

1391: How the anti-Jewish riots in Spain led to Inquisition and expulsion





1391

- Mass attacks on Jewish communities throughout the main Spanish kingdoms were a key turning point in Jewish and Iberian history but ...
- 1391 is a far less famous date than 1096 or 1492
 - WHY?
 - HOW WAS 1391 UNIQUE?
- HOW DID 1391 CREATE THE CONDITIONS FOR INQUISITION AND EXPULSION?

The Jews of Spain

- Long-established
- Prospered under Muslim rule - the so-called “Golden Age” of Al-Andalus
- But also periods of persecution

The Jews of Christian Spain

c. 1100-1300

- Legally separate:
 - Theoretically, as elsewhere in Europe, royal servants: both a financial resource AND key, trusted advisers
 - Communal legal jurisdiction a concomitant of exclusion from Christian institutions – a parallel world
- Jewish courtiers a common occurrence (perhaps more so than in Muslim times): typically, treasurers – notably under Pere el Gran of Aragon and Pedro I of Castile (Samuel HaLevi Abulafia)
- The majority of the community were artisans, traders and shopkeepers ...
- ... with plentiful evidence of money-lending as well as land ownership and other forms of wealth management

The 13th Century: royal patronage and growing clerical hostility

- The footprint of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215)
- The rise of the mendicant orders - the Disputation of Barcelona (1263), attacks on the Talmud and widespread compulsory preaching to Jews
- Ambivalence of royal authorities
- BUT
- General prosperity: growing population, trade and wealth
- Rich religious, cultural and scientific life

The “Catastrophic” 14th century

A Sea-Change in Society?

- Natural world: harvest failure, famine and plague
- War and Rebellion
- Economic and financial crises and transformation
- Impacts on the Jews?
 - Physical attacks
 - Perhaps as “proxies” for attacks on royal authority
 - Less central to credit markets and a declining source of tax revenue

Clerical attitudes

- Ferran Martínez ... strongly opposed by church authorities and by the crown
- Vicente Ferrer
- Did attitudes harden or did ideas turn to actions?



I, Ferrand Martinez, Archdeacon of Ecija, and acting Dean and Chapter of the Church of Seville, vacant seat, order you the clerics and sacristans of Santolalla de la Sierra, under pain of excommunication, in view of my patent letter, within 3 hours, to **demolish the synagogue house, in which the enemies of God and the church called the Jews, who in this place, carry out their idolatry,** and of the books and objects seen there, send them to me in order that I should make of them as is due; and the tiles, wood and lamps which should be for the work of our church. And **if in this you meet any obstacles, go with force and power.** And I order you, for the cure of the said place, under the said penalty, to place a interdict in the said place not to cease until you complete my patent. 8 December 1390.

Political Vacuum in 1391

- Minority in Castile
- Death of the Archbishop of Seville
- In Aragon, Joan (from 1387): “el Descurat”, “el Caçador”, “l’Amador de la Gentilesa”
- Years of unrest and rebellion weakened royal authority over municipal authorities: critical to the king’s ability to restore order

Anti-Jewish Riots of 1391

Outbreak in Seville, spread through New Castile

June

Note: the actual route of spread and precise order of outbreaks includes substantial guesswork



The Riots of Seville, 6th June

and on Tuesday June 6, with second cause, there burst forth again such a riot of the Christians against the Jews, that **the enraged people killed more than four thousand**, a number to which, although it seems excessive, many memorials refer, and they plundered the Jewish Quarter: **the belief is that it was caused by the preaching of the Archdeacon who wanted to convert them by force: few remained and out of fear most pretended to be converted, hoping to prevaricate later.** Most of the Jewish Quarter was laid barren and Jewish quarters suffered all the same damage throughout this province, a crime for which no punishment is noted as being imposed on the people.

Diego Ortiz de Zúñiga, contemporary chronicler,
in *Anales eclesiásticos y seculares de la ciudad de Sevilla*

Anti-Jewish Riots of 1391

Spread to
Valencia

July



Spread through
most of the crown
of Aragon

Aug



An extraordinary spread of unrest

- In 10 weeks, the unrest had spread across much of Castile and Aragon, covering around 1,200 km and affecting perhaps 100 or more separate Jewish communities
- Many different methods of travel: by sea, by messenger, by mobs marching from one town to the next ...
- Different local grievances aired and different groups blamed, including foreigners, sailors, peasants, artisans, lower orders, marginal groups ... but clear that citizens, noblemen and burghers involved in some cases
- Widely held view of “divine ordination” – miracles of the baptismal chrism; “Nisi Dominus custodieret civitatem, frustra vigilat qui custodit eam (Psalm 127), cited by jurats of Valencia (Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain”)

Some key questions

- Who were the perpetrators?
- Why were some areas less affected than others
- Local differences in the dynamics
- Was there a voluntary element to the conversions?
- Strategies to protect the Jews
- Numbers killed and converted; survivors ... and emigrants
- Royal and municipal response ...

How was 1391 unique?

- Not the beginning of a period of enhanced anti-Jewish activity although the officially-espoused policies of 1411-15 led to another wave of mass conversions ... But
- Lasting impact
 - Permanent destruction of major communities, notably Barcelona, Valencia and Mallorca
 - Mass forced conversion – no way back despite some royal rulings ...
 - Creation of a new social class – the *converso* – Christians who were never fully accepted into the Christian world

Jews in Fifteenth-century Spain

- Perhaps half of Jews converted by 1415
- Less persecution after 1415: communities could gradually re-build
- Surviving communities were much reduced in numbers – probably around 80,000 in total (although earlier estimates were higher) and impoverished
- By the late 15th century, many Jews lived in villages and were involved in agriculture
- With notable exceptions: the community of Morvedre thrived and some individuals remained wealthy and politically influential ...
- Some continued as revenue collectors and in senior positions in administration

The *converso* “problem”

- Freed from the legal restraints on Jews: could hold municipal office, progress in the church, join trade guilds ...
 - Some were highly successful in the church, literature and administration
 - Leading families inter-married with the nobility
 - BUT
-
- Never fully integrated into Christian society, they remained under suspicion for the sincerity of their Christian views and formed separate factions on public bodies
 - *Conversos* tended to live amongst Jews and were favoured in financial offices – especially as tax collectors – as the Jews had been

But often failed to shake off the label of “Jew”

I always said that [the Virgin] remained immaculate, / and I never
swore by the Creator! / I recited the Creed, / I worship pots of pork fat
/ and eat rashers of half-cooked bacon, / I listen to Mass and pray, /
cross myself every which way / and never could I slay / this stain
of *converso*. On all those holy days I pray, / with bent knees and great
devotion / ... so that my guilt would be removed, / but I never could
lose the label / of the old faggot Jew

Converso poet, Antón de Montoro (1474)

15th century: Anti-*converso* activity largely supplanted anti-Jewish activity

- Major outbreak in 1449 in Toledo
- *Limpieza de Sangre* – discrimination based on bloodline, not religion

Purity of Blood Questionnaire

Used until the Nineteenth Century for a scholarship at the University of Santiago de Compostela

- Question 4 – “If he knows that the said member of the College, as well as his Parents, Grandparents and Great-Grandparents, through their respective lines, have been, and are held and reputed for Old Christians, without race or mixture of Jew, Moor or Converso, and that they have not been condemned, nor given penance by the Holy Office of the Inquisition, as heretics or suspicious in the Faith”.

15th century: Anti-*converso* activity largely supplanted anti-Jewish activity

- Major outbreak in 1449 in Toledo
- *Limpieza de Sangre* – discrimination based on bloodline, not religion
- Further outbreaks of violence against *conversos* in Castile in the 1470s
- Isabel became queen in 1474 against a background of massive social and political unrest, with *conversos* often at the centre
- A string of anti-Jewish laws, aimed at segregation ...
- In 1478, the instigation of the Spanish Inquisition

Spanish Inquisition - Myths

- It was aimed at Jews – NO, ONLY HERETICAL CHRISTIANS
- Most victims were burned - - ONLY A SMALL PERCENTAGE, MOST WERE “RECONCILED”
- Everyone tortured – INITIALLY LIMITED BUT BECAME MORE COMMON
- BUT
- Very few acquittals
- Suspects had assets sequestered, were subject to indefinite imprisonment
- The “stain” of the Inquisition remained for future generations and “relapse” meant likely death

Origins of Inquisition

Why it had its roots in 1391

- Papal Inquisition had started as a genuine attempt to root out heresy, including in the crown of Aragon
- The Inquisition effectively under royal authority from 1478 was specifically focused on *conversos* and the ‘heresy’ of judaisation
- 2,400 self-denunciations in Toledo in 1486 alone
- The first 8 years saw 5,000 “reconciliations” and 700 “burnings”, some in effigy

The [Unanswerable] Question

- How many *conversos* really were “secret Jews”?
- In many cases, they retained Jewish custom without necessarily being observant Jews ...
- How much of the *anti-converso* sentiment was based on social prejudice against this twilight group of semi-outsiders? And jealousy at the power and wealth of leading families?
- Many – including the Pope – held suspicions of the true motive
 - Was it a money-making scam by the crown (sacadinero)?
 - A power grab?
 - An opportunity to settle old scores?

Expulsion of the Jews – April 1492

- NOT CATHOLIC UNIVERSALISM : Conquered Muslims allowed to worship freely
- NOT A DESIRE TO REMOVE THE INDIVIDUAL JEWS BUT JUDAISM ITSELF: Invited back in Nov 1492, at least to Aragon, as long as could prove baptism
- BUT
- A direct result of the Inquisition, which saw the proximity of Jews and *conversos* as preventing the latter being true, faithful Catholics

Expulsion of 1492

Reasons

- Expulsion was quite clearly a direct result of the *converso* “problem” and the perceived role of Jews in “leading them astray”
- From the 1470s, official policy had aimed to separate Jews and *conversos* physically by ghettoisation, regional expulsions, but with limited success
- The Inquisition was also perceived as failing to deal with judaisation because of the continuing presence of Jews
- Accusation of ritual murder in 1490, with *conversos* and Jews implicated
- Pressure on the monarchy from leading Inquisitors who actually drafted the Decrees of Expulsion
- Ironically, had the opposite of the desired effect by creating tens of thousands more converts who had no real Catholic affiliation

1391 as the key turning point in Iberian Jewish history

- A unique series of events in their intensity, speed and extent of spread and apparent intent to convert or kill all Jews and remove Jewish quarters
- Created the mass *converso* problem ...
- ... direct line to the social upheavals of the mid- to late-fifteenth century, the Inquisition and Expulsion of 1492
- Did not end in 1492 – although both Castile and Aragon later expelled forcibly converted Muslims (known as *moriscos*), *conversos* were never expelled but remained targets of the Inquisition until the late 18th century (Inquisition finally abolished in 1834)