In March 1485, inquisitors formally entered the town with the help of an army. In 1485–7, Inquisitor

Çolivera and his inquisitor-colleague, Martín Navarro, held thirteen public sentencings, called *autos de fe*, in Teruel. Out of some eighty defendants, 82 percent received the death penalty. At this moment in time, Teruel had between 1,550 and 1,750 inhabitants.²⁰ As had been the case in Seville in 1480–1, many converso residents of Teruel ran away.

If the Spanish Inquisition's overwhelming target in its first years of existence was judaizing conversos, its apparent failure to stamp out that heresy had horrific effects upon Spain's remaining Jews. The reasoning of both Spanish inquisitors and Spanish monarchs was that close living quarters and friendly relationships between conversos and Jews corrupted the former into Jewish rituals and beliefs. The solution ultimately was expulsion of Spain's Jewish population.²¹ The first ejections of Jews were either mandated by royal decrees, or carried out by popular demand, with royal approval thereafter. At the end of 1482, Jews were forced to leave Jerez de la Frontera; they were expelled from the rest of Andalucía in 1483. Jews were forced out of Zaragoza, Albarracín, and Teruel in 1486; when Granada was officially conquered in January 1492, the small community of Jews there was given one month to leave the city.²²

By the end of 1491, it appears that Ferdinand and Isabella were convinced that unbaptized Jews must convert to Christianity or leave.²³ They issued the Alhambra Decree on March 31, 1492, which mandated that Jews in Castile and Aragon had to convert to Christianity by July 31 of that year or depart. Important rabbis who held government positions begged Ferdinand to change his mind: He did not, though he ultimately gave Spain's expelled Jews until 1499 to convert and return. The Expulsion created a new generation of conversos; the Jews who left Spain – in total, perhaps 150,000 to 165,000 – went primarily to Portugal, where they would again be forced to convert or leave in 1497.²⁴

It can be exceedingly difficult for modern readers to grasp what the Spanish monarchs thought they were gaining with a state-administered inquisition and the eventual ejection of a not insignificant proportion of their population. There is no evidence that these events were due to political or financial strategies on the part of Ferdinand and Isabella. Ferdinand did not benefit politically from agreeing that the first inquisitors should go to Seville; he was not king in Andalucía. He and Isabella had plenty of problems with the relatively independent Castilian

aristocracy, but they pacified rebellious impulses with patents of nobility and gifts of land. There is no proof that they sought to stir up hatred toward a converso elite to give the nobility a new enemy and deflect attention from themselves. There are no signs that Ferdinand wanted Jewish assets.²⁵ Instead, these monarchs inherited a long tradition of religious values that prioritized Christian orthodoxy, dismissed tolerance, and expected secular rulers to care about and take steps to ensure the salvation of their subjects. Unlike earlier monarchs in Spain, Ferdinand and Isabella were in a sufficiently secure political position to put religious measures into effect.

Whether or not the monarchs imagined the Spanish Inquisition from the start as part of their institutional church and state, what they created lasted a very long time, from 1478 to 1834. How then did the Inquisition end, and what myths did it accrue?

There is hardly any controversy among scholars as to how the Spanish Inquisition finally disappeared, though it was a dialectical process that took far more time than its founding. After the war of the Spanish Succession (1701–14), Spain's monarchy became Bourbon rather than Hapsburg. The new king, Philip V, was the grandson of French king Louis XIV; he abolished the *fueros* of Aragon, Valencia, and Catalonia between 1707 and 1716, after which the kings of Spain ruled their territory for the first time as a coherent political unit. Philip V's heirs had absolutist pretensions. A unified Cortes for both Castile and Aragon met only three times in the eighteenth century, and two of those meetings were to recognize royal heirs. In 1737, the Spanish crown made church properties subject to taxation. In the second half of the eighteenth century, Spain's Bourbon monarchs funneled money into the navy, created a standing army via conscription, and regularized taxes.

Still, one of the largest problems for Spain's Bourbon kings was what to do about the French Revolution and its aftermath. By the opening of that tumultuous event in 1789, Spanish political loyalties had become traditionally French, but the question was whether the country would seek to protect the French king, Louis XVI, or accept the revolutionaries' demands. After Louis XVI was executed for treason on January 21, 1793, and France's revolution swerved into ever more radical territory, Spain declared war, which lasted until 1795. In August 1796, Spain signed an offensive and defensive pact

with France. As evidence of its condition as a French satellite state, Spain went to war against Britain in October 1796.

Circumstances for Spain worsened with the crowning of Napoleon Bonaparte as emperor in 1804. In October 1805, a French-Spanish naval coalition was defeated by Admiral Lord Nelson in the Battle of Trafalgar. In 1807, Spanish king Charles IV and his royal favorite, Manuel Godoy, allowed Napoleon's troops to cross Spain in order to invade Portugal. A year later, in January 1808, French imperial troops again entered Spain under the pretext of supporting the army in Portugal; this time, however, they arrived with Napoleon's orders to seize important Spanish fortresses.

These events scandalized contemporary Spaniards, who viewed the French incursions as humiliating invasions. In 1807, the mightily discontented heir to the Spanish throne, Prince Ferdinand, planned a coup against his father, Charles IV; the plot was discovered, and Ferdinand forgiven. On March 17, 1808, however, a popular uprising against the royal favorite, Godoy, occurred in the town of Aranjuez, where the royal family was staying in anticipation of the French military's southward march. A band composed of soldiers as well as ordinary residents and peasants forced Charles IV to dismiss Godoy; on March 19, the king abdicated, and his son became King Ferdinand VII. In April 1808, Napoleon invited Charles and Ferdinand to the French border city of Bayonne, ostensibly to help them sort out the Spanish monarchy. On May 2 and 3, 1808, citizens in Madrid revolted when French troops there appeared to be trying to transport the royal princesses to French territory. On May 10, Napoleon forced Charles IV and Ferdinand VII to resign their Spanish kingdom to his brother, Joseph.

The new French-Spanish king Joseph I entered Madrid on July 20, 1808, but quickly had to retreat because Spaniards loyal to Ferdinand launched the Peninsular War, often known in Spanish history as the War of Independence. This conflict lasted from 1808 to 1814. It featured British assistance for the Spanish insurgents, as well as the first documented instances of European guerrilla warfare. The French ultimately were defeated in 1813 in the northern Spanish city of Vitoria-Gasteiz, which is the capital of the Spanish Basque country in the province of Álava.

At first, war with France looked as if it would destroy the Spanish Inquisition. Napoleon abolished it in July 1808; on December 4, 1808,

via the decrees of Chamartín, he formally ended the Old Regime in Spain and absorbed all the possessions of the Spanish Inquisition into the national patrimony. Yet Napoleon's executive actions produced a patriotic backlash. Individuals who conceived of themselves as loyal Spaniards *supported* the Inquisition as a reaction to the French invasion and a way to demonstrate their fidelity to the Catholic religion.²⁶ Furthermore, Spanish rebels against France and Napoleon *wanted the restoration of the Spanish monarchy*. In no way were Spanish forces questing after a secular, liberal republic. The basic theory behind Spanish resistance was that the sovereign will of the nation had not been consulted about the royal abdications. Ultimately, the notion of national sovereignty justified convening the Spanish Cortes, which met in the Mediterranean port of Cádiz, beginning September 24, 1810.

In May 1811, the Cádiz deputies voted to create a special commission to consider the inquisition question; eleven months later, deputy José Riesco asked the Cortes to clarify whether the Inquisition would be re-established. The special commission was forced into a decision: four of its members wanted the Inquisition to be refounded, with one opposed. Over the rest of 1812, however, opposition to restoring the Inquisition grew, to the point that the question was ultimately moved to the Commission for the Constitution, which had to determine whether the Inquisition conformed to that new charter. When the Commission announced its opinion on November 13, 1812, it made two points: first, Catholicism would be protected by laws in conformity with the Constitution; second, the Inquisition did not conform to the Constitution. The second point was approved by only six to five, with four commission members refusing to vote because the question was too delicate.

From January 4 to January 22, 1813, the Cádiz deputies debated the inquisition question as a full body. They gathered and perused inquisition documentation; they argued historically. Individuals in favor of the Inquisition contended that without it, the monarchy could not take sufficient steps to protect the nation's religion. Individuals against the inquisition's re-establishment insisted that it actually impeded the growth of Catholicism because of the fear it engendered: Heretics did not end up truly converted by the inquisitorial process but were merely frightened into appearing so.²⁷ Opponents also noted that the constitutional principle of the separation of powers meant that religious legal