

The Anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theory in Sixteenth-Century Spain and Portugal and the Origins of the *Carta de los Judíos de Constantinopla*: New Evidence*

Francois Soyer**
University of Southampton

LA TEORÍA CONSPIRATIVA ANTISEMITA EN ESPAÑA Y PORTUGAL A FINES DEL SIGLO XVI Y LOS ORÍGENES DE LA *CARTA DE LOS JUDÍOS DE CONSTANTINOPLA*: NUEVA EVIDENCIA.— Este artículo examina un documento en gran parte desconocido y conservado en los archivos del Instituto Valencia de Don Juan en Madrid. Este documento —un breve memorial escrito por el obispo portugués Andrés de Noronha en la década de 1580 y probablemente destinado a uno de los secretarios reales o tal vez el propio Felipe II— revela nueva información acerca de la creencia de que los judíos o *conversos* judaizantes en la Península Ibérica comunicaban con sus correligionarios en el Imperio otomano y conspiraban con el objetivo de infiltrar la sociedad cristiana y destruir a las monarquías ibéricas. Dando un informe de una conversación entre el obispo y un inquisidor español que habría tenido lugar en 1566 o 1567, el memorial se refiere a la *Carta de los judíos de Constantinopla*, una infame falsificación que se convirtió en la piedra angular de esta poderosa teoría conspirativa antisemita. A través de un análisis del texto, este artículo aclara el modo en que la *Carta de los judíos de Constantinopla* circuló y fue diseminada, tanto en España como en Portugal, así como su papel en la creación en 1568 de becas discriminatorias reservadas para cristianos viejos que deseaban estudiar medicina en la Universidad de Coimbra.

PALABRAS CLAVE: antisemitismo; falsos; conspiración; propaganda; judíos; Monarquía Hispánica; Edad Moderna.

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** f.j.soyer@soton.ac.uk

This article examines a largely unknown document preserved in the archives of the Instituto Valencia de Don Juan in Madrid. This rare document –a short memorandum written by the Portuguese Bishop Andrés de Noronha in the 1580s and probably intended for one of the high-ranking royal secretaries or even King Philip II himself– reveals new information regarding the belief that the Jews or judaizing *conversos* in the Iberian Peninsula were communicating with their coreligionists in the Ottoman Empire and plotting to destroy the Iberian monarchies by infiltrating Christian society. Reporting a conversation between the bishop and a Spanish inquisitor that took place in 1566 or 1567, the memorandum refers to the *Carta de los judíos de Constantinopla*, an infamous forgery that became the keystone of this powerful anti-Semitic conspiracy theory. Through an analysis of the text, this article sheds light upon the early circulation and dissemination of the *Carta de los judíos de Constantinopla* in both Spain and Portugal as well as its role in the creation in 1568 of discriminatory bursaries reserved for Old Christians wishing to study medicine at the University of Coimbra.

KEYWORDS: Anti-Semitism; Forgeries; Conspiracy; Propaganda; Jews; Catholic Monarchy; Early Modern.

The anti-Semitic conspiracy theory –the ‘Jewish plot’– has thrived upon documents purporting to have been written by Jews but which are in reality forgeries designed to endorse and enhance the credibility of the claims made by anti-Semitic conspiracy theorists. The most infamous of these works, without doubt, are the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a late nineteenth-century Russian fabrication that purports to be a list of twenty-four points agreed upon by rabbis from around the world at a secret gathering held in Prague. The *Protocols* detailed the rabbis’ plans to undermine the morals of the Gentile world, dominate its economy and control its press in order to ultimately enslave all Gentiles. Although they were rapidly exposed as a forgery, indeed clumsily plagiarising amongst others a nineteenth-century French political satire entitled *The Dialogue in Hell Between Machiavelli and Montesquieu* that had nothing to do with anti-Jewish propaganda, the *Protocols* rapidly became part of the anti-Semitic canon outside of Tsarist Russia with translations appearing in many languages including French, German, English, Spanish and Portuguese. More recently, in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, their Arabic translation has enjoyed considerable success and continues to be printed. All attempts to refute their authenticity have been presented as being directed or inspired by Jews keen to suppress the ‘truth’ and thus

have only reinforced their standing amongst anti-Semites. Ultimately, as Norman Cohn has evocatively stated, the *Protocols* became a “warrant for genocide” in Nazi Germany and they continue to be used to justify anti-Semitic violence and propaganda.¹

This article focuses on a largely overlooked document that sheds new light on the origins and early dissemination of a similar forgery that appeared in sixteenth-century Spain and became a keystone of anti-Semitic propaganda in the early modern Iberian world: a set of two letters supposedly exchanged between the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula and those in Constantinople and allegedly dating from the time of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in early 1492. Their status as crude forgeries was convincingly exposed by the French scholar Isidore Loeb as early as 1887.² The ‘letter’ from the Jews of Spain bemoaned their plight in the face of the choice of expulsion or conversion to Christianity and requested advice from their brethren in Ottoman-ruled Constantinople. The ‘reply’ of the Jews of Constantinople explicitly advised the Iberian Jews to convert and then to seek to gain their revenge against their Christian persecutors by infiltrating ecclesiastical and secular institutions as well as by deliberately urging their sons to become merchants, judges and doctors:

Regarding what you state about the King of Spain compelling you to become Christians, let him do it for there is nothing that you can do to prevent it. Concerning what you write about the fact that they are seizing your goods, well turn you children into merchants so that, bit by bit, they may seize their goods. In connection with what you have said about their murdering you, well turn your sons into doctors and apothecaries, so that they make murder them. As regards what you say about their destroying your synagogues, turn your sons into clergymen and theologians, so that they may destroy their churches. Finally, vis-à-vis what you have to say about the vexations that they make you suffer, strive so that your sons may become lawyers, attorneys, notaries and counsellors and that they should always know how public affairs work so that they may dominate them and win lands. Follow these instructions in the same order and this way

¹ Norman COHN, *Warrant for Genocide. The Myth of the Jewish World Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (London, 1967).

² Isidore LOEB, “La correspondance des Juifs d’Espagne avec ceux de Constantinople,” *Revue des Études Juives* [hereafter *REJ*] 15 (1887), 262–276.

you will get your revenge and through experience you will witness how you shall be transformed from being social outcasts to being held in considerable esteem.

The first known printed version of these letters appeared in a collection of “various silly and curious stories that will be useful for ladies and gentlemen in honest and virtuous conversations” compiled by Julián de Medrano and entitled *La Silva Curiosa*. First printed in Zaragoza in 1580, the work appeared in reprints produced in Paris in 1583 and 1608. There can be no doubt, however, that the letters date from many years before Julián de Medrano’s work first appeared in print.

The origins of the forgeries may well lay in the heated controversy that surrounded the introduction of statutes of purity of blood (*limpieza de sangre*) in the chapter of the Cathedral of Toledo by Archbishop Juan Martínez Silíceo and his supporters between 1547 and 1556. The first references to these letters are indeed during the propaganda war waged by supporters and opponents of the introduction of the statutes of *limpieza*. Albert Sicroff has revealed that amongst the many libels hurled at the *conversos* by Silíceo to justify the introduction of the discriminatory statutes was the claim that they were plotting to take over Spain and the archbishop of Toledo explicitly referred to the forged letters.³ They are also alluded to in the *Defensio Statuti Toletani* of Bishop Diego de Simancas, who wrote under the alias of Diego Velázquez. In that work, which was first printed in 1573, Simancas refers to a “rumour” (*fama*) that the *conversos* of Toledo had sought the advice of certain unspecified “foreign synagogues” (*synagogas externas*) and that the latter had advised them to dissemble and pretend to be Christians with the intention of visiting as much death and harm as they could upon the ‘Old Christians’ by infiltrating the clergy as well as the medical and legal professions.⁴ Finally, the learned priest and historian Baltasar Porreño (1569-1639), refers to the letters in an unpublished work defending the statutes of purity of blood introduced in Toledo by Archbishop Silíceo which he began in the late

³ Albert SICROFF, *Los estatutos de limpieza de sangre. Controversias entre los siglos XVI y XVII* (Newark, Del., 2010), 135-191: 162; BnF, MS. 354, ff. 15r-v.

⁴ Diego VELÁZQUEZ, *Defensio Statuti Toletani a Sede Apostolica saepe confirmati* (Antwerp, 1575), 18-19: “[...] et si forte fabula ficta sit, rerum tamen exitus declarauit, eam fuisse proxima vero”.

sixteenth century but only completed in 1608. Baltasar Porreño claimed to have personally examined the letters (or at least copies of them) in the Toledan archives.⁵

In the nineteenth-century, the historian Adolfo de Castro claimed that the archbishop personally concocted these letters but there is no documentary evidence to support such a categorical assertion actually assigning authorship to the archbishop.⁶ At least it is possible to state that no trace of the letters, or reference to them, exists prior to the middle of the sixteenth century. The many manuscript copies that are preserved in libraries in Spain, Portugal and France and which have been examined by Sicroff are all posterior to 1550. One manuscript copy in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, claims to be an exchange of letters between the Jews of Spain and the Jews “of Babylonia” rather than Constantinople.⁷

Whatever their real origins and whoever actually composed them, the forged letters became a major element in early modern Spanish and Portuguese anti-*converso* polemical propaganda. They appeared in all major anti-Semitic works written and/or printed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The jurist Ignacio del Villar Maldonado reproduced (in vernacular Spanish) only the reply of the Jews of Constantinople in his influential work *Sylva responsorum iuris: in duos libros diuisa*, first printed in Madrid in 1614 and it was this version that was often copied and transcribed in subsequent works. These works include the *Breve Discurso contra a heretica perfidia do judaismo* by Vicente da Costa Matos (Lisbon, 1622, ff. 55v-56r); the extremely popular *Centinela contra Judíos* by Fray Francisco de Torrejoncillo (Madrid, 1674, pp. 86-87); the *Impugnacion contra el Talmud de los judios, Alcoran de Mahoma, y contra los hereges* by Fray Félix Alamín (Madrid, 1727, p. 57) and the *Mayor Fiscal contra Judíos* by Antonio de Contreras (Madrid, 1736, pp. 130-132). The popularity of the forgeries extended even to works whose purpose was not primarily to attack Jews and/or *conversos*. By way of illustration, the jurist Fernández de Otero transcribed both the letter and the

⁵ Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid, MS. 3043 (*Defensa del estatuto de limpieza de sangre que estableció en la Iglesia de Toledo el arzobispo Silíceo o Museo de los reyes sabios que han tenido las naciones del orbe*).

⁶ Adolfo de CASTRO, *Historia de los judíos en España* (Cádiz, 1847), 137-142.

⁷ BnF, MS. 354, f. 221v.

commentary of Villar Maldonado, in their original Spanish, in his own work *Tractatus de officialibus reipublicæ* (Lyon, 1682, pp. 15-16) and the doctor Sebastián de Acuña mentions the letters in his *Dissertaciones sobre el orden que los medicos deben observar en las juntas* (Madrid, 1746, pp. 49-50).

The most famous author to cite the letters was probably the celebrated author and poet Francisco de Quevedo. The letters are mentioned in a manuscript (and never printed in the early modern period) anti-Semitic pamphlet authored by Quevedo and entitled *Execración de los Judíos* (1633), which was produced amidst the anti-*converso* uproar caused by the infamous case of the Cristo de la Paciencia, in which a family of Portuguese *conversos* residing in Madrid were accused of flagellating a crucifix and statue of Christ and subsequently prosecuted by the Inquisition. Quevedo, unlike many of his peers, was not willing to uncritically accept their genuineness but still believed that a worldwide Jewish plot threatened both the Catholic Church and the Spanish monarchy. For Quevedo, the advice of the “evil Jews” of Constantinople to the Jews/*conversos* of Spain was “so full of venom that it is infectious to even read it and it is hateful to witness the cunning with which [the *conversos*] have implemented it”.⁸ Furthermore, Quevedo’s doubts about the authenticity of the letters did not prevent him from using the theme of the secret Jewish conspiracy in his later work *La Isla de los Monopantos* (‘The Island of the Monopantos’), which was written a few years after the *Execración de los Judíos* but, unlike the *Execración*, appeared in print (albeit posthumously) amongst more of his writings in 1650 in a work entitled *La Fortuna con seso y La Hora de Todos*.⁹

1. THE DOCUMENT IN THE INSTITUTO VALENCIA DE DON JUAN

The object of this work is to introduce and analyse a document from the archive of the Instituto Valencia de Don Juan in Madrid that has been

⁸ Francisco de QUEVEDO, *Execración contra los Judíos*, ed. Fernando CABO ASEGUINO-LAZA and Santiago FERNÁNDEZ MOSQUERA (Barcelona, 1996), 58.

⁹ Francisco de QUEVEDO, *La Fortuna con seso y La Hora de Todos* (Zaragoza, 1650), 159-182.

overlooked by historians but which offers new insights into the early stages of the development of the conspiracy theory circulating in early modern Spain and Portugal. The author of this document claimed that Jews or judaizing *conversos* in the Iberian Peninsula were actively communicating with Jews in the Ottoman Empire and, guided by the latter, were seeking to undermine both the Catholic Church and Iberian monarchies.¹⁰ The document in question is a letter –although memorandum might be a better term to describe it– that is only two pages long. It bears the title heading “A warning about a certain affair that has come to be known by order of the Inquisition of Llerena” (*Advertimiento de cierto negocio sabido por orden de la Inquisición de Llerena*). Despite its brevity, the document sheds new light on the early circulation of manuscript copies of the forged letters supposed to have been exchanged by Iberian *conversos* and Jews in Constantinople as well as their impact on the development of anti-*converso* feeling and racially discriminatory statutes in Spain and Portugal.

In a short article published in 1967, the Hebraist Francisco Cantera Burgos, the sole scholar to have devoted any attention to the memorandum, identified its author as Bishop Pedro González de Acevedo, who occupied the See of Plasencia from 1594 until 1609. He also claimed that it was written during the controversies surrounding the Habsburg Crown’s policy of conciliation towards the Portuguese *conversos* at the start of the reign of Philip III of Spain (1598-1621).¹¹ However, this appears to have been a mistake. To begin with, the signature on the document (see plate 1) clearly shows that the first name of its author began with an ‘A’ rather than a ‘P’. Even though Cantera Burgos noted the presence of the letter ‘A’, he strangely did not realise its implications regarding the identity of the author.

¹⁰ Instituto Valencia de Don Juan (Madrid), Envío 91, caja 131, doc. 473 (r/v).

¹¹ FRANCISCO CANTERA BURGOS, “El problema de los criptojudíos al escalar el trono Felipe III,” in *Homenaje al Excmo. Sr. Dr. D. Emilio Alarcos García* (Valladolid, 1967), vol. II, 633-642.

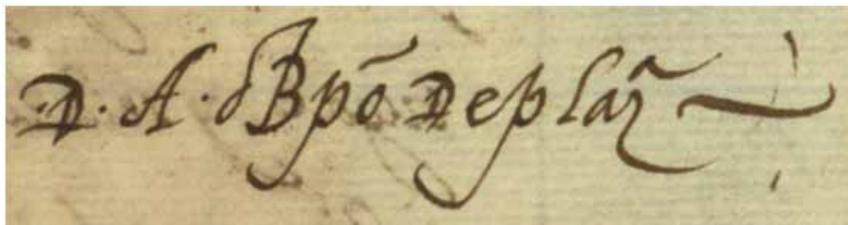


Figure 1: Detail from Instituto Valencia de Don Juan, Envío 91, caja 131, doc. 473 verso.

Beyond the signature itself, the reference made by the author in the first sentence of the memorandum regarding his presence in the town of Portalegre in neighbouring Portugal is also crucial. In his transcription, Francisco Cantera Burgos misread Portugal for Portalegre,¹² thus overlooking an important clue, but the original document is clear that its author was referring to Portalegre, a municipality located in the Portuguese Alentejo province and situated close to the Luso-Spanish border. Together, the letter ‘A’ in the signature and reference to Portalegre clearly indicate that the author of the document was actually Andrés de Noronha, a Portuguese churchman who was bishop first of Portalegre in Portugal between 1560 and 1581 before rising to become bishop of Plasencia in Spain between 1581 and his death in 1586. During his time as bishop of Portalegre, Andrés de Noronha showed himself to be a staunch supporter of Philip II’s claim to the Portuguese throne at the time of the succession crisis that followed the death of the aged and childless King Henrique in 1580. His appointment to the Spanish diocese of Plasencia the same year as King Philip’s acclamation as King of Portugal at a special parliament convened in the town of Tomar in 1581 was a reward for his loyalty. The promotion entailed a substantial increase in Noronha’s income, since the bishop of Plasencia enjoyed a substantially greater annual income than his counterpart in Portalegre.¹³ Bishop Noronha was a public supporter of discrimination against the converted descendants of Jews and the statutes of *limpieza de sangre*. In the diocese of Plasencia, he oversaw the adop-

¹² *Ibid.*, 634, n. 4.

¹³ Luís Augusto REBELO DA SILVA, *Quadro elementar das relações políticas e diplomáticas de Portugal* (Lisboa, 1858), vol. XVI, 88-91, 107-109, 111-112.

tion in May 1585 of a set of regulations for the running of the Cathedral that included the enforcement of earlier statutes of purity of blood, including for its choirboys.¹⁴

The addressee of the document is not explicitly identified beyond the abbreviation *V.M.*, which commonly stands for *Vuestra Merced* (“your honour”). It cannot be King Philip II of Spain himself as Bishop Noronha refers to “His Majesty” (*su Magestad*) separately, using the third person. The archive of the Instituto Valencia de Don Juan preserves thousands of documents from the reign of Philip II and his personal secretaries Mateo Vázquez and Antonio Pérez. It is therefore entirely possible to hypothesize, that it was sent by the bishop to one of the royal secretaries in the hope that its content and the request of its author would be referred on to the king.

In the memorandum, Andrés de Noronha claimed that, at an unspecified date during his time as bishop of Portalegre, he had received a visit by Martín de Salvatierra, an inquisitor in the tribunal of Llerena in the neighbouring Spanish province of Extremadura. The archives of the Portuguese inquisition reveal that Inquisitor Salvatierra was in frequent contact with his Portuguese colleagues in the inquisitorial tribunal of Évora in the late 1560s and early 1570s.¹⁵ It is thus not surprising to find him visiting Portalegre. During their conversations, inquisitor Salvatierra related a curious and alarming story to his host. The inquisitor told the Portuguese prelate that he had questioned two Christians who had previously been slaves of Jews in Constantinople (presumably prisoners of war bought by Jews after being captured by Ottoman Turkish forces and sold as slaves). According to the inquisitor, one of the captives claimed that he had fallen in love with (and had been loved by) the daughter of his Jewish master, whose love led her to reveal the existence of a secret correspondence between her father and “the Jews of Portugal”:

¹⁴ António Caetano de SOUSA, *Historia genealogica da Casa Real Portuguesa: desde a sua origem até o presente* (Lisboa, 1738), vol. V, 249-250; Andrés de NORONHA, *Estatutos de la Santa Iglesia Cathedral de Plasencia, fechos, y confirmados por el Ilustrissimo Señor Don Andrés de Noroña, Obispo de Plasencia* (Madrid, 1704), f. 17v.

¹⁵ See the various letters bearing the signature of inquisitor Salvatierra in the Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (Lisbon), Inquisição de Évora, livro 51.

The Jews of Portugal wrote a letter to the father of this woman, who showed it to the captive, and gave him the original copy, in which they wrote of the travails which they suffered and that, in order to be free from these (...), there was only one remedy, which was to teach their sons the science of medicine and the art of pharmacy as the means by which to kill their persecutors. She also showed him the response of her father to those in Portugal, and gave it to the Christian, in which the father consoled them by stating that, however great the travails and oppression they suffered over there [in Portugal], they should persevere in their ardour to teach their sons the sciences that they had named. Moreover, they should also seek to turn their sons into clergymen so that they should turn the Christians into idolaters when they celebrate the Mass and also lawyers so that they may use their position as judges to seize the property of those who are not of their caste.¹⁶

Andrés de Noronha claimed that inquisitor Salvatierra gave him the letters –whether the gifts were the alleged ‘originals’ presented by the captive or copies is not specified– and he had sent them on to King Sebastião of Portugal. Noronha states his belief that the letters had been the decisive factor in convincing the Portuguese monarch to introduce a special bursary for Old Christians wishing to study medicine and pharmacy at the University of Coimbra and to support discriminatory statutes of purity of blood for those seeking employment as judges.

Dating the meeting between Bishop Noronha and inquisitor Salvatierra does not present too many difficulties. In his memorandum, Noronha claims that his discussion with inquisitor Salvatierra occurred when he was bishop of Portalegre and before the creation of a system of bursaries discriminating against *judeoconversos*, therefore, it must be that the meeting between Noronha and Salvatierra occurred at some point in the 1560s, certainly before 1568. Moreover, it is possible to go even further since we know that Salvatierra became an inquisitor in Llerena in 1566. It thus seems logical to posit that their meeting occurred in 1566 or 1567. Likewise, the approximate date at which Noronha wrote the memorandum and sent it to the Habsburg court in Madrid can be deduced in a similar manner. Noronha is clear that he had by then moved to the diocese of Plasencia in Spain where, as it has been mentioned above, he served as bishop between 1581

¹⁶ Instituto Valencia de Don Juan (Madrid), Envío 91, caja 131, doc. 473, recto.

and 1586. Furthermore, at the end of the memorandum, Bishop Noronha recalls the difficulties that he faced when implementing statutes of *limpieza de sangre* in his cathedral chapter in Plasencia. He also incidentally mentions the fact that Martin de Salvatierra “is now bishop of Segorbe” (*agora es obispo de Segorue*), a position that Salvatierra occupied between 1583 and 1591. This narrows the date in which the memorandum was written considerably to between 1583 and 1586.

2. THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DOCUMENT

The real identity of the memorandum’s author and its date are consequently quite different from those that Francisco Cantera Burgos put forward in this work. Unsurprisingly, the historical significance of the document is therefore also quite different from that which Cantera Burgos ascribed to it. Bishop Noronha’s memorandum contains information that contributes appreciably to furthering our understanding of the relationship that existed between the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory supported by the *Carta de los judíos de Constantinopla* and the expansion of statutes of *limpieza de sangre* during the sixteenth century.

To begin with, the memorandum provides a very early reference – in the 1560s and therefore predating the ‘dynastic union’ of Spain and Portugal in 1580– to the dissemination of the forged ‘Jewish letters’ not only in Spain but also in neighbouring Portugal. These letters clearly did not circulate in printed form but rather in manuscript copies that were informally passed on from one individual to another. In the memorandum, we read about a private conversation between two churchmen –one a Portuguese bishop and the other a Spanish inquisitor– in which the latter not only brought the ‘Jewish letters’ to the attention of the former but provided him with copies, presumably manuscript, of the letters that were then sent on by the Portuguese bishop to his monarch.

Fascinatingly, the ‘letters’ to which Bishop Noronha refers in his memorandum are not those supposedly exchanged between Spanish Jews and those of Constantinople but a Portuguese variation. The story related by Bishop Noronha about the origins of the forged letters gives them an explicitly Portuguese origin. It is the “Jews of Portugal” (*los judíos de Portugal*) –and not

those of Spain or Toledo— who are presented as being in secret communication with those of Constantinople. Despite this one difference, the reported content of the letters is exactly the same as that of those that were reproduced in Spanish sources but whose authors are presented as the Jews of Spain.

The version of the ‘Jewish letters’ that were transcribed in Spanish polemical works never provides information that would account for the circumstances in which such presumably secret documents were discovered. According to Bishop Noronha, inquisitor Salvatierra claimed that news of the secret correspondence was brought to the notice of the Inquisition of Llerena by a Christian captive, presumably a prisoner of war, who had once been the slave of Jews in Ottoman-ruled Constantinople. There are, of course, many lacunae in the story as it was related by Salvatierra, or at least what is reported by bishop Noronha, and these beg a number of questions. How did the unnamed prisoner come back to Spain? Why did he end up in Llerena? How and why did he find himself under interrogation by the inquisitors of that town? Bishop Noronha did not think it was essential to offer such details to his correspondent and it may be that inquisitor Salvatierra did not provide them to him.. For Salvatierra and Noronha, the story of the Christian captive may well have been considered little more than a backstory that was of little significance and thus not worth recording.

The most significant claim made by Bishop Noronha is probably that he despatched the letters to King Sebastião of Portugal and that these letters were a major factor—indeed according to Bishop Noronha *the* decisive factor—in convincing the Portuguese monarch to introduce a special bursary system reserved for Old Christians untainted by Jewish ancestry who were intending to study medicine and pharmacy at the university of Coimbra. Christian anxieties about the vulnerability of Christian patients receiving treatment from Jewish medical practitioners were well-established in the medieval period but in the early modern Iberian Peninsula the fear that judaizing *conversos* were secretly entering into the medical profession with the aim of murdering Old Christian patients, who could not physically distinguish the descendants of converts from ‘Old’ Christians, was a conspiracy theory that gained widespread currency. It was certainly one of the claims supported by the forged letters of the Jews of Spain/Portugal and Constantinople. The fear of judaizing *conversos* and their involvement in medicine was as virulent in Portugal as it was in Spain during the six-

teenth century. As early as 1562-63, popular representatives gathered in a parliament petitioned the Crown to decree that only pure Old Christians should be considered for the position of *físico-mor*, the official in charge of inspecting the medical profession in Portugal and demanded that “[the Crown] order young Old Christians” to learn medicine.¹⁷

It is certainly the case that in September 1568, as Bishop Noronha states, King Sebastião of Portugal decreed that the University of Coimbra should admit thirty students of ‘Old Christian’ stock to study medicine and surgery and also ordered that bursaries covering the costs of their training should be created and funded by taxes raised in the region of Coimbra. These two measures were subsequently confirmed by King Philip II of Portugal (Philip III of Spain) on 7 February 1604 and 18 February 1606 respectively. King Philip not only ordered the stipends of the students to be increased but also decreed that a number of Old Christian students of pharmacy should be added to the existing stipendiaries. This latter measure would suggest that the original provisions of King Sebastião were not fully implemented. The plan for discriminatory bursaries did not, however, meet with the universal approval of those supporters of racial discrimination who considered it as an insufficient effort to prevent judaizing *conversos* from obtaining medical training. Francisco de Bragança, a canon of the cathedral of Évora appointed by the Crown to reform the University of Coimbra, thought that the provision of bursaries did not go far enough and unsuccessfully suggested that a medical college exclusively for Old Christians –literally a *Collegio para os medicos christãos velhos*– should be founded instead. Despite the royal provisions and decrees, the bursary scheme for Old Christian medical students soon ran into financial difficulties as the taxes meant to finance it with inadequate. In 1632, the Rector of the University wrote to the King to beg for a rapid resolution to these financial problems “because the penury means that there is no Old Christian who wishes to study medicine and it is feared that the entire faculty [of medicine] will be extinguished.”¹⁸

¹⁷ João de Figueirôa RÊGO, «*A honra alheia por um fio*»: os estatutos de limpeza de sangue no espaço de expressão ibérica (sécs. XVI-XVIII) (Lisboa, 2011), 223.

¹⁸ Teófilo BRAGA, *Historia da Universidade de Coimbra Nas Suas Relações com a Instrução Publica Portuguesa. Vol. II: 1555 a 1700* (Lisboa, 1895), 779-783; P. M. Laranjo COELHO, “Terras de Odiana. Subsídios para a sua história documentada,” *O Instituto. Revista Científica e Literária* 69 (1922), 384.

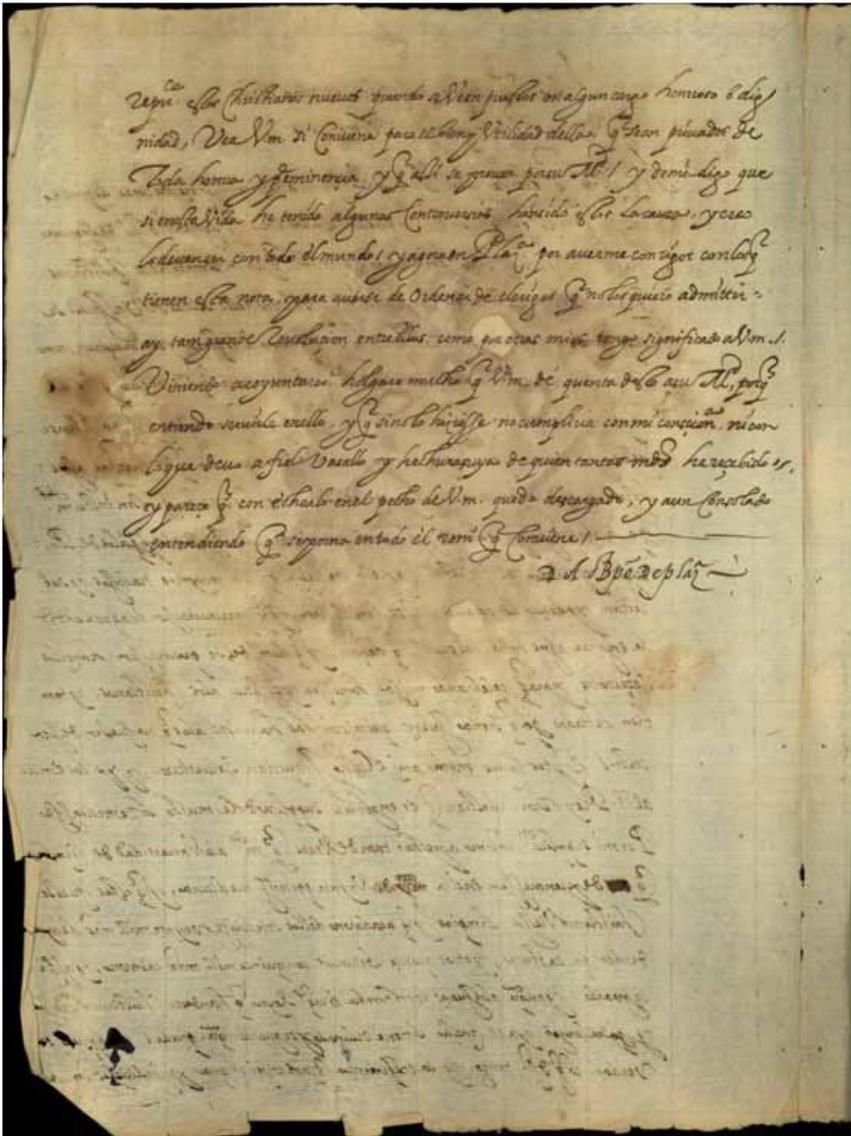


Figure 3. Instituto Valencia de Don Juan, Envío 91, caja 131, doc. 473 verso. Printed with the kind permission of the Instituto Valencia de Don Juan.

Beyond the discriminatory university bursaries introduced in 1568, other laws and decrees targeting medical professionals with tainted ancestry were issued by the Portuguese Crown. One royal edict, issued in December 1585, decreed that all municipalities, charitable institutions (known as *misericórdias*) and hospitals should give preference to the employment of Old Christian doctors over those ‘tainted’ by Jewish ancestry. New Christian doctors were to be dismissed whenever an Old Christian medical practitioner was available to take his place. In 1599 this ethnic preference was extended to all doctors employed by the supreme royal law court (the *Casa da Suplicação*) and the appellate law court (the *Casa do Cível*).¹⁹ In the seventeenth century, additional legislation was enacted to strengthen this measure. On 1 September 1622, any individual condemned by the Inquisition was barred from working as a doctor in the kingdom, a measure directly targeting *conversos* since they constituted the vast majority of cases prosecuted by the Inquisition in Portugal. Finally, on 17 August 1671, the Portuguese Crown issued yet another decree prohibiting any individual condemned by the Inquisition from practicing medicine in Portugal, this time specifying somewhat luridly that any individuals caught breaching the law did so “under pain of extermination” (*sob pena de ser exterminado*).²⁰

CONCLUSION

The exhaustive research of Fernanda Olival has demonstrated that the statutes of *limpieza de sangre* took longer to develop in Portugal than they did in Spain and that the 1560s was a particularly crucial decade especially insofar as university colleges and faculties are concerned.²¹ The discussion between Bishop Noronha and Salvatierra in 1566 or 1567 thus occurred at a crucial stage in the history of the introduction of discriminatory statutes of purity of blood in Portugal and, if we accept the claim

¹⁹ Jorge Valdemar GUERRA, *Judeus e Cristãos-novos na Madeira (1461-1650)* [= *Arquivo Histórico da Madeira. Série de Transcrições Documentais. Transcrições Documentais 1*] (Funchal, 2003), 163-164, n. 331.

²⁰ BRAGA, *Historia da Universidade de Coimbra. Vol. II: 1555 a 1700*, 810-811.

²¹ Fernanda OLIVAL, “Rigor e interesses: os estatutos de limpeza de sangue em Portugal,” *Cadernos de Estudos Sefarditas* 4 (2004), 151-182.

made by Bishop Noronha that he brought the 'letters of the Jews of Portugal and Constantinople' to the attention of King Sebastião, then it is clear that they played a significant role in convincing the Portuguese Crown to support such a measure affecting the faculty of medicine of Coimbra.

It is difficult to extrapolate too much from a single document reporting a conversation that occurred circa twenty years before it was written, especially when the thoughts and intentions of Bishop Noronha and inquisitor Salvatierra cannot be known with any certainty. Was inquisitor Salvatierra, either acting on his own initiative or at the behest of his superiors in the Supreme Council of the Inquisition, deliberately seeking to bolster anti-Semitic sentiment in neighbouring Portugal and propel anti-*converso* policies by circulating the anti-Semitic *Carta de los judíos de Constantinopla* in a version that was altered to suit a Portuguese audience? Did the prisoner interrogated in Llerena conjure up the story of the 'Jewish letters', one that may have been familiar to him thanks to the widespread dissemination of the forged letters in Spain, aware that the inquisitors interrogating him in Llerena would be receptive to such a tale of Jewish perfidy? It is unlikely that we will ever be able to satisfactorily answer such questions. Nevertheless, the very fact that Noronha believed it to be worth his while to send an unsolicited memorandum to the Crown to warn it of the 'Jewish plot', threatening the Iberian Peninsula in general and the medical profession in particular, must be a clear indication that he certainly believed the 'letters' between the Jews of Portugal and Constantinople to be genuine and the menace that they related to be severe. It is nonetheless tempting to see a sinister motive behind inquisitor Salvatierra's visit to the bishop of Portalegre and his role in disseminating the forged letters from Spain to Portugal. Unsurprisingly, inquisitors were zealous guardians of the Christian faith but inquisitor Martín de Salvatierra appears to have been particularly fanatical in his wish to see the Iberian Peninsula purged of all forms of heresy. His most notorious act came in 1587 when, after his promotion to the diocese of Segorbe, Salvatierra submitted a memorandum of his own to King Philip II of Spain suggesting that all *moriscos* should be exterminated by being castrated, deported to the remote coasts of Cape Cod and Newfoundland and then left to die.²²

²² L. P. HARVEY, *Muslims in Spain, 1500 to 1614* (Chicago, 2005), 295-296.

The memorandum of Bishop Andrés de Noronha might be a short document but the information that it contains thus provides information that helps us to understand the atmosphere of fear upon which the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory of a ‘Jewish plot’ orchestrated by Iberian *conversos* and their coreligionists in Constantinople thrived in the sixteenth-century Iberian Peninsula. The memorandum offers the first documentary evidence of the manner in which the forged *Carta de los judíos de Constantinopla* could be altered to promote anti-Semitic fears outside of Spain. In the seventeenth century, the French priest Jean-Baptiste Bouis reproduced a copy of a *Lettre des Juifs d’Arles envoyée aux juifs de Constantinople* and the *Réponse des Juifs de Constantinople à ceux d’Arles et de Provence* in his historical work *La Royale Couronne des Roys d’Arles*, which was printed for the first time in 1641. Although minor alterations were made, these documents were largely reproductions of the Spanish forgeries from the previous century in which the role of the “Jews of Spain” was replaced by that of the “Jews from Arles.”²³ The forged letters of the Jews of Toledo, Portugal or Arles (depending upon the version) and those of Constantinople eventually became a standard element of anti-Semitic diatribes printed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The modern works that referred to them range from the vitriolic works of Emmanuel Chabauty (1827–1914) and Édouard Drumont (1844–1917) to an article entitled *Jude und Heilkunde* (‘The Jew and Healing’) that was personally penned by the fanatical Nazi Karl Holz and printed in the Nazi medical periodical *Deutsche Volksgesundheit aus Blut und Boden!* (‘German People’s Health through Blood and Soil!’) in 1934.²⁴

²³ Jean-Baptiste BOUIS, *La Royale Couronne des Roys d’Arles* (Avignon, 1641), 475-479. See also Arsène DARMESTETER, “Lettres des juifs d’Arles et de Constantinople, 1489,” *RÉJ* 1 (1880), 119-123.

²⁴ Emmanuel CHABAUTY, *Les juifs nos maîtres!* (Paris, 1882), 4-15 and 46-59; Édouard DRUMONT, *La France juive* (Paris, 1887), 220; Karl HOLZ, “Jude und Heilkunde,” *Deutsche Volksgesundheit aus Blut und Boden!* II, no. 23 (1 December 1934), 1-2.

Appendix

Transcription

Aduertim[ien]to de cierto neg[oci]o sabido por orden de la Inquisiçion de Llerena

Acuerdome q[ue] estando yo em Portalegre fue alli a tratar conmigo çiertas cosas de parte de la Inquisiçio[n] de llerena el Inquisidor Saluatierra que agora es ob[is]po de Segorue y entre otras me dixo como por declara[ci]on y Juram[ien]to que auian tomado a dos Christianos que auian estado captiuos en Constantinopla y el uno dellos [e]sclauo de un Judio, se supo por [or?]den de una hija del Judio que se affiçiono al captiuo y se conoçieron, como los Judios de Portugal [e]scriuieron al p[adre] desta una carta que ella enseño y dio al captiuo original, en que le deçian las cosas y trabajos que padeçian, y que p[ar]a librarse dellos, y acabar con quien les perseguia tenian un solo remedio que era enseñar a sus hijos la sçiençia de medicina, y arte de boticarios, los quales fuessen instrum[en]tos patra acabar a sus perseguidores / enseñole asimismo la respuesta del p[adre] p[ar]a los de Portugal, y se la dio al Christiano, por ella les deçia quanto mayores trabajos, y subiection padeçian los de allá, que se consolassen, y que perseuerassen en aquel ardor de enseñar a sus hijos las sçien[ç]ias q[ue] deçian, y que [a]dem[as] desto procurassen hazerlos saçerdotes, para q[ue] celebrando missa hizies- sen ydolostrar a los Christianos; y tambien Letrados p[ar]a que siendo juezes quitassen las haziendas a los q[ue] no fuessen de su casta / estas cartas me dio a mi el dicho Inquisidor Saluatierra, y yo las embie al S[eñor] Rey Don Sebastian q[ue] es en Gloria supplicandole mucho lo remediase. Por mi supplica[ci]on lo tomo a pecho tam de versa que m[an]do a la Vniuersidad de Coimbra q[ue] se prendiessen en ella Veynte personas [en?] mediçina, y que estos fuessen Christianos Viejos limpios, y que cada uno dellos se le diesse veynte mill m[a]r[avedi]s de ayuda de costa p[ar]a su [e]studio, y otros quinze boticarios con quinze mill m[a]r[avedi]s cada uno / y assi se guardo / y enq[ua]nto a los juezes es costumbre en aq[ue]l Reyno que han de ser Christianos Viejos y p[ar]a ser clerigos, ya el Conçilio lo tiene ordenado y se guarda qu[ua]nto puede. [?]ppue[?] ser verdad lo q[ue] d[?] tengo, y la experiençia q[ue] nos enseña quam perjudiciales [son en la?]

[verso]

Repu[bli]ca estos Christianos nuevos quando se veen puestos en algun cargo honroso o dignidad, Vea V[uestra] M[erced] si conuiene para el bien y vtilidad della, q[ue] sean priuados de toda honrra y p[re]eminencia; y q[ue] assi se provea por su M[agesta]d / y de mi digo que si en esta vida he tenido algunas controuersias han sido estos la causa, y creo lo deuen ser con todo el mundo/ y agora en Plas[encia] por auerme con [r?]igor con los q[ue] tienen esta nota para auerse de ordenar de clerigos q[ue] no los quiero admittir: ay tan grande revolucion entre ellos como por otras mias tengo significado a V[uestra] M[erced] / Viniendo a coyuntura holgare mucho q[ue] V[uestra] M[erced] de quenta desto a su Magestad, porq[ue] entiendo seruirle en ello, y que si no lo hiziesse no cumpliria con mi consçien[çi]a, ni con lo que deuo a fiel vasallo y hechura suya de quien tantas m[erced]e[s] he reçevido: y parece q[ue] con echarlo en el pecho de V.M. quedo descargado, y aun consolado entendiendo q[ue] se ponra en todo el rem[edi]o de conuiene.

D. A. Ob[is]po de Plas[encia].

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