

King João II of Portugal “O Príncipe Perfeito” and the Jews (1481-1495)

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King João II (1481-1495) is chiefly remembered in Portuguese historiography as the first “modern” King of Portugal and a monarch who vigorously worked to restore the status of the Portuguese Crown, weakened during the reign of his father Afonso V (1438-1481). In Jewish historiography, however, João II has become infamous for his persecution of the Jews who came to Portugal after their expulsion from Castile in 1492 as well as his order to seize Jewish children from their parents so that they could be converted to Christianity and sent to colonize the Island of São Tomé. Using Hebrew, Spanish and Portuguese sources, this article examines in detail the nature of the relations that existed between João II and the Jews, both those who were natives of Portugal as well as the Jewish exiles from Castile.

KEYWORDS: Portugal; João II; Jews; Castile; Expulsion; Conversion; Slavery.

EL REY JOÃO II DE PORTUGAL «O PRÍNCIPE PERFEITO» Y LOS JUDÍOS.— El rey João II es recordado en la historiografía portuguesa principalmente como el primer rey «moderno» de Portugal, y un monarca que trabajó enérgicamente para restaurar el estatus de la Corona, debilitada durante el reinado de su padre Afonso V (1438-1481). Sin embargo, la historiografía judía ha construido una imagen del rey como infame por su persecución de los judíos expulsos llegados de Castilla en 1492, así como por la orden de sustracción de niños judíos a sus progenitores para usarlos en la colonización de la isla de São Tomé. Mediante el uso de fuentes hebreas, hispánicas y portuguesas, este artículo examina de forma detallada la naturaleza de las relaciones existentes entre João II y los judíos, tanto de los que eran nativos de Portugal, como de los castellanos exiliados.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Portugal; João II; judíos; Castilla; expulsión; conversión; esclavitud.

King João II of Portugal, who reigned over the Portuguese from 1481 until 1495, has enjoyed a rather positive posthumous reputation in Portugal and in Portuguese historiography. Already during his lifetime, João II was dubbed the “perfect prince” (*O Príncipe Perfeito*) by his admirers. King João is considered to be the first “modern” king of Portugal and his reign is now chiefly

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remembered because of the important political transformations in Portugal that it witnessed. The Portuguese monarch successfully restored the authority of the Crown, which had been weakened under his father Afonso V (1438-1481), and established his authority in the face of aristocratic opposition headed by the powerful Duke of Bragança. Furthermore, João II funded reconnaissance expeditions by Portuguese seamen in the 1480s that reached the mouth of the Congo River and sailed beyond the Cape of Good Hope. He thus played a major part in laying the foundations of the overseas empire that would bring great prosperity to Portugal in the sixteenth century and propel the country to the forefront of European politics.¹

In Jewish historiography, however, the ruthlessness of King João II has earned him considerable infamy. A central element of this reputation has been João II's treatment of the thousands of Jews who were expelled from the neighbouring kingdoms of Castile and Aragón in 1492 and who came to Portugal. King João has become particularly notorious because of his enslavement of a number of these Castilian Jews as well as his decision to deport Jewish children seized from their parents to the inhospitable island of São Tomé in the Gulf of Guinea. Somewhat unsurprisingly, the Portuguese sovereign gained the reputation –both in contemporary Jewish accounts and in the work of modern historians– of a callous tyrant who pitilessly persecuted the Jews; resorting to cruel methods in order to extort funds from the Castilian Jews and coercing many of them to convert to Christianity. By way of illustration, Isaac Abravanel (1437-1508), one of the foremost Jews at the Portuguese Court until his exile in 1483, used the epithets “tyrannical,” “deceitful” and “iniquitous” to describe João II in his work.² Likewise, the Cretan Rabbi Elijah Capsali (c. 1490-1549), who interviewed many Iberian Jews, presents João II in his famous chronicle as an inveterate enemy of the Jews and describes the monarch as a “repulsive” and “wicked” king. In his work, Capsali went to the extreme of including an extraordinary paragraph in which God punished João II for his cruelty towards the Jews by sending an avenging angel to slay him and thus avenge his Jewish victims.³ Some of the foremost modern historians

¹ M. MENDONÇA, *D. João II : um percurso humano e político nas origens da modernidade em Portugal* (Lisboa 1989). For a more recent biography, see L. Adão da FONSECA, *D. João II* (Lisboa 2007). See also, J. SERRÃO and A. H. de Oliveira MARQUES, *Nova História de Portugal*. Vol. V: *Portugal do Renascimento à Crise Dinástica* (Lisboa 1998), 701-712.

² B. Z. NETANYAHU, *Don Isaac Abravanel: A Statesman and Philosopher* (Philadelphia 1972), p. 26, footnote 76.

³ E. CAPSALI, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, ed. A. SHMUELEVITZ, S. SIMONSOHN and M. BENAYAHU (Jerusalem 1975), vol. 1, pp. 229 and 232. In the paragraph devoted to the death of João II, Capsali

of Portuguese Jewry, including Meyer Kayserling, Anita Novinsky and Yosef H. Yerushalmi, have continued to present João II as a cruel monarch who not only mercilessly harassed the Jewish exiles from Castile by forcing them to pay vast sums to enter Portugal, but also betrayed them by preventing their exit from his kingdom in order to force them either to convert to Christianity or become his slaves.⁴

The events that took place in Portugal during the reign of João II have to a large extent been overlooked by modern historians of Sephardic Jewry. This neglect can be explained by the fact that their attention has focused more on the terrible tragedy that befell the Portuguese Jews a few years later. A little over a year after the death of João II, his successor Manuel I (1495-1521) issued an edict of expulsion and ultimately decreed the forced conversion of practically the whole Jewish population of Portugal in March-April 1497.⁵ This article will endeavour to find answers to two problematic questions. Firstly, was João II's treatment of the Castilian refugees motivated by anti-Jewish sentiments or rather by ruthless expediency? Secondly, is it possible to draw a distinction between the Portuguese monarch's attitude and policies towards the Castilian exiles of 1492 and those that he adopted in relation to those Jews who were natives of Portugal? The nature of the relations that existed between João II and the Jews, whether natives of Portugal or Castilian exiles, will be examined not only by comparing the evidence contained in Portuguese and Jewish narrative sources but also in the light of unedited documentary evidence preserved in various Portuguese archives.

JOÃO II AND THE PORTUGUESE JEWS: “OUR PROPERTY”

It is important to draw a sharp distinction between João II's treatment of the “native” Jewish population of Portugal and the Jewish refugees who arrived from Castile in 1492.⁶ There is little evidence that João II's policies towards his Jewish

quotes heavily from the Bible, including Jeremiah 51:9; 2 Kings 5:12; Numbers 22:22; Psalms 35:6; and Judges 5:27.

⁴ M. KAYSERLING, *História dos Judeus em Portugal* (São Paulo 1971), 74-104; A. NOVINSKY, “Juifs et nouveaux chrétiens du Portugal,” in *Les juifs d’Espagne. Histoire d’une diaspora 1492-1992*, ed. H. MÉCHOULAN (Paris 1992), 79-80. For the views of Y. H. YERUSHALMI, see his introduction to Samuel Usque's *Consolação ás Tribulaçoens de Israel*, ed. by Y. H. YERUSHALMI and J. V. de Pina MARTINS (Lisboa 1989), vol. 1, p. 21.

⁵ Maria J. Ferro TAVARES, *Judaísmo e Inquisição. Estudos* (Lisboa 1987), chapter 1, pp. 17-66 and F. SOYER, *The Persecution of the Jews and Muslims of Portugal. King Manuel I and the End of Religious Tolerance (1496-7)* (Leiden 2007).

⁶ On the “native” Jewish population of medieval Portugal, see Maria J. Ferro TAVARES, *Os Judeus em Portugal no Século XIV* (Lisboa 2000²), and EAD. *Os Judeus em Portugal no Século XV* (Lisboa 1982-85).

subjects deviated in any way from those of his father Afonso V or his grandfather Duarte (1433-1438) during the period that spans from his accession in 1481 to his death in 1495. As in the rest of the Iberian Peninsula, Portuguese Jews were direct subordinates of the Crown, to whom their physical persons and possessions were legally deemed to belong. The Jewish communities depended in turn on the Crown for their protection and in return were saddled by a heavy fiscal burden paid directly to the royal treasury or *camara*. In his letters, João II described the Portuguese Jews as “*cousa nosa*” (‘our property;’ see following paragraph). This particular relationship between the Crown and its Jewish subjects, fittingly described as “*cameral servitude*” by David Abulafia, was a boon for a monarch whose chief concern was to strengthen royal authority and power within Portugal.⁷

In the neighbouring kingdom of Castile, relations between the Crown and its Jewish subjects had been poisoned by the existence of large numbers of *conversos*, the descendants of Jews who had converted to Christianity in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. It was suspicion of contacts between Jews and *conversos*, who were widely suspected of apostasy by the rest of the Christian population, that had ultimately led to the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition and the expulsion of the Jews from Castile and Aragón in 1492.⁸ In Portugal, however, the situation was markedly different. The tide of anti-Jewish violence that had engulfed the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the fourteenth century spared the Jews of Portugal and the result was therefore that no population of *conversos* existed in that kingdom.⁹ Only the arrival of *conversos* fleeing the Inquisition established in Castile in 1482 caused tension as the Portuguese Jews feared that anti-*converso* sentiment would spark attacks against their persons and property. On 20 November 1484, after receiving a petition by the Jews of Lisbon, João was compelled to write a stern letter to the municipal council of Lisbon instructing them to take measure to protect the Jewish community:

The Jews of the *comuna* of this town [of Lisbon] have informed us that (...) there have been some disturbances and attempts to expel the [Castilian]

⁷ The taxes paid by certain Jewish communities in Portugal were occasionally granted by the Crown to individuals as rewards. See SOYER, *The Persecution of the Jews and Muslims of Portugal*, pp. 46-52, and TAVARES, *Os Judeus em Portugal no Século XV*, pp. 159-213. On the “*cameral servitude*” of Jews see D. ABULAFIA, “The servitude of Jews and Muslims in the medieval Mediterranean: Origins and Diffusion,” *Mélanges de l’École Française de Rome. Moyen Âge* 112 (2000), 687-714, p. 709.

⁸ M. KRIEGEL, “Le prise d’une décision: l’expulsion de juifs d’Espagne en 1492,” *Revue Historique* 260 (1979), 49-90. See also B. Z. NETANYAHU, *The Origins of the Spanish Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain* (New York 1995).

⁹ F. SOYER, “Was there an Inquisition in Portugal before 1536?” *Iacobus: revista de estudios jacobeos y medievales* 19-20 (2005), 177-202.

conversos out [of Lisbon] and that the [Jews of Lisbon] fear that they will suffer some harm themselves for no reason (...). It is our will that the Jews of that town should be protected and shielded as they are our property. We order you to take care that the Jews [of Lisbon] receive no injury and that you attend as diligently as possible to their safety and defence. If they should receive any harm, we would then be most displeased and would act as we see fit.¹⁰

To tackle the problem posed by the Castilian *conversos*, João II established a short-lived inquisitorial tribunal and promulgated an edict of expulsion against the *conversos* on 2 October 1488. The Portuguese Jews, however, were not affected in any manner by either of these measures.¹¹

There can be no denying that during the various parliaments (*cortes*) that were held during his reign, João II gave his sanction to a number of anti-Jewish laws. At the parliament held at Évora in November 1481, for instance, King João ordered Jews not to wear silk but more humble woollen clothes to reflect their inferior social status. Almost a decade later, at a parliament held at Évora between March and June 1490, João II instructed all Jews owning slaves who had converted to Christianity to free them within a set period of time. These measures, however, did not originate with the King himself but were, in fact, demands made by the representatives of the Commons who took advantage of the parliamentary assembly to express their anti-Jewish sentiments. João II was therefore occasionally forced to pander to popular anti-Judaism in order to secure the goodwill of the representatives of the Commons. It is even difficult to gauge whether these laws were ever effectively implemented. In return for ready cash, João II was certainly prepared to grant privileges to various wealthy Jews exempting them from legal restrictions placed on them.¹²

¹⁰ “A comuna dos judeus desa çidade nos emujaron dizer como por o tempo ser tall como se en eessa çidade auer allgũus aluroços de lamçarem os confesos fora, elles se temiam lhes seer feicto alguũ dano e sem rezam [...]. E porque çerto nosa vomtade he os judeus desa çidade serem guardados e emparados como cousa nosa que sam, vos encomendamos e mandamos que por nos njsto serujrdes tenhaes maneira como em cousa algũua grande nem pequena os dictos judeus nom reçebam desagisado algũu e que emtemdaaes e acudaaes com mujta deligançia a todo o que comprir ao bem e defemsam deles, porque seemdolhes feicto allgũu dano averjamos delo desprazer e o semtirjamos como he rezam,” cf. H. Baquero MORENO, “Reflexos na cidade do Porto da entrada dos conversos em Portugal nos fins do século XV,” in his *Marginalidade e Conflictos Sociais em Portugal nos séculos XIV e XV* (Lisboa 1985), pp. 142-143 and 153-154 (doc. 1).

¹¹ Rui de PINA, *Crónica de D. João II*, ed. L. de ALBUQUERQUE (Lisboa 1989), p. 61; SOYER, “Was there an Inquisition in Portugal before 1536?,” pp. 183-199.

¹² Maria J. Ferro TAVARES “O crescimento económico e o antijudaísmo no Portugal medieval,” in *La Península Ibérica en la era de los descubrimientos 1391-1492. Actas III Jornadas Hispano-Portuguesas de Historia Medieval* (Sevilla 1997), vol. 2, 51-67. Also TAVARES, *Os Judeus em Portugal no Século XV*, vol. 1, pp. 215-225.

The King's personal attitude towards his Jewish subjects, however, was not influenced by the anti-Jewish prejudice which was increasing amongst the Christian population in Medieval Portugal. King João's pragmatic attitude towards his Jewish subjects can be seen in his reaction to the involvement of Isaac Abravanel, one of the wealthiest and most prominent Jews in Portugal, in the unsuccessful conspiracy of the Duke of Bragança in 1483-84. Even though Abravanel was condemned to death and all his property was declared forfeit, this episode in no way appears to have negatively affected the monarch's ties with the Jewish community.¹³ The same stance is apparent in the rejoinder that João II made to a complaint that the representatives of the Commons assembled in parliament addressed to him in 1490 appealing to the King to stop employing Jews as tax-farmers on behalf of the Crown. The King responded, with no little cynicism, that the experience of lands where Christians had been employed as tax-farmers demonstrated that the exactions committed by the Christians were usually worse than those of Jews.¹⁴ Furthermore, after receiving news of various incidents of violence against Jews in Lisbon that same year, the King wrote once more to the municipal council of the town to firmly order the councillors to ensure that the Jews were not unjustly harassed and later congratulated them for their vigilance.¹⁵

The Portuguese King's relations with his Portuguese Jewish subjects during the three years following the arrival of the Jews expelled from Castile in 1492 until João II's death in October 1495 represent something of a mystery. Surviving documentary evidence for these three years is frustratingly scarce and the absence of any surviving documents produced by the Portuguese royal chancery for the years 1493, 1494 and 1495 is particularly unfortunate. Jeronymus Münzer, a German traveller from Nuremberg who visited Portugal in the fall of 1494, describes a flourishing and prosperous Jewish community in Lisbon commenting that "extremely wealthy Jews are found [in Lisbon], nearly all of

¹³ The death sentence against Abravanel was never in fact carried out as he was able to flee to Castile. See NETANYAHU, *Don Isaac Abravanel*, pp. 19-32, and also E. LIPINER, *Two Portuguese Exiles in Castile* (Jerusalem 1997), 46-76. On the conspiracy of the Duke of Bragança and his partisans see M. MENDONÇA, "A problemática das conspirações contra D. João II," *Clio – Revista do Centro de História da Universidade de Lisboa* 5 (1984-85), 29-48.

¹⁴ KAYSERLING, *História dos Judeus em Portugal*, p. 85; TAVARES, "O crescimento económico e o antijudaísmo no Portugal medieval;" F. SOYER, "Muslim Slaves in Medieval Portugal," *Al-Qantara* 28 (2007), 489-516, p. 506.

¹⁵ *Livro das Posturas Antigas*, ed. Maria Teresa Campos RODRIGUES (Lisboa 1994), pp. 193-194; See also Maria J. FERRO TAVARES, "Revoltas contra os judeus no Portugal Medieval," *Revista de História das Ideias* 6 (1984), 161-173.

them tax farmers who work for the Crown” and that “extremely rich Jews can be found, all of them merchants, who live off the work of their slaves”. The German traveller even added, with a note of disapproval, that the Jews of Lisbon were “insolent.”¹⁶ Münzer was also able to visit the main synagogue of Lisbon on a Saturday in late November 1494 and described in considerable detail a splendidly decorated edifice:

The [interior of the synagogue] is sumptuously decorated and has one pulpit that is similar to those found in mosques. [The synagogue] is lit by ten huge candelabra with fifty or sixty candles each, as well as many other lights. The women sit in a separate space from the men, which is lit in a similar manner by numerous lights.¹⁷

Yet, despite this description of a flourishing Jewish community in Lisbon, Münzer goes on to claim that the Jews of Lisbon in 1494 “feared an expulsion” similar to that in Spain two years previously. According to Münzer, it was publicly known that João II had received threatening letters from Isabel of Castile and Fernando of Aragón in which they asked him to expel the Jews from Portugal as well.¹⁸

The most sensational revelation that Münzer chooses to make, however, is his claim that João II had actually issued an order giving the Portuguese Jews two years to leave the realm. Thus Münzer claims that all Jews were ordered to leave Portugal before the end of 1496.¹⁹ It is difficult to know what to make of this astonishing statement with far reaching implications. If it is true, then Manuel I’s own edict of expulsion in December 1496 was only implementing a

¹⁶ “Sunt ditissimi Judei Lisibona et recipiunt tributa regia, que a Rege emerunt. Et insolentes sunt [...]. Reperiuntur hic ditissimi Judei, qui quasi omnes merces vendunt, qui ex solo sclavorum suorum labore vivunt,” cf. H. MÜNZER, “*Itinerarium Hispanicum*,” ed. L. PFANDL, *Revue Hispanique* 48 (1920), 82 and 88. A Spanish translation of Münzer’s work is also available, see J. PUYOL [transl.], “Viaje por España y Portugal en los años 1494 y 1495,” *BRAH* 84 (1924), 32-119 and 197-279.

¹⁷ “O quam pulcherrimum locum et cathedram predicandi ut in mesquitis. Ardebant in ea decem magna candelabra et in unaquaque 50 aut 60 lampades, demptis aliis lampadibus. Et mulieres habebant separatam sinagogam in qua etiam quam multe lampades ardentis” (cf. MÜNZER, “*Itinerarium Hispanicum*,” ed. PFANDL, p. 82). The “pulpit” is evidently the *bimah*.

¹⁸ “Timent etiam maxime de proscricione. Nam Rex Hispanie precepit Regi Portugalie, ut Marranos exterminet, similiter Judeos, aut bellum cum eo habeat” (cf. MÜNZER, “*Itinerarium Hispanicum*,” ed. PFANDL, *ibid.*).

¹⁹ “Ad Judeos autem Rex habet inducias per integros duos annos, ut cum moderacione eos ex regno eiciat. Considerantes hoc Judei continuo abeunt et extera loca pro habitacione querunt” (cf. MÜNZER, “*Itinerarium Hispanicum*,” ed. PFANDL, pp. 82-83).

policy already devised by his predecessor. Münzer met João II in person during his visit to Portugal and the rest of his travel diary appears to be generally well informed. Nevertheless, in this particular instance it is difficult not to conclude that he must have been wrong or that he was, perhaps, reporting as fact gossip that he had heard in the streets of Lisbon. Such an extraordinary decision would have been contrary to the King's own interests. Why would King João, at a time when his relations with his Castilian neighbours were being strained to breaking point, have meekly acquiesced to their demands and forfeited considerable fiscal revenues?²⁰

Absolutely no documentary evidence of such an expulsion has survived. There is no trace, for example, of the menacing letters supposedly sent to João II by his Spanish neighbours. Furthermore, it is difficult to understand why Christian or Jewish chroniclers did not mention such a plan if it had been public knowledge. Neither Rui de Pina nor Damião de Góis, who as royal archivists had access to documents that are no longer extant, mention this alleged expulsion in their respective chronicles. Rabbi Abraham Saba, for example, states in his work that the time of his resettlement in Portugal between 1492 and 1497 represented a relative return to calm for him and his family after their expulsion from Spain. He recalls that he completed most of the exegetical commentaries he had begun in Castile while resettled with his family at Guimarães in northern Portugal.²¹ Moreover, if João II had publicly ordered such an expulsion, then it is also difficult to believe that neither Rabbi Elijah Capsali, who seized every opportunity to heap abuse upon the Portuguese monarch for his treatment of the Jews, nor any other Jewish sources would not have mentioned it in their works. Lastly, it is important to note that King Manuel I himself did not refer to any previous plan to expel the Jews in his own expulsion edict of December 1496. This silence is all the more surprising as such a plan could have presented Manuel with a welcome argument to justify his own edict.²²

The extremely limited documentary evidence for this period that does survive also clearly contradicts Münzer's claim. On 22 February 1495, for instance,

²⁰ On the hostile relations between João II and Isabel of Castile before 1492 and 1495, see chapter 3 of SOYER, *The Persecution of the Jews and Muslims of Portugal*, pp. 139-181.

²¹ A. GROSS, *Iberian Jewry from Twilight to Dawn. The World of Rabbi Abraham Saba* (Leiden 1995), pp. 7-8. The life of Saba in Portugal is also described in M. ORON, "Autobiographical elements in the writings of kabbalists from the generation of the Expulsion," in *Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Mediterranean World after 1492* (London 1992), p. 107, n. 22.

²² For the expulsion edict of December 1496 see B. LEROY, *Les édits d'expulsion des Juifs 1394-1492-1496-1501* (Biarritz 1998), pp. 59-63, and SOYER, *The Persecution of the Jews and Muslims of Portugal*, pp. 186-189.

Samuel Alferce, a Jew of Vila Nova de Portimão in the Algarve, agreed to rent houses in the southern towns of Lagos and Sagres for the standard duration “of three lifetimes.” A copy of this contract survives as it was later confirmed by João II’s successor Manuel I in October 1495.²³ This case is not unique, and a similar transaction was carried out by another Jew, this time in the town of Évora, a little over three months later. Judas Caçam and his wife Tamar agreed, in a document dated 26 May 1495, to rent some houses situated in the *judiaria* of Évora for a period of two years on the condition that they complete certain renovations in addition to paying a yearly rent of 700 *reais brancos* and a measure of honey.²⁴ Why would Portuguese Jews have made contractual agreements to rent property for a number of years in early 1495 if João II had publicly issued an expulsion decree ordering them to leave at the end of 1496?

KING JOÃO AND THE CASTILIAN JEWS (1492-93)

On 31 March 1492, Queen Isabel of Castile and King Fernando of Aragón ordered all the Jews residing in their realm to leave within four months. The arrival into Portugal of Jewish refugees from Castile in 1492 probably presented João II with one of the greatest challenges of his reign. The precise number of Jews who actually entered Portugal during the first half of 1492 will never be known. Christian and Jewish chronicles present vast numbers well in excess of 100,000 whilst surviving documents preserved in the National Portuguese Archives suggest that the number was somewhat smaller.²⁵ The impact of the Spanish expulsion on Portugal has not yet received the detailed academic scrutiny that it deserves.²⁶ Many Castilian Jews converted to Christianity and never left Castile whilst a very large number of those who arrived in Portugal subsequently converted and returned to Castile. Even if the number of Castilian Jews who came to Portugal should be numbered in the tens of thousands rather than

²³ Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (ANTT), Chancelaria de D. Manuel I, livro 26, fols. 10r-10v and livro 32, fols. 123r-123v. The duration “of three lifetimes” meant that three different individuals (usually the tenant, his surviving wife and then one of their children) could hold the property in succession before the lease expired.

²⁴ J. C. BAPTISTA, “Os pegaminhos dos bacharéis da Sé de Évora,” *A cidade de Évora* 65-66 (1982-1983), pp. 92-93, doc. 284.

²⁵ For a detailed discussion of the various figures provided by Jewish and Christian chroniclers and the documentary evidence in Portuguese archives see SOYER, *The Persecution of the Jews and Muslims of Portugal*, pp. 103-106.

²⁶ See J. EDWARDS, “Portugal and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain”, *Medievo Hispano: estudios in memoriam del Prof. Derek W. Lomax* (Madrid 1995), 121-139. Edward’s article only uses edited narrative sources and edited Spanish documents.

the hundreds of thousands, as seems probable, a careful analysis of the available documents in the Portuguese National archives reveals that the arrival of these refugees was not an uncontrollable flood of refugees that overwhelmed João II and his agents.²⁷

The arrival of the Castilian Jews appears in fact to have been carefully managed by João II and his officials. King João's biographer, Rui de Pina (1440-1522), does not attempt to conceal the fact that pecuniary considerations underpinned his decision to allow the Castilian refugees into Portugal in spite of the protests of many of his councillors gathered at Sintra:

[João II] employed arguments by which he clearly revealed that it was his wish and will to admit them [into Portugal] because of the money [he could get from them]. His reasoning was that [this money] would allow him to cross over to [conquer North] Africa [with a crusading army], without unduly oppressing and taxing his own people.²⁸

Rabbi Capsali, for his part, put the following words into João II's mouth:

João, the King [of Portugal], having learnt that Fernando [of Aragón] had expelled the [Jews] and had allowed them to leave with their goods and wealth, spoke thus to his ministers: "The King of Spain has been quite stupid to allow the Jews to keep their faith and their wealth". For his part, he would convert them and seize all their goods.²⁹

Only a relatively restricted number of Castilian Jews holding special royal licences were allowed to settle in Portuguese towns dispersed the breadth and length of the kingdom. The Jewish and Portuguese chronicles agree that João II allowed only 600 "households" to remain in his kingdom. In many cases, these privileged few were either wealthy individuals or those artisans who possessed some skills of interest to the Crown, such as armourers or blacksmiths.³⁰ João II allowed the rest of the Castilian Jews to remain in Portugal for a limited period of time only, seemingly promising to provide them with ships to transport

²⁷ E. CANTERA MONTENEGRO, "Judíos de Torrelaguna: retorno de algunos expulsados entre 1493 y 1495," *Sef* 39 (1979), 333-346; J. EDWARDS, "Jews and Conversos in the region of Soria and Almazán: departures and returns," *Religion and Society in Spain, c. 1492* (Great Yarmouth 1996), 1-14. See also SOYER, *The Persecution of the Jews and Muslims of Portugal*, pp. 132-136.

²⁸ "[...] fez e alegou tais razões e mostranças em que claramente descobriu sua vontade e desejo ser de os recolher por dinheiro, com fundamento de com ele passar em África com menos opressão e despesa de seu povo," in PINA, *Crónica de D. João II*, p. 136.

²⁹ CAPSALI, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, ed. SHMUELEVITZ *et al.*, vol. 1, p. 221.

³⁰ SOYER, *The Persecution of the Jews and Muslims of Portugal*, pp. 116-122.

them out of the kingdom. According to Rui de Pina, this delay was set at eight months, but the Spanish chronicler Andrés Bernaldez, an anonymous Jewish source and Rabbi Capsali all state that it was set at only six months.³¹

One of the first measures instituted by the Portuguese monarch to control the entry of the Castilian Jews was the establishment of refugee camps on the Luso-Castilian border. Rabbi Elijah Capsali relates that the Castilian Jews were assembled into a “camp” (במחנה) and it appears that the Jewish exiles were in their overwhelming majority packed not into a single camp but rather into a number of different refugee camps situated close to the border with Castile.³² Documentary information concerning these refugee camps is extremely scarce but there exists evidence, both documentary and anecdotal, that points to the existence of camps in both the remote north-eastern province of Trás-os-Montes and in the southern province of the Alentejo.

One of the encampments situated in the Trás-os-Montes may apparently have been positioned next to the village of Vila Flor, approximately 20 km from the border with Castile. The hypothetical existence of this camp can be deduced, quite accidentally, from a royal pardon delivered to a man named Fins Alvarez in 1496. The pardon explicitly states that he had found a quantity of silver in Vila Flor “it could be four years ago more or less, at the time when the Jews came from Castile to these realms,” and even added that at that time “there were many of the Jews from Castile” in the village.³³ Anecdotal evidence points to the presence of another northern refugee camp situated close to Caçarelhos, roughly fifteen kilometres from the border with Castile, where a valley still bears the suggestive name of “valley of the shacks” (*Vale das cabanas*).³⁴ More reliable documentary evidence seems to point to the presence of a refugee camp at the strategically important border town of Miranda do Douro. A pardon granted by the Crown in 1496 incidentally refers to a time “three years ago” when the town was “full of 4,000 to 5,000 Jews.”³⁵

The most unambiguous documentary reference to a refugee camp does not concern the north of the realm but rather the southern town of Castelo de Vide in

³¹ PINA, *Crónica de D. João II*, p. 137; Andrés BERNÁLDEZ, *Memorias del reinado de los Reyes Católicos*, ed. M. GÓMEZ-MORENO and J. de M. CARRIAZO (Madrid 1962), 259; CAPSALI, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, ed. SHMUELEVITZ *et al.*, vol. 1, p. 223; A. MARX, “The expulsion of the Jews from Spain: Two new accounts”, *Studies in Jewish History and Booklore* (New York 1944), p. 94.

³² CAPSALI, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, ed. SHMUELEVITZ *et al.*, vol. 1, p. 222.

³³ ANTT, Chancelaria de D. Manuel I, livro 32, fol. 99r.

³⁴ KAYSERLING, *História dos Judeus em Portugal*, p. 98, n. 8.

³⁵ ANTT, Chancelaria de D. Manuel I, livro 26, fols. 42r-42v.

the Alentejo. This small town was situated close to the border town of Marvão, where many Castilian Jews would have entered Portugal in 1492. An official named Velasco da Mota, who was responsible for this refugee camp, stated in a letter to the Crown that the encampment for which he was responsible contained between 4,000 and 5,000 Jewish refugees from Castile. It is important to note that the Portuguese term that Velasco da Mota chose to use, when describing the camp in his report, was *arraial*, a word that would usually have been employed to refer to an open-air military encampment with tents. Velasco da Mota further adds that the Castilian Jews were guarded to prevent thefts and kidnappings that were allegedly being committed by gangs of marauders from Castile.³⁶

Whilst exact details concerning the conditions in the Portuguese camps are impossible to come by due to a lack of sources, the little that we do know about those Jews who did manage to cross the straits of Gibraltar in 1492, and found themselves in similar refugee camps in Morocco, leaves little room for doubt. The deposition of a witness made to the Inquisition of Toledo in 1510 described how a group of Castilian Jews from Maqueda (northwest of Toledo), had lived outside Fez in an encampment of precarious huts made from branches that they had built themselves.³⁷ Although the details of daily life in the Portuguese camps are not known, it is nevertheless clear that the presumably poor sanitary conditions encouraged the outbreak of disease amongst the refugees. The Portuguese author of a description of the town of Lamego and its region, dating from the 1530s and therefore written over forty years afterwards, reported that Portugal had never again suffered from the outbreak of “great plagues” (*grandes pestellenças*) similar to the epidemic which followed the arrival of the Castilian Jews into the realm.³⁸

The danger represented by the outbreak of an epidemic of the plague was certainly one of the reasons that motivated João II to confine the arrivals to the camps. In the refugee camps themselves, the plague appears to have claimed many lives. All the extant sources, whether Christian or Jewish, described the ravages caused by the plague. Abraham Zacut, Joseph Ha-Cohen and Samuel Usque all assert that the virulent epidemics that struck the Jewish refugees in

³⁶ Arquivo Distrital de Évora (ADE), Livro 3º de Originais, fol. 214r.

³⁷ H. BEINART, “The Jewish community of Maqueda at the time of the Expulsion” [Hebrew], *Zion* 56 (1991), 239-253. The Spanish word used to describe the huts in the inquisitorial document is “chozas”.

³⁸ “O mais compasso da terra he muito são de mui poucas febres e de poucas maleitas, e des que os Judeos de castella entrarão em Portugal, que então foram grandes pestellenças, nunca mais ouve peste,” cf. Rui FERNANDES, *Descrição do terreno ao redor de Lamego a duas léguas (1531-1532)*, ed. A. Morais BARROS (Santa Maria da Feira 2001), p. 119.

Portugal claimed scores of lives.³⁹ Spanish documents record the cases of a number of Jews who lost hope, converted to Christianity and subsequently returned to Castile, where they petitioned the Crown to grant them property that had belonged to relatives who had died in Portugal. One such individual was an unfortunate *conversa* of Alcalá de Henares (Castile) named Francisca, who had emigrated to Portugal with her husband and children in 1492. She returned to Castile as a convert after losing her husband and at least one of her sons in Portugal.⁴⁰ Likewise, two brothers who converted and returned, Fernán de la Vega and Pérez de la Vega, submitted a claim in 1494 for the property of their sister Reina who had died in Portugal together with her husband and all their children.⁴¹ If we are to believe testimony collected by the Inquisition in the Castilian town of Soria in 1502, the desperate plight of the refugees in Portugal reached such levels that it generated messianic expectations.⁴²

João II made desperate efforts to contain the outbreak of the plague. At an unknown date, he instructed his officials in border towns not to admit into Portugal any Jews from Castile who came from areas of that kingdom that were known to be affected by outbreaks of the epidemic. João II's measures, however, do not appear to have appeased the concerns of municipal councils. In November 1492, for instance, the town of Évora sent a bitter letter of complaint to João II relating to the number of Castilian Jews who were temporarily staying in the town whilst on their way to Lisbon and absolutely refused to receive any more. A special municipal police force, which included four horsemen, was created by the council in December and given the task of keeping foreign Jews out of the town.⁴³ On 9 December, the King was forced to write back to the insubordinate

³⁹ A. ZACUT, *Sefer Yuhasin*, ed. H. FILIPOWSKI (London and Edinburgh 1857), p. 227; Joseph HA-COHEN, *El Valle del Llanto* ('*Emeq ha-Bakha*). *Crónica hebrea del siglo XVI*. Introducción, traducción y notas P. LEÓN TELLO (Barcelona 1989), p. 123; USQUE, *Consolaçam ás Tribulaçoens*, vol. 2, fol. 199r. PINA, *Crónica de D. João II*, p. 138.

⁴⁰ Archivo General de Simancas, Registro General del Sello (RGS), vol. 12, no. 107, fol. 344r.

⁴¹ RGS, vol. 11, no. 3414, fol. 246r.

⁴² "E venido de allá, este testigo le dixo a [...] Juan de Sant Esteuan que cómo avia tardado en Portugal, e le preguntaua de las nuebas de alla e como les yva a los judios; el qual le respondiò [...] que los que allá estauan fasýan muchas oraciones e reclamos a Dios, viendo la perdisión de sus criaturas e de sus personas. E que desýan que no podýan ser, syno que viendo sus reclamos que Dios avía de fazer algund miraglo con ellos," cf. C. CARRETE PARRONDO, ed., *Fontes Iudaeorum Regni Castellae*. Vol. 2. *El Tribunal de la Inquisición en el Obispado de Soria* (Salamanca 1985), p. 144, no. 351.

⁴³ ADE, Livro 3º de Originais, fol. 214r.

municipal councillors to reproach them for their actions and order them to allow the Castilian Jews into the city:

We have been informed that you have prohibited any Jew that has come from Castile to our realms from entering the town. At present, We have not ordered you to act in this manner but have only ordered those places on the borders not to receive Jews from parts of Castile where they are dying [of the plague], We order you to let into the town those Jews that are not from such areas and not already dying of the plague.⁴⁴

The situation further south in the coastal province of the Algarve did not differ from that in the rest of Portugal. The official minutes of the town council of Loulé record that the councillors met on 17 December 1492 to discuss the measures that were to be implemented to prevent the spread of the plague that was “presently killing people in many parts of this realm and particularly the Jews who have come from Castile.” The officials of the local Jewish community of Loulé were called to appear before the council and instructed not to admit into their community any “Jew from outside” (*judeu de fora*). The Jews were warned that their failure to implement this measure would result in the imposition of a large fine on their community.⁴⁵ Unlike that of Évora, the council of Loulé did not create a special police force to keep these unwelcome Jews out, but gave the unpopular task of guarding the entrances of the town, and physically preventing the entry of any outsiders who may have carried the plague, to the Muslim community of that town. In July 1493, the Muslim community of Loulé lodged a formal complaint with the municipal council, asking to be relieved of the burden.⁴⁶

It appears that, at the start of 1493, complaints from various town councils may have forced João II to accept the fact that many Portuguese towns were

⁴⁴ “[...] a nos foy ora dito que vos tiinhees posta defesa que nemhuũs judeus que de Castella vieram e em nossos regnos estam os nom leixam emtrar e estar em essa çidade. E porque nos ataa ora vos nam estprevemos que tall cousa mamdassees ssoomemente estprevemos aos luguares do estremo que nom reçebesem em elles nemhuũas pesoas que dos luguares de Castella domde morremem veessem, vos mandamos que açerca desto ssoomente ponhaaes booa deligemçia a açerca dos dictos judeus nom viimdo elles dos luguares domde morremem nem morremdo amtre elles, leixees emtrar e estar em esa çidade,” cf. ADE, Livro 3º de Originais, fol. 212r.

⁴⁵ “[...] foi dito que porquanto ora moriam destes arees maaos em muitos lugares deste regno e asy dos judeus de Castella que em elle estauam [...],” cf. L. M. DUARTE, “Actas de Vereação de Loulé, Século XV”, *Revista al-Ulya* 10 (Loulé 2004), pp. 84-86.

⁴⁶ “Outrosy foi dicto pellos dictos juiz e oficiaees aos dictos fidalgos e caualeiros e povo como os mouros da mouraria da dicta villa se agravavam dizendo que elles serviam avia oito menses o que recebiam em grande opressam e fadiiga e que lhe requereram que os escussassem de tall guarda [...]” cf. DUARTE, “Actas de Vereação de Loulé, Século XV,” pp. 118-119.

reluctant to admit Jews from Castile even if they were only passing on their way to Lisbon. In February of that year, the Portuguese King confirmed an ordinance passed by the town council of Benavente –located in the Ribatejo, between Lisbon and Santarém– that expelled the Jews from the town under pain of a fine of five *justos* (10 *cruzados*). The document is ambiguous and does not explicitly specify that those expelled were from Castile, but in view of similar developments elsewhere in the realm this appears to be the only plausible explanation.⁴⁷ The Portuguese King and his officials therefore forced the majority of Castilian Jews to remain in the camps and did not allow them to move freely within the kingdom. Only those Castilian Jews with special royal authorisation were allowed to go to towns and cities elsewhere in Portugal. The royal licences conferred to ten Castilian Jews, granting them the privilege to travel to and settle in Lisbon, survive in the municipal archive of the Portuguese capital.⁴⁸

A simple measure instituted by the Crown to deter the illegal arrival of Jewish refugees into Portugal, and ensure the payment of the entry tax, was the establishment of a system of special royal licenses authorizing refugees both to enter and exit the realm. Royal officials, whose task it was to ensure that all Castilian Jews paid the entry tax required of them, were stationed along the border with Castile. Rabbi Elijah Capsali provides us with a vivid account, apparently based on eyewitness testimony, which leaves us with the unmistakable impression that border controls were rigorously enforced by Royal officials:

King João, even before the [Castilian Jews] had entered Portugal, sent zealous agents, angels of destruction, to decimate them and deprive them of their ornaments. As they were emptying their bags, the messengers of the Gentiles appeared before them, insulting them; [the Crown’s agents] searched their tents seeking loot and seizing their gold and silver. In order to prevent any violation of his orders, the King appointed officials and governors whose task it was to stop anyone from entering [Portugal] until they had paid the royal treasury one golden *beka*. Neither men nor women were exempted.⁴⁹

Rabbi Abraham Zacut (c. 1450 - c. 1510), who was himself amongst the exiles arriving from Castile, has left the following description of the taxes imposed upon the exiles as they crossed the border:

⁴⁷ Arquivo Histórico da Câmara Municipal de Lisboa (AHCML), Livro 1º do Provimto da saúde, fols. 16r-17r.

⁴⁸ Durval Pires de LIMA, *Documentos do Arquivo Histórico da Câmara Municipal de Lisboa* (Lisbon 1959), pp. 3, 326, 329, 332, 333, 334 and 336; docs. 54, 57, 60, 61, 62 and 64.

⁴⁹ CAPSALI, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, ed. A. SHMUELEVITZ et al., vol. 1, p. 221.

[The exiles] gave a tenth of all their wealth, plus one *ducado* for each soul, apart from three *ducados* for [the permission] to pass through the [kingdom], and they also gave a quarter of all the wealth that they brought [with them], and some nearly a third. And even one who had no wealth at all paid a ransom for his soul of eight *ducados*, and if he did not he would be imprisoned.⁵⁰

The bureaucratic “formalities” endured by the Castilian exiles at the border were not confined to the payments of the entry tax. Upon payment of the entry tax, all Castilian Jews were apparently issued with a permit to enter Portugal and a receipt. Any Jews who were unable to produce these documents took the risk of being arrested for having entered illegally and that, consequently, their property would be confiscated. No Portuguese document relating to these strict measures has yet been discovered, but their existence is confirmed by a petition sent to the Crown of Castile by a *converso* named Juan Fernández Alegre, who had gone to Portugal in 1492 but later converted and returned to Castile. Juan Fernández Alegre accused his former son-in-law of having stolen these documents from him. Juan Fernández Alegre states in his petition that João II had promulgated a decree by which he had ordered the seizure of the property of any Castilian Jew unable to produce these precious documents and that one-third of the confiscated property would be granted to informers. Caught by Portuguese officials without the necessary paperwork, Juan Fernández Alegre had accordingly been deprived of assets worth 4,000 *ducats*.⁵¹ A similar system of entry permits was later instituted on another occasion by King Manuel I in 1503, in an attempt to control the number of Castilian *convertos* entering Portugal.⁵²

That João not only attempted to control the entry of the Castilian Jews into Portugal but also their departure is made clear by Rabbi Capsali:

Moreover, this evil King forbade anyone from taking the Jews on their ships and transporting them out of the country. Only his own ships could transport them as he wanted to keep the profit for himself and his men. He fixed the price of the crossing at two florins per head.⁵³

The ruthless measures implemented by João II to secure the royal monopoly on the transportation of Castilian Jews out of Portugal can be gathered from

⁵⁰ English translation by H. BEINART, *The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Oxford 2002), p. 285; ZACUT, *Sefer Yuhasin*, ed. FILIPOWSKI, p. 227.

⁵¹ RGS, vol. 12, n° 1050, fol. 534r, cit. by BEINART, *The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain*, p. 300, n. 38 and 39.

⁵² ANTT, Gavetas 2, maço 1, n° 30.

⁵³ CAPSALI, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, ed. SHMUELEVITZ *et al.*, vol. 1, p. 222.

a royal privilege granted on 23 January 1496 by Manuel I to a woman named Maria Anes, the widow of a sea captain named Diogo da Cunha. Maria Anes had successfully petitioned the Crown for the return of confiscated property after her husband had been “executed in accordance with the law for having transported Jews from the port of Setúbal.” The crime committed by Diogo da Cunha thus seems to have been the transportation of Jews out of Portugal without a royal licence authorising him to do so.⁵⁴ The severity with which the King and his magistrates punished offenders is also apparent in a note made in the minutes of the municipal council of Porto on 19 July 1494. The note records, unfortunately without providing any further details, the fact that on 19 July 1494 the councillors agreed to commend a certain João Beleauga, a royal squire and native of Porto, for representations he had made on their behalf to King João. João Beleauga had been forced to intervene after a complaint had been made to the Crown regarding certain unspecified irregularities that had occurred during the embarkation in Porto of “the Jews who came from Castile”.⁵⁵ The Portuguese King’s decree that only ships chartered by the Crown could transport Castilian Jews out of Portugal must not be understood as a measure intentionally designed to prevent Jews from leaving Portugal. In reality, João appears to have been merely attempting to exert his control over the exit of Castilian Jews from Portugal in order to maximise the profit that the Crown could extort from them.

There is abundant evidence in narrative and documentary sources that João II did allow those Jews who paid the exit tax to leave his kingdom. Capsali himself, though no admirer of the Portuguese monarch, states that in the month of Iyyar of the year 5253 –April-May of 1493– over 60,000 Jews left Portugal aboard 120 ships. The number of ships, and of Jews on them, quoted by Capsali is very large, and probably exaggerated, but it nevertheless provides a clear indication that the numbers were substantial.⁵⁶ The Spanish chronicler Andrés Bernáldez (c. 1450-1513), an anonymous Portuguese source dating from the early 16th century, and Damião de Góis (1502-c. 1574) all corroborate this statement although they do not venture to give the number of ships or departing

⁵⁴ “[...] foy morto por justiça per razom dos judeus que levou do porto de Setúbal.” ANTT, Chancelaria de D. Manuel I, livro 32, fol. 48v. Maria Anes claimed that the property had belonged to her prior to her marriage to Diogo da Cunha.

⁵⁵ Arquivo Histórico Municipal do Porto, Livro n° 6 de Vereações, fols. 73v-74r. Published in MORENO, “Reflexos na cidade do Porto da entrada dos conversos em Portugal,” pp. 159-160.

⁵⁶ CAPSALI, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, ed. A. SHMUELEVITZ et al., vol. 1, p. 223. Capsali gives their destination as the “lands of Ishmael”, referring to Islamic territories, but it is clear that many of the ships also sailed for Italy.

Jews.⁵⁷ Amongst these Jews was R. Judah Hayyat, who left a precious first hand account of the ordeal he endured with 250 other Jews during their seaborne journey from Lisbon to Naples.⁵⁸ Bernaldino Tomas, a Jew who later converted and returned to Castile, was another Castilian exile who boarded a ship in Lisbon for Naples in the spring of 1493 and whose terrible experiences at sea are described in a petition addressed to the Crown of Castile.⁵⁹ Surviving inquisitorial trial dossiers also provide glimpses of the experiences of Castilian Jews who were able to leave Portugal for North Africa or Italy.⁶⁰ As late as 30 December 1493, from his palace at Almeirim (near Santarém), the King sent a letter to the municipal council of Lisbon in which he ordered them to take good care of the Jews “whom we ordered to leave” and who accordingly came to the city to embark on ships. The late date of this document is striking and suggests that an unknown number of Castilian exiles were in fact allowed to leave Portugal well after the original deadline accorded to them by João II had expired.⁶¹

A clear measure of how anxious the Portuguese monarch was to see the majority of the exiles depart from his realm as soon as possible can be gleaned from a somewhat peculiar royal edict issued on 19 October 1492 that aimed to create favourable conditions for the conversion of Jews, both Portuguese and foreign “of whom many have now arrived in our realms.” In this edict, the King decreed that any Jew who converted to Christianity was to be exempted from the payment of a range of taxes levied by the Crown, as well as by municipal councils, and excused converts from having to serve in the army “on sea or on land during time of war or peace”. These privileges were very similar to existing legislation dating back to the reign of João I (1384-1433) and incorporated in the legal compendium known as the *Ordenações Afonsinas* during the reign of Afonso V.⁶² It is the final privilege of the edict that is particularly striking. Indeed, João II promised any “foreign Jews” who had come to Portugal and who converted to

⁵⁷ BERNÁLDEZ, *Memorias del reinado de los Reyes Católicos*, p. 259; Biblioteca da Ajuda (Lisboa), codex 51-V-69, fol. 203r; Damião de Góis, *Crónica do Felicíssimo Rei D. Manuel* (Coimbra 1949), vol. 1, pp. 23-24.

⁵⁸ ORON, “Autobiographical elements in the writings of kabbalists,” pp. 103-106.

⁵⁹ J. RODRÍGUEZ FERNÁNDEZ, *Las juderías de la provincia de León* (León 1976), pp. 424-425.

⁶⁰ See, for instance, ANTT, Inquisição de Évora, processo n° 9416; CANTERA MONTENEGRO, “Judíos de Torrelaguna: retorno de algunos expulsados entre 1493 y 1495”, pp. 345-6; BEINART, “The Jewish community of Maqueda at the time of the expulsion”, pp. 239-253.

⁶¹ “[...] Nos mandamos vyr a esa cidade os judeus que destes Regnos ouverem de sair e asy a outros portos de nosos Regno [...] Emcomendamosvos [...] lh'es mandees dar boo tratamento e que lh'es nom seja feito agravo [...]” LIMA, *Documentos do Arquivo Histórico da Câmara Municipal de Lisboa*, vol. 3, p. 339, document 67.

⁶² *Ordenações Afonsinas* (Universidade de Coimbra 1792), livro II, titulo 83.

Christianity that they would have the right to leave the realm and take with them any gold, silver, cash and jewellery belonging to them without having to pay any taxes. A salient aspect of this last clause is that it does not stipulate that the converts had to emigrate to a Christian kingdom as previous edicts had routinely done.⁶³ Surely the King could not have ignored that converts from Judaism who emigrated from the Iberian Peninsula to Muslim lands usually reverted to their original faith once they no longer needed to fear retribution for apostasy. The publication date of the edict, as well as the fact that this last clause was applicable only to the Castilian exiles, appears to suggest that the King actively sought ways to encourage them to leave Portugal for any destination. The requirement that the exiles convert to Christianity beforehand can only be understood as an attempt to “save face” by the Portuguese Crown.⁶⁴

JOÃO AND THE ENSLAVEMENT OF THE CASTILIAN JEWS

Amongst the conditions that João II had clearly imposed on the Castilian Jews before allowing them to enter Portugal was the stipulation that all those not allowed to settle permanently must leave his kingdom within the delay he had set them or face enslavement. The poverty of numerous Castilian Jews, however, meant many of them were not able to leave Portugal within the specified delay. According to Rabbi Elijah Capsali, João II had already enslaved an unspecified number of Castilian Jews who had attempted to enter Portugal without paying the entry tax:

A great number of humble and destitute people, whose means were insufficient, were not able to pay the tax and, thinking that they would be able to dupe the King, were duped themselves, for he pursued them all from the greatest to the smallest [...]. He therefore took them as his slaves and servants.⁶⁵

Subsequently, there were Jews who stayed in Portugal beyond the delay

⁶³ See, for instance, the edict of expulsion promulgated by João II on 2 October 1488 against Castilian *conversos* residing in Portugal, which allowed them to go to France, England, Italy and Germany, but explicitly prohibited them from going to Islamic North Africa. AHCML, *Livro das Posturas Antigas*, fols. 62v-63v. Publ. in *Livro das Posturas Antigas*, ed. RODRIGUES, pp. 172-174.

⁶⁴ “Outrosy queremos e nos praz que os judeus estrangeiros que se asy em nossos regnos e senhorios tornarem cristãos querendo se ir pera fora delles o possam fazer e levar e levar consigo livremente todo ouro prata dinheiro amo[e]dado e joias que em os dictos nossos regnos meteram quando a elles vieram sem dello pagarem nehuum direito,” cf. DUARTE, “Actas de Vereação de Loulé, Século xv,” pp. 62-64.

⁶⁵ CAPSALI, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, ed. SHMUELEVITZ *et al.*, vol. 1, p. 222.

granted to them. Capsali asserts that soon after the Castilian Jews were assembled into the various camps on the border, João II ordered a number of heralds to read aloud the following proclamation:

Any man or woman amongst those who had come to the lands of João [II] of Portugal and who wished to remain there from this day forward, although the King has limited the duration of their stay to six months, a delay that had already expired, would be able to remain on condition that they paid the King a capitation tax of 8 florins. They would then be permitted to remain in the country without being molested. Anyone who disobeyed this order and did not pay this sum would become the slave of the King for the rest of his life. When the Jews learnt of the King's edict, [...] the wealthy rejoiced and the poor despaired.⁶⁶

For those refugees who were too poor to leave Portugal before the delay granted to them had expired, João showed himself to be just as ruthless as with those who had not paid the entry tax.

There is no documentary evidence that might provide historians with a clear idea of the number of Jews who were thus enslaved and we only have the estimations provided by two chroniclers. Rabbi Capsali declares in his work that 15,000 Castilian Jews, who were not able pay the tax levied by João II, were reduced to slavery but that 10,000 of them were eventually ransomed by the Portuguese Jewish community.⁶⁷ Such an action by the Portuguese Jewish community would not be surprising. As recently as 1489, Jewish communities throughout Spain had similarly ransomed the Jews of Málaga, who had been enslaved after the conquest of that town by Castilian armies in 1487.⁶⁸ For his part, Andrés Bernáldez is more ambiguous as he puts the number of men and women reduced to bondage at "more than 1,000 souls."⁶⁹ Who were these hapless Jews and what became of them? The extant narrative sources only state that all the Jews enslaved by João II were later freed by his successor Manuel but provide no further details.⁷⁰ A handful of documents, however, do offer scraps of information concerning their fate. By way of illustration, one of these enslaved Jews was Joseph Abenaçan, a resident of Torrelaguna in Castile. According

⁶⁶ CAPSALI, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, ed. SHMUELEVITZ *et al.*, vol. 1, p. 223.

⁶⁷ CAPSALI, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, ed. SHMUELEVITZ *et al.*, vol.1, p. 222.

⁶⁸ Y. BAER, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (Philadelphia 1966), vol. 2, p. 432; L. SUÁREZ FERNÁNDEZ, *Documentos acerca de la expulsión de los judíos* (Valladolid 1964), pp. 315-317 and 327-329, docs. 122 and 131.

⁶⁹ "[...] e quedaron más de mill ánimas captivas en poder del rey, porqueno pagaron los cruzados e los derechos de la entrada," cf. BERNÁLDEZ, *Memorias del reinado de los Reyes Católicos*, p. 259.

⁷⁰ GÓIS, *Crónica do Felicíssimo Rei D. Manuel*, vol. 1, pp. 23-24.

to a reply made by the Castilian Crown in December 1494 to a petition by his son (who had converted and returned to that kingdom), Joseph Abenaçan “remained in the kingdom of Portugal and had been enslaved by the said King [João II], because of certain laws [the Portuguese King] passed concerning the Jews who went there.”⁷¹ Likewise, a list of slaves working in the royal stables in 1493 includes a man bearing the name *Yaco* (Jacob). I have not found any examples of Christians or Muslims using this name in Medieval Portugal, and it must therefore be presumed that its bearer was in all probability another ill-fated Castilian Jew.⁷² Not all those enslaved by the Crown apparently remained in its service. A royal pardon granted by Manuel I in February 1496 reveals that a certain João Tavares, a knight residing in the border town of Portalegre, owned a female convert from Judaism named Filipa Rodrigues as his slave. The pardon indicates that her father Jacob Abraham and mother Orabona, who were still Jews and apparently free and residing in Portugal, had started legal proceedings against João Tavares for having raped their daughter. No context is provided by the document, but given its date it seems nonetheless extremely plausible that Filipa Rodrigues was one of those Castilian Jews enslaved in 1493. Why Filipa was still a slave whilst her parents were apparently free, even though Manuel I had ordered that enslaved Castilian Jews be freed soon after his accession in October 1495, is a mystery.⁷³

It is the fate of the children of these enslaved Jews that has received the most attention in the chronicles. Jewish narratives all relate the tragic fate of these Jewish children who were seized from their parents and deported to the uninhabited island of São Tomé with the expedition of Álvaro de Caminha in order to be raised there as Christians and serve as colonists.⁷⁴ No extant document has ever given the reason that motivated the Portuguese king to adopt such a brutal and unprecedented course of action or indeed how João II sought to justify it. The Jewish chronicler Ibn Gedalya (1526-1587) states in his work that João II initially seized the children from their parents, presumably destitute exiles, as a security for the taxes that they owed the Crown:

⁷¹ “[...] e quel dicho su padre se quedo en el reyno de Portugal e por esclavo del dicho rey, por çiertas leys que en su reyno fiso çerca de los judíos que alla pasaron [...],” RGS, vol. 11, nº 4361, fol. 119r. This document has been published by CANTERA MONTENEGRO, “Judíos de Torrelaguna: retorno de algunos expulsados entre 1493 y 1495,” pp. 343-344, doc. 5.

⁷² ANTT, Corpo Cronológico, Parte I, maço 2, doc. 9

⁷³ ANTT, Chancelaria de D. Manuel I, livro 32, fol. 102r.

⁷⁴ On Álvaro de Caminha see H. Baquero MORENO, “Álvaro de Caminha, Capitão-mor da ilha de São Tomé,” in *Congresso Internacional Bartolomeu Dias e sua época. Actas. Vol. 1. D. João II e a política quatrocentista* (Porto 1989), pp. 299-313.

The King cunningly inquired whether all the [Castilian] exiles had paid their taxes according to their status. When he discovered that many of them had not, he was furious, and he took their sons as security.⁷⁵

Likewise, Solomon Ibn Verga provides exactly the same explanation:

Some [people] claimed that the cause of this persecution [i.e. the seizure of the children] was that those expelled from Spain had promised a certain sum [of money] to the King so that he would receive them in his kingdom. In the end, however, many of the [exiles] did not pay...⁷⁶

Many Jewish authors describe the terrible anguish of the parents who lost their children but the episode recorded by Solomon Ibn Verga, who himself came to Portugal in 1492 with his family, is particularly moving:

There was a [Jewish] woman from whom they had taken six children. When the unfortunate woman heard that the King was leaving the church [where he had just attended mass], this woman [started to] implore his mercy and threw herself at the feet of his horse, pleading with him to return her youngest child to her but the King would not listen to her.

The King ordered his servants: “take her out of my sight!”

[The woman] continued to plead her case with yet louder screams and [the servants] abused her.

The King then exclaimed: “Let her be, she is like a bitch whose pups have been taken away from her!”⁷⁷

Practically every Jewish narrative describes, with more or less detail, the tragic fate of these children sent to the disease ridden and inhospitable island of São Tomé. Whilst some Jewish authors writing in Hebrew transliterated the Portuguese name of the island into Hebrew, others preferred to use the description “Island of the lizards,” a name that must have been commonly used in Portugal itself and which presumably referred to its feared reptilian fauna (snakes and crocodiles).⁷⁸

⁷⁵ A. DAVID, “The Spanish expulsion and the Portuguese persecution through the eyes of the historian R. Gedalya ibn Yahya,” *Sef* 56 (1996), p. 52.

⁷⁶ Salomón IBN VERGA, *La vara de Judah. Shebet Yehudah*. Traducción de. M. José CANO (Barcelona 1991), p. 224. The dates of birth and death of Ibn Verga are not known.

⁷⁷ IBN VERGA, *La vara de Judah*, p. 224. It is interesting to note that Cano confused this passage with that of the forced conversion of 1497. Astonishingly, Ibn Verga never refers to the events of 1497, but leaps forward from 1492-93 to the massacre of the converts of Lisbon in April 1506.

⁷⁸ In an article published in 2000, M. Mitchell Serels argued that the Jewish children were transported to the Cape Verde archipelago rather than São Tomé. In fact, the evidence does not leave any room for doubt that their destination was São Tomé. See M. Mitchell SERELS, “The two

Jewish sources offer different estimations as to the number of children who were sent by João II to São Tomé. Rabbi Capsali states that 5,000 “boys” were taken to São Tomé but the numbers provided by other sources are considerably lower. Abraham ben Solomon Torrutiel (1482-?) believed that there were 800 children, including both boys and girls, whilst an anonymous Jewish chronicler alludes to 700.⁷⁹ The most credible estimation may be that offered by Valentim Fernandes, a German printer who established himself in Portugal in 1495 and wrote a description of the islands based on the testimony of sailors who had visited it. Valentim Fernandes’s description of São Tomé was published in 1510 and in it he asserts that the Jewish children who arrived on the island had originally numbered 2,000, of whom only 600 had survived into adulthood.⁸⁰ It is interesting that Christian authors such as Rui de Pina, Andrés Bernáldez and Damião de Góis do not mention the seizure of the children at all. It is only possible to speculate about the reasons behind this remarkable silence. In the case of King João’s biographer Rui de Pina, and also for a churchman like Andrés Bernáldez, the shocking nature of this event, as well as its dubious religious legitimacy, doubtless incited them to omit any mention of it in their work. In the case of Damião de Góis, however, this silence is more puzzling. As the official biographer of Manuel I, Damião de Góis briefly describes the enslavement of the Castilian Jews by Manuel’s predecessor but neglects to mention the seizure of the Jewish children. Since de Góis did not seek to hide the later seizure of Portuguese Jewish children in 1497, which was orchestrated by Manuel I on a far larger scale, this lapse defies explanation.⁸¹

thousand missing Portuguese-Jewish children,” in *Studies on the History of Portuguese Jews from their Expulsion in 1497 through their Dispersion*, ed. J. KATZ and M. Mitchell SERELS (New York 2000), pp. 193-200. Usque described the island both as that of São Tomé and as the island of the “lagartos” (‘lizards’). USQUE, *Consolaçam ás Tribulaçoens*, vol. 2, fols. 200v-202r.

⁷⁹ CAPSALI, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, ed. SHMUELEVITZ *et al.*, vol. 1, p. 222; Abraham ben Solomon, *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, transl. in Y. MORENO KOCH, *Dos crónicas hispanohebreas del siglo XV* (Barcelona 1992), p. 105; MARX, “The expulsion of the Jews from Spain,” p. 94.

⁸⁰ R. GARFIELD, “Public Christians, secret Jews: Religion and political conflict on São Tome island in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 21 (1990), pp. 645-654, and “A forgotten fragment of the Diaspora: The Jews of São Tomé Island, 1492-1654,” in *The Expulsion of the Jews. 1492 and After*, ed. R. B. WADDINGTON and A. H. WILLIAMSON (New York 1994), pp. 73-87. For a modern edition of Valentim Fernandes’s work see *Códice Valentim Fernandes*, ed. J. Veríssimo SERRÃO and J. Pereira da COSTA (Lisbon 1997).

⁸¹ On the massive seizure of Jewish children across Portugal ordered by King Manuel in March 1497, see SOYER, *The Persecution of the Jews and Muslims of Portugal*, pp. 210-218.

CONCLUSION

The historian Alexandre Herculano (1810-1877), who is universally acknowledged as the father of modern Portuguese historiography, commented wryly in his work that “excessive scruples were not one of João II’s weaknesses.”⁸² The entirety of João II’s reign, like those of so many other “Renaissance Princes,” was to a large extent characterised by the monarch’s determination to stabilise and aggrandise the Crown’s political and economic position. The ruthlessness with which João eliminated all threats to his authority would lead him to the extreme measure of stabbing to death his own brother-in-law Duke Diogo of Viseu, whom he accused of treason, with his own hands in 1484. The conduct of João II towards the Jews, whether they were natives of Portugal or exiles from Castile, cannot be analysed in isolation and has to be incorporated within this context.

The nature of the Portuguese monarch’s relations with the Jews were not dictated or even influenced by any anti-Jewish sentiments but rather by political and economical expediency. Nursing ambitious projects for Portuguese expansion in North Africa and elsewhere, the Portuguese King was always in search of new revenue and mindful to protect the rights and status of the Crown as well as the needs of the Royal treasury.⁸³ It was these essential factors that characterised the nature of his attitudes and policies towards the Jews. Notwithstanding this, João II’s ruthless policies understandably induced his victims to see him as an inveterate enemy of the Jews and Judaism. Such sentiments gave rise to a curious legend, clearly biblical in inspiration, relating to the death of João II’s only legitimate son and heir, prince Afonso, which is found in some Jewish accounts. This legend, which must have originated amongst the refugees from Castile who eventually reached Italy via Portugal, is reported as fact both by Elijah Capsali and Joseph ha-Cohen in their works. According to these authors, the accidental death of Prince Afonso after a fall from his horse could only be understood as God’s punishment of the Portuguese King for his cruelty towards the Jewish refugees from Castile.⁸⁴ Capsali, in particular, includes an entire chapter of his work dedicated to the death of Afonso in which the misfortune of João II is

⁸² A. HERCULANO, *História da origem e estabelecimento da Inquisição em Portugal* (Lisbon 1975), vol. 1, p. 102.

⁸³ For João II’s territorial ambitions in North Africa, more specifically in what is today Morocco, see, L. F. F. R. THOMAZ, “O projecto Imperial Joanino,” in *Congresso Internacional Bartolomeu Dias e sua epoca. Actas. Vol. 1. D. João II e a política quatrocentista* (Porto 1989), pp. 81-98.

⁸⁴ HA-COHEN, *El valle del llanto*, p. 123.

narrated with great relish by the Cretan Rabbi.⁸⁵ The Jewish chroniclers chose to make this connection even though the death of the prince actually occurred in July 1491, thus preceding the arrival of the Jews expelled from Castile by almost a year.⁸⁶

Setting aside the treason of the exceptionally wealthy Isaac Abravanel, the Portuguese Jews formed a marginalised group that was entirely dependent upon João II for their protection. As such, they did not pose any threat to his authority. The very different treatment that João II reserved for the Castilian Jews can also be rationalised in this manner. The thousands of refugees who came into Portugal in 1492 represented at the same time a threat to the stability of his kingdom as well as an extraordinary and unexpected opportunity for João II to fill the royal coffers. If the King compelled the Castilian Jews to remain in camps controlled by Royal officials, forced them to embark only on ships chartered by the Crown and ordered the seizure of the children of Jews who had failed to pay the taxes, then these actions have to be understood not as those of a religious bigot but rather of a prince who ruthlessly exploited the Castilian Jews for his own gain. Even though it has been repeatedly argued that João II did his utmost to stop the Castilian Jews from leaving Portugal, in reality the opposite appears to have been the case. João II was anxious to ensure that as many of the refugees as possible actually left his kingdom once they had paid the taxes he demanded of them. Four years later, exactly the same pragmatic considerations, rather than religious motives, would push Manuel I to employ remarkably brutal and callous measures to compel all Portuguese Jews to convert to Christianity and remain within Portugal.⁸⁷

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⁸⁵ CAPSALI, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, ed. SHMUELEVITZ *et al.*, vol. 1, pp. 229-232.

⁸⁶ On the death of Prince Afonso see PINA, *Crónica de D. João II*, pp. 102-108.

⁸⁷ See chapter four “*The ‘General Conversion’ of the Jews*” of SOYER, *The Persecution of the Jews and Muslims of Portugal*, pp. 182-240.