

THE CRYPTO-JEWS AND THE INQUISITION IN  
CARTAGENA DE INDIAS, 1610-1650

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

From its establishment by royal decree in 1610 until its abolition in 1821, the Inquisition tribunal of Cartagena de Indias sought to stamp out heresy and maintain Catholic orthodoxy among the inhabitants of the territory of New Granada. This thesis examines the activities of the tribunal during the first half of the seventeenth century, specifically as they relate to its persecution of the crypto-Jews under its jurisdiction. While the surviving evidence demonstrates a significant crypto-Jewish presence in Cartagena in the 1600s, and even though the authority of this tribunal extended far beyond its immediate surroundings, very few crypto-Jews were ever prosecuted by this court during this time. This thesis explores the social, economic and political dynamics explaining a change in policy that led to a rise in the number of Inquisition trials against the crypto-Jewish population in the first half of the seventeenth century. This thesis argues that Spanish imperial politics coupled with socio-economic factors inherent in the colonial system, explains why inquisitorial persecution increased in this period.

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## CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the discovery and conquest of the New World, Spain established an administrative system to oversee its empire. Political institutions and economic systems similar to those in Spain were transplanted to the Spanish American colonies. The Holy Office of the Inquisition was among the Spanish institutions introduced in the New World. Its purpose was to reinforce Roman Catholic principles among the Spaniards living in the colonies, but it eventually morphed into a policing body dedicated to identifying and suppressing religious heterodoxy, particularly among *conversos* settling in the New World. As the Jewish presence in Spanish America increased, so did their persecution by the various tribunals established throughout the continent, from Mexico to Argentina.

The Inquisition's policies were geared towards the suppression of crypto-Judaism, and it was a continued manifestation of the anti-Semitism that had been a prevalent feature of Spanish society since the time of the Visigoth kings.<sup>1</sup> Although Spanish Jews remained a despised and persecuted minority through the Middle Ages,<sup>2</sup> it was only after the unification of Spain under Ferdinand and Isabella that hatred of the Jews reached its apogee with their forced expulsion from the country in 1492. According to one historian, with the fall of the Muslim kingdom of Granada and the *Reconquista* all but completed, there was no further need for Jewish support

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<sup>1</sup> In 587 King Reccared embraced Christianity and began enacting restrictions upon his Jewish subjects. But it was during the reign of King Sisebut that the *Fuero Juzgo* or Visigothic Code was proclaimed. It stated that “within one year any Jew who had not been baptized or had not had his children and slaves baptized should be stripped, receive 100 lashes, forfeit his property to the king, and be exiled.” See Seymour B. Liebman. *The Jews in New Spain: Faith, Flame, and the Inquisition* (Miami: University of Miami Press, 1970), 37-38.

<sup>2</sup> According to a new interpretation of the Spanish Inquisition the concept of *convivencia* or religious coexistence based on mutual tolerance, is not historically accurate. The reason for this is that neither one of the three major religions in medieval Spain was able to completely overpower the other two. Therefore tolerance under such conditions “was a de facto tolerance, suffered rather than desired.” See introductory chapter in Perez, Joseph. *The Spanish Inquisition: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

against the Moors.<sup>3</sup> With their personal safety and religious freedom no longer guaranteed by the Spanish crown, many Jews chose to convert to Christianity rather than face expulsion and the loss of their property, hence their identification as *conversos*.<sup>4</sup>

Although nominally Christian, many *conversos* continued to practice Judaism behind closed doors, according to their own confessions contained in the surviving records of their Inquisition trials. This behavior defined them as crypto-Jews, which in the eyes of the Catholic establishment was the worst type of heresy possible and the main reason for the institution of the Holy Office in Spain. This sentiment was clearly stated in the papal bull issued by Sixtus IV on November 1, 1478, which granted the Catholic Kings the right to establish an Inquisition in their dominions. In the text of the bull, the pope acknowledges that many baptized Jews continued to practice Judaism in private while behaving as Christians on the outside. Moreover, Sixtus IV believed that by holding on to their Jewish identity, these people represented a danger to the salvation of their descendants and everybody else around them.<sup>5</sup>

After the expulsion in 1492 many New Christians immigrated, first to neighboring Portugal, and then to the Indies. Growing concern among Spanish authorities regarding this influx of *conversos* into the New World culminated in the establishment of various Inquisition tribunals to oversee all of Spain's American colonies, during the last quarter of the sixteenth century. The first tribunals were erected in Mexico and Lima in 1570, and 1571 respectively. Forty years later a new court was established in the port city of Cartagena de Indias, which until

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<sup>3</sup>Roth, Cecil *A History of the Marranos* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1932), 52.

<sup>4</sup>The terms *converso* and New Christian have basically the same meaning and will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

<sup>5</sup>The words in the text are “infectan con su perfidia,” which literally means “infecting with perfidy.” See Bula de Sixto IV de 1 de noviembre de 1478, in Miguel Jiménez Monteserín. *Introducción a la Inquisición Española: Documentos Básicos para el Estudio del Santo Oficio* (Madrid, España: Editora Nacional, 1980), 53-54.

this time had been under the jurisdiction of the Lima tribunal. The Cartagena tribunal and its campaign against crypto-Jews is the focus of this study. I argue that economic, social and political factors as much as the enforcement of religious orthodoxy, affected the way the Inquisition in Cartagena prosecuted this group.

### Historiography of the Cartagena Inquisition

In recent years, the historiography of the Inquisition in America and its persecution of *conversos* has grown considerably, particularly with regard to the Portuguese Jews. However, most of the literature is focused on the activities of the Mexico and Lima tribunals, with only a few studies addressing the Cartagena court. The primary material relating to this tribunal is available in the Spanish National Archives in Madrid. This documentation contains all the reports sent from Cartagena to the main tribunal in Spain<sup>6</sup>, which details its proceedings and sentences as well as the personal correspondence of its officials.

This study examines the documents relating to the *procesos* initiated against *conversos* accused of crypto-Judaism, to better understand the New Christian experience in Cartagena de Indias. Furthermore, the timeframe selected for this study will be limited to the tribunal's activities during the first half of the seventeenth century, since this time period witnessed the height of inquisitorial persecution towards crypto-Jews not only in Cartagena, but in the rest of Spanish America as well.

As previously noted, the Inquisition tribunal in Cartagena de Indias has been underrepresented in the historiography of the Holy Office in America. The first works to address

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<sup>6</sup> This was El Consejo de la Suprema y General Inquisición (The Council of the Supreme and General Inquisition), simply known as the *Suprema*.



its complete history were written by Chilean historian José Toribio Medina in 1889 and American scholar Henry Charles Lea in 1908. Medina's book is a chronological narrative of the entire life of the tribunal, with little in depth analysis of its activities. He presents a number of cases involving crypto-Jews and the financial windfall incurred by the Inquisition as a result of these prosecutions. Lea takes a similar approach in his history of *The Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies*. It is the first study written in English that discusses in some detail the Cartagena Inquisition. Although Lea dedicates one chapter to the Cartagena tribunal, his treatment of the crypto-Jews is very brief. He agrees with Medina's argument that financial and political considerations were the driving forces behind the Holy Office's campaign against the crypto-Jews.<sup>7</sup> Such a viewpoint has dominated the historiography of the Inquisition and will be examined in this thesis.

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a significant increase in the scholarly literature concerning the Cartagena Inquisition, although most of these works are written in Spanish. This new wave of scholarship focuses on the impact that crypto-Jews had on the social order in Cartagena and surrounding areas. Spanish historian Manuel Tejado Fernández published *Aspectos de la Vida Social en Cartagena de Indias Durante el Seiscientos*, in 1954, a book based on the primary material available at the time. Tejado does not credit the crypto-Jewish community in Cartagena with having any positive impact on its commerce or social development. On the contrary, Tejado argues that *conversos* constituted a "vulgar" segment of Cartagenian society, whose pernicious influence was appropriately checked by the Holy

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<sup>7</sup> Medina, Jose Toribio. *Historia del Santo Oficio de La Inquisicion de Cartagena de Indias* (Bogota: C. Valencia Editores, 1978); Lea, Henry Charles. *The Inquisition in The Spanish Dependencies: Sicily, Naples, Sardinia, Milan, the Canaries, Mexico, Peru, New Granada* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1908)

Office.<sup>8</sup>The author's conclusions owe more to his personal biases than to an objective interpretation of the sources.

Lucía García de Proodian offers a less negative assessment of the crypto-Jewish community in Cartagena in her 1966 book *Los Judíos en America: Sus Actividades en los Virreinos de Nueva Castilla y Nueva Granada, Siglo XVII*. García de Proodian discusses the social interaction between crypto-Jews and other groups in these two regions, focusing on the religious identity and traditional customs of the *conversos*. Nevertheless, the book suffers from a bias toward the crypto-Jews as the author emphasizes the negative aspects of this community, highlighted by the criminal activities of a few, over its greater achievements as a whole, such as in the economic development of the colonies. It is important to understand, however, that most Latin American scholars studying the Holy Office choose to present the crypto-Jews as innocent victims. For instance, a positive assessment of the crypto-Jews is found in the works of Latin American historians such as Boleslao Lewin, Itic Croitoru Rotbaum, and Daniel Mesa Bernal.<sup>9</sup> These scholars present a critical assessment of the Holy Office in the New World, blaming its repression and intolerance of Jews for the economic stagnation of Spanish America.

Both Rotbaum and Mesa Bernal argue that crypto-Jews, far from being a threat to the colonial system in Cartagena, were largely responsible for its economic growth and commercial expansion. Moreover, Mesa Bernal contends that crypto-Jews successfully adapted into Cartagenian society, becoming well acquainted with the city's elite and authorities. Therefore,

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<sup>8</sup> Tejado Fernández, Manuel. *Aspectos de la Vida Social en Cartagena de Indias Durante el Seiscientos* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1954), 147-210.

<sup>9</sup> Lewin, Boleslao. *Los Judíos Bajo la Inquisición en Hispano America*. (Buenos Aires: Dedalo, 1960); Rotbaum, Itic Croitoru. *De Sefarad al Neosefardismo: Contribucion a La Historia de Colombia*. (Bogota: Editorial Kelly, 1967); Mesa Bernal, Daniel. *De Los Judíos en la Historia de Colombia*. (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta, 1996).

this assimilation was one reason for the low number of crypto-Jews prosecuted by the Inquisition in Cartagena during this time period.

The presence of many *conversos* of Portuguese origin in seventeenth-century Cartagena de Indias was a motivating factor in the way the Inquisition conducted its duties. The city's central role in the commerce between Spain and its American colonies attracted many crypto-Jews hoping for a better life. Many who settled in Cartagena had commercial ties with Portugal and with other crypto-Jews in the other areas of the New World. Fermina Álvarez Alonso examines the Portuguese connection at length in *La Inquisición en Cartagena de Indias Durante el Siglo XVII*. Alvarez acknowledges the important role the crypto-Jewish community played in the commercial life of the region, linking it to their involvement in the slave trade. By the early seventeenth century African slaves had become the main source of labor in Cartagena and New Granada at large. Thus, Álvarez argues that the Holy Office showed considerable tolerance towards the crypto-Jews, for they practically controlled the trade in the city.<sup>10</sup>

The contributions of *conversos* to the economic prosperity of Cartagena is also explored in the four-volume work *Cincuenta Años de Inquisición en el Tribunal de Cartagena de Indias 1610-1660*. This study published in 1997 and written by three Colombian historians is a thorough analysis of the Inquisition in Cartagena, albeit during its first fifty years of existence. The authors' main contention is that the Inquisition in Cartagena de Indias displayed a level of tolerance towards *conversos* unparalleled in other American tribunals. They cite a number of reasons for this anomaly, highlighting the apathy among *criollos* to denounce suspected crypto-Jews to the Inquisition. The study concludes that Old Christians, as non-*converso* Christians

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<sup>10</sup> Fermina Álvarez Alonso. *La Inquisición en Cartagena de Indias Durante el Siglo XVII* (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1999).

were known, were not qualified to accurately identify Judaic practices, since they lacked a basic understanding of Jewish rituals and traditions.

Furthermore, Old Christians themselves were also a target of the Inquisition, as evident in the number of prosecutions against individuals who demonstrated a lack of familiarity with basic Christian doctrine. Crypto-Jews, on the other hand, were quite adept at masking their Judaism while purporting to be Christians on the outside. So long as they kept their true religious allegiances hidden, the authors contend, the Inquisition ignored them.<sup>11</sup>

### Chapter Outline

Other determinants such as class and nationality will be examined in order to fully comprehend the changes to the city's social dynamics generated by the interaction between the Inquisition, and the *conversos*. Since Cartagena was such a strategic commercial hub, chapter two of this thesis will examine the importance of Cartagena to the commercial life of Spanish America prior to the arrival of the Inquisition. In addition, it examines the circumstances that led to Cartagena being chosen to seat a new Inquisition tribunal and how this court operated in its initial stages.

Chapter three will examine the condition of the crypto-Jewish community in Cartagena before and after the establishment of the Inquisition tribunal. Since New Christians began arriving in Cartagena even before the union between Spain and Portugal took place, it is important to establish how drastic were the changes in the city once the Holy Office began

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<sup>11</sup> Anna Maria Splendiani, Jose Enrique Sánchez Bohorquez and Emma Cecilia Duque de Salazar. *Cincuenta Años de Inquisición en el Tribunal de Cartagena de Indias 1610-1660* (Bogotá: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 1997), 151-173.

operating. Furthermore, crypto-Jewish involvement in the economic life of the colony, including their participation in the slave trade, will be discussed. Considering that slavery was one of the main sources of labor in the city, it is imperative to look at this commercial enterprise in order to determine how much influence crypto-Jews exerted on the trade.

In chapter four, the focus will be on the actual *procesos* initiated against crypto-Jews. This is necessary in order to determine as accurately as possible the social and economic status of those accused, as well as to gain a clearer picture of their genuine religious and cultural identities. Most importantly, an examination of confiscations and sentences meted out to convicted crypto-Jews will be required to assess the wealth of the crypto-Jewish community and to discern the scope and methods of Inquisitorial persecution in Cartagena.

The final chapter in this thesis will look at the crypto-Jews in Cartagena de Indias at the end of the seventeenth century. It will discuss the effectiveness of the Inquisition in rooting out crypto-Judaism and what became of the *conversos* still living in Cartagena by this time.

## CHAPTER II – THE INQUISITION COMES TO CARTAGENA DE INDIAS

### Historical Background of Cartagena

Spanish explorers attempted to conquer the region that would become part of the province of Cartagena de Indias as early as 1509, when Alonso de Ojeda landed in the port of Calamar, seeking to penetrate inland in search of gold and other riches. However, De Ojeda's lack of manpower and resources coupled with the ferocious resistance offered by the natives, forced him to retreat and abandoned his dreams of conquest. It was not until 1522 that this area would fall under Spanish rule, when an expedition led by Don Pedro de Heredia succeeded in overcoming native resistance and conquered all the coastal land surrounding the harbor of Cartagena. The city itself was founded on January 21 of the same year and owes its name to the port's resemblance to the Spanish city of Cartagena. In addition, according to Spanish historian Manuel Tejado Fernández, most of Heredia's soldiers came from that city as well.<sup>12</sup>

Because of its geographic strategic location Cartagena grew quickly into one of the busiest trading ports in Spanish America. Within two years of its founding, the city functioned as a provincial capital with its own Episcopal seat.<sup>13</sup> By the middle of the sixteenth century Cartagena had established itself as the mandatory port of call for all merchant ships sailing between Spain and the New World. In the words of one historian, Cartagena was 'the door to New Granada and one of the richest and best-fortified cities in the Indies.'<sup>14</sup> As the Spanish

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<sup>12</sup> Manuel Tejado Fernandez. *Aspectos de la Vida Social en Cartagena de Indias Durante el Seiscientos* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1954), 20.

<sup>13</sup> Tejado Fernandez, *Aspectos*, 20.

<sup>14</sup> Clarence H. Haring. *Trade and Navigation Between Spain and the Indies in the Time of the Hapsburgs*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918), 188.

monarchy consolidated its empire in the New World, every commodity of value in the colonies was sent to the city to be ultimately shipped to Spain. Accordingly, to Cartagena “came the gold and emeralds of New Granada, the pearls of Margarita and Rancherías, and the indigo, tobacco and cocoa and other products of the Venezuelan coast.” Furthermore, commodities also came from as far away as Guatemala by way of Lake Nicaragua, a longer route preferred by merchants as they “feared to send goods across the Gulf of Honduras to Havana, because of the French and English buccaneers hanging about Cape San Antonio.”<sup>15</sup>

As Cartagena’s importance in the Spanish colonial trade increased so did the ambition of pirates and buccaneers in plundering the city’s riches. Despite being a well-fortified port, Cartagena was often overrun by English, Dutch and French corsairs. Some of the pirates that succeeded in taking the city included legendary freebooters such as Francis Drake and the Baron of Pointis. These depredations represented huge losses for Cartagena’s economy and the Spanish treasury. They also affected the Inquisition’s finances, since the money sent from Spain to pay its employees was often diverted to pay for the fortification of the city, leaving the Holy Office without means to cover their most basic needs for long periods of time.<sup>16</sup>

Cartagena’s vibrant commercial life also attracted large numbers of New Christian merchants and entrepreneurs, mostly of Portuguese origin. They took advantage of Portugal’s union with Spain in 1580 to circumvent restrictions enacted by the Spanish monarchy to curb foreign immigration into the New World. Laws prohibiting Jews, Protestants and other heretics from traveling to Spanish America had been in place as early as 1501. In later years these laws

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<sup>15</sup> Clarence H. Haring. *The Buccaneers in the West Indies in the XVII Century*. (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1966), 16.

<sup>16</sup> Splendianni, Anna Maria, José Enrique Sanchez Bohorquez and Emma Cecilia Luque de Salazar. *Cincuenta Años de Inquisición en el Tribunal de Cartagena de Indias 1610-1660*( Bogota: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 1997), 117.

were extended to include the children and grandchildren of *conversos*. Travel restrictions to Spanish America also decreed that no man could leave his wife home without her written consent and a payment of a thousand ducats, as security for his return home within three years.<sup>17</sup>

The fact that many men chose to remain single once in the New World was well known to the Spanish crown, who was forced to enact punitive measures to discourage such practice. For example, a royal *cedula* sent to the governor of Cartagena in 1546, empowered him to punish those men who failed to bring their wives within two years, with a fine of a hundred gold pesos and with the additional threat of confiscation of their property should they refuse to fulfill this obligation. Nonetheless, these men were given the option to sent somebody else on their behalf to bring their wives, were they not able to travel back to Spain to do so themselves.<sup>18</sup>

Unmarried women on the other hand, were not to travel to the Indies unless they were members of a migrating family or servants in that family. Additionally, passengers were prohibited to sail as part of a military retinue, although it often happened that admirals lacking manpower were allowed to enlist travelers as sailors and soldiers for the duration of the voyage.<sup>19</sup>

Such regulations eventually became impossible to enforce as they hurt more than help the finances of Spain, “especially as the *conversos* or New Christians comprised the very class most apt to possess the capital required to develop the colonial trade.”<sup>20</sup> In fact, the Spanish crown, always in need of revenue, found it financially expedient to allow New Christians to immigrate

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<sup>17</sup> Haring, *Trade and Navigation*, 102.

<sup>18</sup> Documento 2071, “cédula dirigida al gobernador o juez de residencia de Cartagena, sobre que los casados vayan o envíen a España por sus mujeres, expedida en Madrid, 29 de noviembre de 1546,” in *Documentos Inéditos para la Historia de Colombia*, ed. Juan Friede (Bogota: Academia de Historia, 1960), vol. 10, pg. 17.

<sup>19</sup> Haring, *Trade and Navigation*, 102.

<sup>20</sup> Haring, *Trade and Navigation*, 104.



to the Indies so long as they were willing to pay a hefty fee. In 1509, a royal provision stated that for twenty thousand ducats, any restrictions on travel should be lifted so that “such persons could go to the colonies and trade there for two years, on each voyage.”<sup>21</sup>

### Cartagena Under the Jurisdiction of the Lima Tribunal

From 1570 until 1610 Cartagena de Indias and the rest of the territories comprising the New Granada had been under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition tribunal in Lima. During this time period less than fifty cases were remitted from various areas of New Granada to Lima, mostly involving accusations of blasphemy and bigamy. Thirty percent of the cases were forwarded by the *comisario* of Cartagena alone, and it included not only Spaniards but also Italian, Irish, Portuguese, and Greek detainees as well. This mix of nationalities suggests that a strict enforcement of immigration policy was in effect in Cartagena during this time, no doubt since so many European traders arrived in the city on a regular basis.<sup>22</sup>

Regarding the socio-economic background of the accused, the ecclesiastical authorities in New Granada gave no special considerations to individuals of higher stand. For instance, among all the people sent to Lima to be processed, we found a provincial governor, a few royal functionaries, and high-ranking clergymen, as well as common thieves, soldiers, merchants, horse trainers, barbers, doctors, etc. With regard to the outcome of the *procesos*, the sentences handed out by the Lima tribunal varied in severity. Some convicts were given the harshest punishment available such as banishment from their homes for up to ten years, lashes, and

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<sup>21</sup> Henry Charles Lea. *The Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies*, 193-194.

<sup>22</sup> The Italian detainees came from three locations in Italy: Milan, Naples and Genoa. Splendianni, *Cincuenta Años de Inquisición*, 109.

confiscation of property. Others were simply given a fine or a warning or made to wear the *sanbenito* in public.<sup>23</sup>

At this time, offenses involving Judaism figured only in a handful of cases. For instance, there was the process against Luis Díaz de Lucena, a Portuguese merchant living in Cartagena, accused of being a secret Jew during the time he lived in Sevilla, Spain. Díaz was processed and convicted in 1604 and was given a sentence of three years imprisonment with confiscation of property, followed by deportation back to Spain after serving his time. Then there was Manuel de Fonseca, a Portuguese doctor denounced as a Jew by a fellow physician, who overheard Fonseca say he had visited a synagogue in Rome a few years back. De Fonseca was imprisoned in Cartagena for two years until his case was remitted to Lima, where he served two more years in jail before being released. His punishment was to have his property confiscated and to appear as a penitent at a mass.<sup>24</sup>

Two other cases merit special attention given the outcome of the trials. The Lima Inquisition exonerated the men accused in these instances after a confession was not procured even after the use of torture. In 1592, Juan de Herrera, a Spaniard living in Tunja (modern-day Colombia), was arrested after a neighbor denounced him as a Judaizer. De Herrera was then sent to Lima to be processed and was tortured. However, after three years imprisonment De Herrera was absolved. The other case was that of Domingo López, a Portuguese merchant living in Cartagena, who was processed and acquitted in 1604. López also refused to confess to being a

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<sup>23</sup> The *sanbenito* was a penitential garment intended to embarrass and humiliate those made to wear it. The outer design of the garment and the length of use varied according to the severity of the sentence given to each individual. See Henry Kamen. *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 71., and Lea, Henry Charles. *A History of the Spanish Inquisition*, vol III (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1966), 162-172.

<sup>24</sup> José Toribio Medina. *Historia del Santo Oficio de la Inquisición de Cartagena de Indias* (Bogotá: C. Valencia Editores, 1978), 12-14.

Jew throughout the torture sessions. The charges were dropped and upon his release all of his confiscated property was returned.<sup>25</sup>

Such outcomes demonstrate that suspected Judaizers were treated in accordance with the norms and procedures established by the Holy Office in Spain, at least during this period of inquisitorial activity. In the matter of the use torture, for example, according to the instructions of Inquisitor-General Fernando de Valdéz, if a culprit withstood a torture session without confessing to the charges, then he must be absolved of all charges and set free.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, there is no evidence of political or economic motivation behind the prosecution of these men. They were arrested and tried based on the testimony of others and there is no evidence they knew each other or belonged to the same congregation.

In the cases of Herrera and López, their property was returned upon release, after spending years imprisoned. With this in mind, let us consider the fact that the longer a prisoner remained behind bars the more the Inquisition would have to spend in his sustenance. Therefore it would have been in the tribunal's best interest to dispose of cases like these quickly, if the taking of a suspect's property for financial gain was its only concern.

By the end of the sixteenth century, regardless of the best efforts of the Lima court to conduct its operations in an efficient manner, it became clear to colonial authorities that another tribunal was needed in South America. The immense territorial extension under the jurisdiction of the Lima Inquisition made it all but impossible to effectively impose its authority beyond the borders of Perú. In 1577, the Viceroy Francisco de Toledo wrote a letter to the king complaining about the cost in time and treasure incurred in bringing anyone to Lima to be prosecuted. A

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<sup>25</sup> Medina, *Historia*, 14.

<sup>26</sup>Instrucciones de Don Fernando de Valdéz, in Jiménez Monteserín, *Introducción a la Inquisición Española*, 225.

solution, as he suggested to the king, would be the setting up of additional tribunals in New Granada, Quito and La Plata, so that officials would not be discouraged in bringing charges against anyone for fear of the long journey to Lima.<sup>27</sup>

Sending individuals to Lima to stand trial or to serve their sentences represented more than just a financial burden for the authorities. It also hindered the proper execution of inquisitorial procedure as it was the case, on many occasions, with the ratification of witnesses, a part of the investigative process needed to establish the guilt or innocence of an accused. Furthermore, there was the possibility that suspects could escape while on route to Lima, get sick or injured, and, as it happened on occasions, die during the trek.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, the installment of a new Inquisition tribunal in New Granada started to gain support among colonial officials. To some, the security of the entire region depended on securing an inquisitorial presence independent of the court in Lima. In 1600 the inquisitor in Lima, Don Antonio Ordoñez, sent a letter to the *Suprema* in which he expresses his concern in having so many distant provinces under the jurisdiction of the Lima Inquisition. Ordoñez was worried that foreigners were arriving unchecked through the port cities, many of them with heretical views that he considered dangerous to the local population. Ordoñez makes special mention of the Portuguese immigrants, whom he believes were all secret Jews.<sup>29</sup>

Along the same line the Archbishop of Santa Fe, Bartolomé Lobo Guerrero, also manifested to the king similar concerns in a letter dated May 15, 1599. Like other colonial officials Lobo Guerrero believed that the presence of the Holy Office in the territory of New

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<sup>27</sup> Medina, *Historia*, 17

<sup>28</sup> Bartolome Escandell Bonet, "La Peculiar Estructura Administrativa y Funcional de la Inquisición Española en Indias," in *Historia de la Inquisición en España y América*, ed. Joaquín Pérez Villanueva y Bartolomé Escandell Bonet, vol. I (Madrid, BAC, 2000), 645.

<sup>29</sup> Medina, *Historia*, 18.

Granada, could guarantee social harmony through the enforcement of orthodoxy. Heresy and all kinds of vices Lobo Guerrero argued, were weakening the Catholic faith among the general population since having the nearest Inquisition tribunal so far away, encouraged individuals to engage in all manner of illegal activities. Therefore, people knowing the authorities were reluctant to remit cases to Lima because of all the difficulties involved in the process, did not bother to accuse or provide testimony against anyone.<sup>30</sup>

In Cartagena de Indias, social unrest was also a problem prior to the arrival of the Inquisition. Given the fact that it was a port city, Cartagena presented a number of problems to the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. For example, a significant segment of the population consisted of soldiers and sailors assigned to guard the city. These men often caused all kinds of problems for the authorities in Cartagena. Soldiers in particular presented a challenge to any form of authority. Constant infighting and lack of discipline among its ranks, posed a threat to the security of Cartagena, according to the statements of the first inquisitors, Juan de Mañozca y Mateo de Salcedo.<sup>31</sup>

### The Establishment of the Inquisition in Cartagena

All of these issues finally persuaded Philip III to issue a royal decree granting the Inquisition a new seat in Cartagena de Indias, effective February 25, 1610. This new court was to function independent of Lima and would follow established inquisitorial norms and procedures, reporting directly to the *suprema* in Spain. In the same edict, the king appointed Don Juan de

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<sup>30</sup> Medina, *Historia*, 19-20

<sup>31</sup> Manuel Ballesteros Gabrois, "La Instalacion del Tribunal del Santo Oficio en Cartagena de Indias. Nuevas Noticias," in *Historia de la Inquisición en España y America*, ed. Joaquín Perez Villanueva and Bartolomé Escandell Bonet, vol. II (Madrid, BAC, 2000), 1026.

Mañozca and Don Pedro de Salcedo to lead the tribunal, and also requested that the governor and other secular authorities in Cartagena provide assistance to the inquisitors with anything they might require.<sup>32</sup>

The men chosen to serve as inquisitors were selected based on a set of guidelines instituted by the Spanish Inquisition at the time of its inception, but that were often modified over time. Initially, and according to the prerogative granted to the Catholic Kings by pope Sixtus IV, the men appointed as inquisitors were bishops or priests, “either regular or secular, over forty years of age, God-fearing, of good character and record, masters of bachelors of theology or licentiates of canon law.” However, in later years the age limit was lowered to not less than thirty years of age, while the requirement for belonging to a religious order “was reduced simply to suitable men of good and tender conscience, ” which essentially opened the way for laymen to become inquisitors.<sup>33</sup>

However, in 1595 Philip II ordered that all inquisitors and fiscals should belong to holy orders, a clause that was omitted by his successor Philip III in 1608. For his part, the *Suprem* stipulated in 1632 that inquisitors must have themselves ordained in the Catholic church, a requirement that was reiterated in 1637 with the additional provision that inquisitors and fiscals not belonging to orders should receive no salaries.<sup>34</sup> In the case of the men chosen to lead the Cartagena tribunal after its establishment, all the above requirements were met. Don Pedro de Salcedo, serving as the senior inquisitor, was sixty-six years of age and had studied law at Valladolid and Osuna. He also served as fiscal in the Zaragoza tribunal prior to his

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<sup>32</sup> Medina, *Historia*, 21

<sup>33</sup> Lea, *History*, vol. II, 233-235.

<sup>34</sup> Lea, *History*, 235.

appointment to Cartagena. Don Juan de Mañozca for his part, was forty-two years of age and had studied arts at the University of Mexico and law at the University of Salamanca.<sup>35</sup>

The district assigned under the jurisdiction of the Cartagena tribunal was enormous in size, comprising New Granada and the islands of Barlovento or Lesser Antilles, including Granada, Saint Lucia, Martinica, Barbados, Guadalupe, Dominica, and Trinidad and Tobago, in addition to the archbishopric of Santo Domingo and the bishoprics of Santa Marta, Popayan, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and Santiago de Cuba.<sup>36</sup> With only two inquisitors appointed to operate such a vast district, is not surprising that there were low levels of activity for this tribunal. In the two hundred years of its history eighty-two individuals were processed for being Protestants and only eighty-seven were tried for practicing Judaism, during the seventeenth century.<sup>37</sup>

Regarding the choice of Cartagena de Indias as the seat of the new Inquisition tribunal, there were two overriding factors that influenced the king's decision to select this city and not Santo Domingo, as he initially intended. First, Cartagena, as well as the whole territory of New Granada, was too distant from Lima, which presented authorities with a logistical nightmare whenever a prisoner had to be remitted there. Second and most importantly, from a security standpoint, the presence of the Holy Office in Cartagena made more sense. Foreigners arrived in the city on a regular basis, many of them coming from non-Catholic countries hostile to the Spanish monarchy. Therefore, it would be easier for Inquisition officials to survey who was

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<sup>35</sup> Medina, *Historia*, 58.

<sup>36</sup> Medina, *Historia*, 22.

<sup>37</sup> FerminaAlvárez Alonso. *La Inquisición in Cartagena de Indias Durante el Siglo XVII* (Madrid: Fundacion Universitaria Española, 1999), 117.

arriving in order to keep persons or books “infected with heresy,” from entering into the colonies and contaminating the local population with their views.<sup>38</sup>

During its early years of operation, the Holy Office concerned itself mostly with prosecuting witchcraft and Protestant heretics, mostly men captured during acts of piracy, usually of Dutch, English and German origin. Others worked as merchants, profiting from the burgeoning slave trade in the New World colonies. So many of these merchants continued to operate in Cartagena and other parts of Spanish America, that the local population began to identify all foreigners, whether merchants or pirates, as heretics and political enemies of Spain.<sup>39</sup>

Prosecutions against Portuguese New Christians were few during this time, according to Inquisition records. In fact, in the first auto-de-fé staged in Cartagena on December 21, 1613, there were two Portuguese individuals, appearing as penitents. These persons were accused and convicted of blasphemy and witchcraft, respectively. Moreover, at least in this two cases, as far as the surviving sources indicate, there is no association of Portuguese origin with crypto-Judaism at this time.<sup>40</sup> However, as the seventeenth century progressed, the crypto-Jewish population in Cartagena would come under increasing scrutiny by the Holy Office, although the number of *procesos* would remain low, especially when compared with those of the Mexico and Lima tribunals. For instance, in the *Gran Auto-de-Fé* of 1649, the Mexican Inquisition paraded one hundred and six prisoners “in person or in effigy, the vast majority of them Judaizers.”<sup>41</sup> And

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<sup>38</sup> Medina, *Historia*, 21. The Spanish term used by Medina was “infectos de herejia.”

<sup>39</sup>Fermina Álvarez Alonso, “Herejes Ante la Inquisición de Cartagena de Indias,” *Revista de la Inquisición*6, (1997): 240.

<sup>40</sup> Medina, *Historia*, 47.

<sup>41</sup> Martin A. Cohen, ed., *The Jewish Experience in Latin America: Selected Studies from the Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1971), vol. I, XL.



in the *auto-de-fé* of January 23, 1639 the Lima tribunal punished eighty individuals, fifty-six of them convicted of Judaizing.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Elkan Nathan Adler, "The Inquisition in Perú," in *The Jewish Experience in Latin America: Selected Studies from the Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, ed. Martin A. Cohen (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1971), vol. II, 33.

### CHAPTER III – THE CRYPTO-JEWS IN CARTAGENA

The crypto-Jewish presence in New Granada dates back to the time of the conquest. A number of *conversos* served in the ranks of the Spanish armies, and it was rumored that a few *conquistadores* themselves were of *converso* origin. For example, Don Pedro de Heredia, founder of Cartagena de Indias, was formally accused by a fellow Spaniard by the name of Pedro Alonso Julian Mendez Cabron, of being a secret Jew. Nothing came of this denunciation, which was attributed largely to personal enmity between the two men. Nevertheless, according to one historian, the fact that *conversos* were part of Heredia's troop is undisputable, and it is possible that Heredia himself was of Jewish ancestry.<sup>43</sup>

However, this was a situation that was prevalent all over the New World during the conquest and early colonization and it was no different in Cartagena de Indias and the New Granada. Military service was one of the few avenues available to *conversos* seeking to evade the restrictions imposed on their immigration into America. All men enlisted as soldiers were exempt from obtaining a *licencia*, or entry permit, required for all foreigners and New Christians traveling to the colonies. Once in the New World, *converso* soldiers would then find their way to their desired destination. Such was the case of Pedro Lopez, who enlisted in Sevilla under captain Sancho de Alcazar, bound for Cartagena. After only four months in the city, Lopez made his way to Peru without much difficulties. Another example is Sebastian Rodriguez, whom after four months of service in Cuba, left for Mexico unhindered.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Mesa Bernal, Daniel. *De los Judios en la Historia de Colombia*. (Bogota: Editorial Planeta, 1996), 47-48.

<sup>44</sup>Garcia de Proodian, Lucia. *Los Judios en America: Sus Actividades en los Virreinos de Nueva Castilla y Nueva Granada S. XVII* (Madrid: Instituto Arias Montano, 1966), 27

The African slave trade also presented *conversos* with an opportunity to circumvent immigration restrictions, given that slavery was paramount to Cartagena's economy and Portuguese New Christians controlled its trade. By the time the Inquisition established its tribunal in Cartagena in 1610, officials at the *Casa de Contratación* in Sevilla already knew that *conversos* were taking advantage of the slave trade to stay in Cartagena and other port cities illegally. In a letter sent to the *Consejo de Indias*, they accused the rich traders in Cartagena of undermining regulations on foreign immigration, through their wealth and political influence among colonial officials. The letter states that these merchants and their representatives would dispatch twenty or more ships a year from Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea and other places, and that these vessels would be packed with Portuguese men who would then remain in the Indies after their voyage ended.<sup>45</sup>

#### The Portuguese Crypto-Jews and the Slave Trade in Cartagena

The Portuguese involvement in the African slave trade dated back to the mid-fifteenth century. However, it was not until 1479 that Portugal secured total control over the trade from Spain by signing the Treaty of Alcáçovas, whereby Spain recognized Portugal's sovereignty over the Azores, Cape Verde, Madeira and all the African coastal land south of Cape Bojador, in exchange for the Canary Islands. Moreover, with the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, Portuguese hegemony on the African coast was confirmed, while Spain was left with no legal right of entry

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<sup>45</sup>Enriqueta Vila Vilar, "Los Asientos Portugueses y el Contrabando de Negros," *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 30 (1973): 573-574.

to this area. Therefore, without direct access to the African coast, Spain became dependent on foreign merchants to supply her colonies with slaves.<sup>46</sup>

Portugal further consolidated its monopoly over the slave trade to the New World in the wake of its political union with Spain in 1580. By this time, the need for slave labor had dramatically increased in Spain's American colonies, and although the African slave markets were still controlled by the Portuguese, they were now subjects of the Spanish monarch. The logic then was simple: the colonies needed slaves and the Portuguese were the most adept to provide them.<sup>47</sup> With the institution of the system of *asientos*, Portuguese traders began to arrive in Cartagena in greater numbers, bringing slaves from Portugal's colonies in Angola and Guinea. However, restrictions on New Christian immigration to Spanish America remained in place, and *converso* traders would often elect to lose whatever money they left back home as a guarantee of return, in order to stay in the New World.<sup>48</sup>

This practice became frequent enough that Phillip III ordered that all slave ships returning from Africa should sail to Sevilla instead of sailing directly to the Indies. The objective was to check all vessels to keep New Christians from reaching the New World ports. Such measure, however, was short lived given the huge economic burden that it placed on the trade.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, corruption among customs officials made it practically impossible to enforce such restrictions, as they allowed any *converso* willing to pay a bribe to remain in Cartagena.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Linda A. Newson and Susie Minchin, *From Capture to Sale: The Portuguese Slave Trade to Spanish South America in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 2-3.

<sup>47</sup> Enriqueta Vila Villar, "La Sublevacion de Portugal y la Trata de Negros," *Ibero-Amerikanisches Archiv* Jg 2 H. 3 (1976): 172.

<sup>48</sup> Garcia de Proodian, *Los Judios en America*, 28.

<sup>49</sup> Saco, Jose Antonio. *Historia de la Esclavitud*, vol II, pg 126.

<sup>50</sup> Mesa Bernal, *De los Judios*, 60.

The majority of the New Christians that arrived in Cartagena were of Portuguese origin, according to the available data, which shows that more than fifty percent of the New Christians processed by the Inquisition came from that Iberian country. The large Jewish presence in Portugal resulted from their mass expulsion from Spain in 1492. The Jews that settled in the Lusitan kingdom eventually converted to Catholicism and became an important part in the country's economy. However, restrictions on their immigration to the New World remained in place, even during Portugal's union with Spain, from 1580 until 1640. Nonetheless, *converso* migration to America continued, especially as the need for slave labor in the colonies persisted. Portugal's dominance in the Atlantic slave trade allowed Lusitan traders to bypass travel restrictions and settle in the New World. In Cartagena, they were mostly merchants and businessmen, involved in the slave trade and in other commercial activities as well.<sup>51</sup>

Cartagena de Indias was the designated port of entry for all slaves to be transported to Perú and to the rest of New Granada. As the Indian population continued to decline during the seventeenth century, the need for slave labor increased dramatically, along with Cartagena's importance to this commercial activity. African slaves presented a viable alternative to indigenous labor as the Spanish crown became concerned with the spiritual and physical well being of the natives, during the previous century. For instance, in a royal letter dated February 22, 1549 and sent to Spanish authorities in the New Granada, *encomenderos* were ordered to cease using natives to work the mines, as it interfered with their Christian conversion and endangered their lives. *Encomenderos* caught using Indians in mine work were to have them confiscated and be fined one hundred thousands maravedís. This amount was to be divided

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<sup>51</sup> Alvarez Alonso, *La Inquisicion en Cartagena de Indias*, 119.

between the *Audiencia*, the person denouncing the *encomendero* and the judge sentencing the offender.<sup>52</sup>

Such interventionist policies decreed by Spanish monarchy, were no doubt influence by the activism of men like Bartolomé de las Casas and Antonio de Montesinos, both Dominican friars, on behalf of the indigenous population of the New World. Las Casas, in particular, advocated the plight of the natives in the New Granada provinces of Santa Marta and Cartagena, stating how they “have been sorely tried, aggrieved, slain, depopulated and devastated, from the year 1498 until this day, and in them many abominable cruelties have been wrought, and murders and thefts by the Spaniards.”<sup>53</sup> Religious activism notwithstanding, the reality was that Indians were disappearing and a new source of labor was needed.

### Conducting the Business of Slavery

The way the slave trade into South America operated was basic in its execution. First, a contract was signed between the king and a merchant, who was then responsible for transporting a pre-determined number of slaves to America, every year. As soon as the contract was signed, only the *asentista*<sup>54</sup> had the right to transport and sell slaves in the Indies. For this exclusive permission merchants had to pay the king thirty ducats per slave and leave a sum of money as a deposit for the duration of their trip. There was also an additional tax called “aduanilla” which

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<sup>52</sup> Documento 2087, in *Documentos Inéditos para la Historia de Colombia*, ed. Juan Friede (Bogota: Academia Colombiana de Historia, 1960), vol. 10, pgs. 29-30.

<sup>53</sup> Bartolomé de las Casas, *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies*, ed. Franklin W. Knight, trans. Andrew Hurley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2003), 57.

<sup>54</sup> Term derivating from the Spanish word “asiento,” which was basically a permission granted by the Spanish crown to individuals or in some cases to other countries, to supply slaves to the Spanish American colonies.

was twenty reales that would increase to thirty in the case of merchants taking their cargo directly to America instead of going to Sevilla first, as required by Spanish law.<sup>55</sup>

Given Portugal's preeminence in the slave trade prior to its union with Spain, it is understandable that the Spanish monarchy would come to rely heavily on Portuguese merchants to carry it. This dependence is evident in the number of Portuguese *conversos* involved in it and the locations from where the slaves were drawn from. While Portugal was united with Spain during the reigns of Philip III and Philip IV (1598-1640), practically all of the slave *asientos* were awarded to native Portuguese, with the terms of these contracts the same as they had been under Philip II's reign. Furthermore, the slaves transported to America came mostly from Angola, Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Mina, all Portuguese colonies in Africa.<sup>56</sup>

One aspect of the slave trade where the Spanish crown sought to impose a strict control was in the transportation of slaves into the New World, specifically the type of vessels used and the nationality of the crew working in these ships. *Asentistas* could utilize any vessel they wanted as long as a rival country of Spain did not own it. In addition, the entire crew had to be either from Spain or Portugal, as well as those employed to maintain accounting records of all the cargos departing from Africa and arriving in the New World. Despite all these restrictive measures and no doubt enticed by the huge dividends the slave trade produced, many New Christians obtained the necessary licenses and immersed themselves in all aspects of the trade, from the purchase of slaves in Africa, to their transportation to Spanish America to their sale in

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<sup>55</sup> Haring, *Trade and Navigation*, 135.

<sup>56</sup> Garcia de Proodian, *Los Judios en America*, 72.

the ports of the New World and, in some cases, their delivery to markets beyond the coastal areas where *conversos* were forbidden to do business.<sup>57</sup>

And there is no question that the slave trade represented a lucrative financial venture for *conversos*. For example, from 1615 to 1622, the *asiento* of Antonio Rodriguez Delvas imported 20,570 slaves, according to the records of the *Casa de Contratacion*. These slaves were then sold at a retail price of 500 to 600 pesos each, with some slaves selling for as much as a 1,000 pesos each.<sup>58</sup> This was definitely a large amount if we take into account the average prices for slaves in various areas of Spanish America at the time. For example, in 1630 the price for a prime male slave was about 370 pesos in Mexico City, 500 in Lima, 600 in Santiago, and 800 in Potosí, Bolivia. Not surprisingly, however, in Cartagena itself the price was no more than 250 to 275 pesos for a single male slave.<sup>59</sup>

Such pricing imbalance was more likely due to the additional expenditures that slave buyers incurred when transporting the slaves to other distant markets. But even after deducting these and other expenses such as custom fees, the salaries of crewmen, the feeding and maintenance of the slaves while en route to the Indies, etc., the trading of slaves remained a lucrative business enterprise for Portuguese entrepreneurs to invest in.

Regarding their involvement in the trade itself crypto-Jews exhibited, for the most part, the same sense of solidarity among them as they did in other facets of their life. United by their religious ancestry and their desire to succeed financially, they often helped each other in various ways. For example, a trader would offer a discount on a sale to somebody known to be a New

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<sup>57</sup> Garcia de Proodian, *Los Judios en America*, 72-73.

<sup>58</sup> Garcia de Proodian, *Los Judios en America*, 73.

<sup>59</sup> Leslie B. Rout, Jr. *The African Experience in Spanish America, 1502 to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 72.



Christian. Similarly, a rich *converso* merchant residing in the Netherlands would lend money at a low interest to a Spanish trader so he could buy slaves to be sold in Peru or Cartagena.<sup>60</sup> In other instances, a merchant in one area would send to a trader already established in a different region, a number of slaves to be sold, with a fee as commission going to the trader for this service. Or sometimes the merchant himself would take his cargo of slaves to another town and would either sell them outright or trade them for other goods. Such was the case of Manuel de Acosta, who delivered his slaves from Cartagena to the island of Margarita and traded them for pearls that were then sold for over thirty thousand pesos.<sup>61</sup>

Portuguese New Christians considered the trading in slaves to be a common commercial activity and should not indicate that these men had no other skills or business interest. For instance, Blas de Paz Pinto, a leading figure in the crypto-Jewish community in Cartagena, was a surgeon; Sebastian Rodriguez was a shoemaker; Luis Gomez Barreto, a public official. All of these individuals were deeply involved in the slave trade and whether individually or in groups, specialized in trading slaves from different areas in Africa. Gomez Barreto sold mostly slaves from Angola, just like Juan Rodriguez Mesa, Francisco Rodriguez de Solis y Manuel de Fonseca Henriquez. Blas de Paz Pinto was partner with Luis Fernandez Suarez and both men specialized in the trading of Guinean slaves.<sup>62</sup>

What these examples demonstrate is that crypto-Jews relied on each other to take advantage of their expertise in the slave trade to establish themselves above all others in this particular area of commerce. Practically all of them were of Jewish ancestry and had endured

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<sup>60</sup> Garcia de Proodian, *Los Judios en America*, 69.

<sup>61</sup> Garcia de Proodian, *Los Judios en America*, 75.

<sup>62</sup> Splendiani, *Cincuenta Años de Inquisicion*, 161.

discrimination by the Old Christian establishment back home in the Iberian Peninsula, something that no doubt drove them to establish their supremacy in the Atlantic slave trade as a means of survival. Their monopoly of the trade, however, was something that the Spanish authorities did not ignore. As early as 1610, officials in the Casa de Contratacion de Sevilla complained of the large number of rich Portuguese merchants residing in Cartagena and other ports, and of how these merchants bribed customs officials to gain entry into American cities and to obtain jobs as well. More importantly, these officials blamed the granting of *asientos* to Portuguese traders as the main cause for the migration of *conversos*, arguing that slave ships would sail from Africa with a crew made up strictly of Portuguese men, who would then stay in the city.<sup>63</sup>

In spite of all these grievances from the colonial establishment, Portuguese entrepreneurs were presented with a golden opportunity to strengthen their hold in the commerce with the Spanish America in 1627, with the first bankruptcy of Phillip IV's reign. Under the protection of the Count of Olivares, Portuguese merchants were able to circumvent the regulations keeping foreigners from trading in the New World, by obtaining the necessary documents needed to do so.

There were two ways one could obtain a royal *cédula* or permit needed to do business in the Indies. One was the legal way, or *via legal*, where the person was required to show proof of residence for twenty years in Spain or the Indies, ten years of marriage to a Spanish woman and four thousand ducats in real state property. The other was the *via de gracia*, which was a royal dispensation granted by the king himself, in a special case where a person lacked any or all of the legal documentation required. Portuguese merchants, who in most cases did not meet the legal

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<sup>63</sup> Mesa Bernal, *De los Judios*, 60.

requirements to trade in the Indies, took advantage of these dispensations to procure *cartas de naturaleza*<sup>64</sup> for themselves and their most trusted associates. These letters were of great benefit to Portuguese New Christians since given their nomadic lifestyle and endogamous marriage practices, it allowed them to keep their past hidden from colonial officials, while also keeping the Inquisition at bay.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to profits from the legal sale of slaves, the trade in Cartagena also allowed *conversos* and corrupt customs officials to make money on the illegal sale of slaves and other merchandise. In fact, custom officials knew that the contraband of slaves was a common practice among Portuguese traders, and they availed themselves to procure a cut of the earnings. For example, there was the case of a ship docking in Cartagena with a registered cargo of two hundred slaves, which were then turned over to a company priest to be baptized. These slaves were given a religious image that was hung around their necks to indicate that they were now Christians. A few days later, however, up to five hundred slaves were found to have this image with them, which clearly indicated that at least three hundred slaves were smuggled in. A similar case occurred in 1635, when a vessel coming from Angola docked in Cartagena with a cargo of five hundred and eighty slaves, of which only one hundred and twenty were legally registered.<sup>66</sup>

There were other methods that traders relied on to smuggle undeclared slaves into Cartagena. One was to have them moved from one ship to another in advance of an inspection. This measure was only necessary in case of a visit by Inquisition officials, as they were also required to inspect all ships “to ensure they were not carrying prohibited books, religious images

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<sup>64</sup> Literally “naturalization letters.”

<sup>65</sup> Pedro Collado Villalta, “El Embargo de Bienes de los Portugueses en la Flota de Tierra Firme de 1641,” *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 36, (1979): 8-13.

<sup>66</sup> Garcia de Proodian, *Los Judios en America*, 85.

or paintings, or persons “sospechosos en la fe.”<sup>67</sup> With regard to inspections by royal officials, the practice was to have the ship owner disembark at a location on the coast before Cartagena, then travel overland to the city to meet with custom authorities and arrange the safe arrival of the cargo. Such “arrangement” usually meant paying a substantial bribe in cash and slaves to whomever was necessary.

For instance, Andres Diaz de Montesinos introduced four hundred slaves when only one hundred and twenty appeared on the *registro* for his vessel. For this, de Montesinos paid a bribe of “thirteen thousand pesos in cash and eleven slaves, four to the governor of Cartagena and one each to seven other royal officials,” in addition to other bribes “totaling twelve hundred pesos to three guards.”<sup>68</sup>

Cases like these illustrate the massive fraud and official corruption involved in the slave trade. And the bribery began at the top, with the Governor himself making as much as thirty thousand pesos a year from the illegal traffic of slaves, a figure that may well have been an underestimate given the number of transactions involved.<sup>69</sup> All this dishonesty had a negative impact on the Spanish economy as a whole. According to the terms of an *asiento*, the king would only receive income for each legally registered slave brought into the colonies. Whatever money unaccounted for in the books was then divided among traders and corrupt customs officials, depriving the Spanish crown of additional revenues at a time when it needed them the most.

Nevertheless, as long as the slave trade remained such a vital part of the commercial life of Cartagena, there was no practical way to curb malfeasance or to deter the immigration of

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<sup>67</sup> Newson and Minchin, *From Capture to Sale*, 145.

<sup>68</sup> Newson and Minchin, *From Capture to Sale*, 145.

<sup>69</sup> Newson and Minchin, *From Capture to Sale*, 146.

*conversos*. On the contrary, it made it possible for them to conduct business in the city with the tacit support of the authorities.

### Social Characteristics of the Crypto-Jews of Cartagena

The wealth that crypto-Jews accumulated from the slave trade translated into social and political influence among Cartagena's elite. Many New Christians reached positions of power in the city's social and administrative hierarchy. For instance, Luis Gomez Barreto, who despite being processed twice as a Judaizer (1636-1638 and 1650-1653), served as Cartagena's deputy mayor on several occasions.<sup>70</sup> Gomez Barreto was a close friend of the inquisitor Domingo Velez de Asas y Argos with whom he spent time on holidays and often visited at home. Then there was Blas de Paz Pinto, who was on such good terms with members of the clergy that he was trusted with keeping the key to the Convent of San Diego. Another New Christian of higher standing was Francisco Rodriguez de Solis, influential enough to intercede on behalf of his fellow crypto-Jews directly to Cartagena's governor Francisco de Murga.<sup>71</sup>

However, survival for crypto-Jews in the New World entailed more than personal wealth and political connections. New Christians went to great lengths to hide or downplay their Jewish roots in order to pass unnoticed and to climb up the social ladder. Many adopted surnames associated with Old Christians or lied about their birthplace or their parents' names. Although conversos were denied access to Catholic institutions, they often had one or more of their children join a monastic order as a way to demonstrate their adherence to Christianity. An example of this practice was Francisco de Ortega, who came from a converso family. He refused

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<sup>70</sup> Garcia de Proodian, *Los Judios en America*, 46

<sup>71</sup> Mesa Bernal, *De los Judios*, 63

to continue his religious studies and confessed his allegiance to the Law of Moses to an acquaintance who then denounced him to the Inquisition.<sup>72</sup>

Another recourse was to have their sons and daughters marry an Old Christian person, preferably someone descending from a conquistador or somebody else of wealth and influence. This preference ensured that the descendants of *conversos* would gain acceptance from other Old Christians, even if it meant passing on a wealthier New Christian suitor. For instance, Diego de Ovalle, a slave trader in Cartagena, kept his daughter Isabel from accepting thirty thousand pesos worth of jewelry from Juan Rodriguez Mesa, a fellow New Christian. De Ovalle wanted to have an Old Christian in-law, which was something common among converso parents. This situation was so widespread that it was ordered by royal decree in 1565 that foreigners could not marry anywhere in Spanish America unless they could prove that they resided in the area for at least ten years prior to getting married.<sup>73</sup>

But despite their desire to be accepted by Old Christians, crypto-Jews never forgot their Hebrew heritage. They continued to observe Judaic customs and traditions and passed them on to their descendants. Many of these practices, however, were reduced to a fluid, external ritualism and lacked a solid doctrinal foundation based on actual Jewish dogma.<sup>74</sup> In other words, the Judaism of the crypto-Jews in America was a collection of ideas and practices transmitted orally or adopted from other conversos throughout the world. Something as trivial as learning a psalm or cooking a meal a certain way or saying a prayer differently, became part and parcel of the

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<sup>72</sup> Splendiani, *Cincuenta Años de Inquisicion*, 164-165

<sup>73</sup> Mesa Bernal, *De los Judios*, 58, 64.

<sup>74</sup> Alvarez Alonso, *La Inquisicion in Cartagena de Indias*, 120.

converso identity. Even among those who lived their entire lives under Spanish rule, the nature of their Judaism was ritualistic in essence.<sup>75</sup>

Something else important to consider is that crypto-Jews were forced to familiarize themselves with Catholic doctrine, in order to pass themselves as good Christians in the eyes of Old Christians and avoid the attention of the Inquisition. But years of adherence to Catholic doctrine, however insincere, and the continued clandestine practice of Jewish rituals, eventually morphed into a form of religious syncretism that borrowed from both Christianity and Judaism. This was the case with the majority of New Christians that settled in New Granada, who were more concerned with custom than with dogma. For example, their holidays were based on the Christian calendar and they would pray in their native language, whether it was Spanish or Portuguese, with the inclusion of a few words in Hebrew.<sup>76</sup>

In Cartagena, although the majority of crypto-Jews came from the Iberian Peninsula, there were some that came or had resided in places such as Italy, the Netherlands and France. It was these secret Jews the ones that were most familiar with proper Jewish doctrine. Because they had been instructed in the faith of their forefathers from an early age and were able to practice Judaism openly, they were well versed in all the traditions of the Jewish faith. For instance, they knew how to conduct the rituals, the right prayers to say, what were the holidays in the Jewish calendar, how to observe them and what their significance was, among other things.<sup>77</sup>

However, whatever differences of interpretation existed between Iberian and non-Iberian crypto-Jews, they never went beyond ritualistic discrepancies. In other words, they all agreed

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<sup>75</sup> Garcia de Proodian, *Los Judios en America*, 138-139.

<sup>76</sup> Splendiani, *Cincuenta Años de Inquisicion*, 167-168.

<sup>77</sup> Garcia de Proodian, *Los Judios en America*, 139-140.

that salvation was only possible through the Law of Moses. They also affirmed the supremacy of Judaism over Christianity as they argued that God did not substitute Moses' Law for that of Christ, being that Christ was not even considered to be the Messiah. Additionally, a fierce rejection of Christian dogma was also a common trait shared by all crypto-Jews, regardless of their socio-economic standing. In Cartagena, as in other areas of the New World, those men known to be well versed in the Law of Moses became the de de-facto leaders of the crypto-Jewish community. Luis Franco Diaz, for instance, was an educated man that knew how to interpret scripture since he was fluent in both Latin and Hebrew. Another leading figure was Blas de Paz Pinto, who functioned not only as a rabbi but also as an instructor of Jewish history and culture.<sup>78</sup>

Without the ability to openly practice Judaism and in the absence of a temple or synagogue where they could worship, crypto-Jews gathered in private homes to conduct their Judaic rituals. These *juntas* were convened under the guise of parties or banquets in order to conceal them from neighbors and authorities. In these meetings crypto-Jews would celebrate their sacred holidays, make matrimonial arrangements, and discuss all matters of importance for the development and survival of their community. They would also encourage one another to abide by Jewish precepts and to continue to reject Christianity, at least inwardly. In short, these assemblies promoted their sense of cohesion and offered them an outlet to indulge in the practices of their true faith.<sup>79</sup>

The meetings were usually held in the homes of prominent crypto-Jews. In Cartagena New Christians met in the homes of Juan Rodriguez Mesa, Fernando Lopez de Acosta, Francisco

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<sup>78</sup> Splendiani, *Cincuenta Años de Inquisicion*, 167.

<sup>79</sup> Splendiani, *Cincuenta Años de Inquisicion*, 158.



Rodriguez Solis, Mendo Lopez del Campo and Blas de Paz Pinto. Lopez del Campo was a physician who liked to host meetings where they would play games until the evenings, and then read the bible and discuss the need to continue observing the Law of Moses for their salvation.<sup>80</sup>

Ultimately, these reunions proved to be their undoing, as they eventually raised enough suspicions among Old Christians who then informed the Inquisition. It only took one *converso* to be apprehended and questioned, for the whole of the New Christian community to unravel. Such was the case of the crypto-Jews congregating at the home of Blas de Paz Pinto, which led to the mass arrests of the Portuguese New Christian leadership. In order to shield their activities from unwanted attention, Pinto would shut the blinds in his house and reinforced them with pieces of black cloths, so nothing could be seen from the outside. In a city like Cartagena where the heat was unbearable, this was an indication that Pinto and his friends were hiding something of importance. Eventually Pinto was forced to move into another house, where the Inquisition found out about their illicit activities.<sup>81</sup>

Regardless of their socio-economic status and political connections, crypto-Jews were always under the threat of discovery by Inquisition authorities. The Holy Office never wavered in its mission of keeping heresy from flourishing in Cartagena, even if it meant going after the most productive segment of the city's society. Given the seemingly low numbers of crypto-Jews processed by the Inquisition it could be argued that the Holy Office did not count on the support of Cartagena's population or the colonial authorities, in its efforts to identify and prosecute suspected Judaizers. Economic considerations and matters of competence among all the various

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<sup>80</sup> Alvarez Alonso, *La Inquisicion en Cartagena de Indias*, 124.

<sup>81</sup> Garcia de Proodian, *Los Judios en America*, 156.

colonial institutions also played a role in determining the scope and method of the Inquisition's actions during this time.

## CHAPTER IV – THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE CRYPTO-JEWS

By the early seventeenth century Portuguese crypto-Jews had become Cartagena's most productive and successful minority, gaining considerable wealth and social status through its commercial activities. They were practically involved in every major commercial enterprise in the colony including the African slave trade. The trade was a very lucrative enterprise that allowed this group to prosper financially. In time, their wealth and social standing in the community attracted the unwanted attention of the Holy Office, who with its chronic shortage of funds and lack of official financial support, was always in search of new avenues of revenue.

It would be too simplistic, however, to assume that inquisitorial prosecution of crypto-Jews was undertaken solely with the objective of seizing their wealth. From its inception, the Spanish Inquisition enjoyed the support of the monarchy in so far as it served to further its political agenda, i.e., the consolidation of Spanish Catholicism among all its subjects. This, however, does not mean the Inquisition depended on royal funding to conduct its operations. On the contrary, from the very beginning, the Holy Office was "expected to be not only a self-sustaining institution, but a source of profit."<sup>82</sup>

In Cartagena, the socio-political dynamics worked to the disadvantage of the Holy Office, as it lacked the financial resources and official support to operate on the same level as other colonial institutions, at least during the years of the Olivares regime. Thus Inquisition officials realized that the only way to redress this imbalance was to obtain financial autonomy mainly

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<sup>82</sup>Lea, *History*, II, 315.

through the expropriation of assets and the imposition of fines in accordance with Inquisitorial procedure.<sup>83</sup>

It is true that New Christians had amassed considerable riches, which allowed them to secure political influence as well. Such a confluence of economic and political power represented a threat to the dominant status hitherto enjoyed by royal bureaucrats and traditional Spanish merchants. And while the Inquisition's campaign against crypto-Jews in Cartagena was motivated by the enforcement of Christian orthodoxy, it was also influenced by economic and political factors affecting Spain's imperial entanglements in the European continent, during this time.

### The Crypto-Jews and Spain's War with the Dutch

During the first half of the seventeenth century the Spanish monarchy was waging an all-out war against the Dutch, as they sought to free themselves from Spanish rule. Since the late sixteenth century and in response to renewed persecution by the Portuguese and Spanish Inquisitions, many Iberian *conversos* had escaped to the Dutch territories taking their wealth and business expertise with them. The influx of *converso* money helped finance the Dutch rebellion, while it hindered the economy of Spain by depriving it of much needed capital. Moreover, Iberian *conversos* were actively involved in subverting the economic embargo that Spain had imposed on the Dutch, aimed at forcing their surrender. However, by relying on a complex network of contacts based on kinship, religion and national ties, Iberian *conversos* along with

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<sup>83</sup> Alfonso W. Quiroz, "La Expropiación Inquisitorial de Cristianos Nuevos Portugueses en Los Reyes, Cartagena y Mexico, 1635-1649," *Historica* 10. no. 2 (December 1986): 251. It is worth noting that confiscation of property should only take place in cases involving a charge of heresy, in accordance with the 1571 instructions issued by Inquisitor-General Don Fernando de Valdés. See Jiménez Monteserín, *Introducción a la Inquisición Española*, 198-240.

their coreligionists in the Netherlands, France and other neutral European ports, eventually gained control of all the commerce between Spain and the Dutch provinces.

Ironically, they were placed in a position to do so by the Spanish government led by the Count of Olivares, Philip IV's favorite minister. Olivares understood the importance of economic warfare and the advantage that having access to *converso* wealth and business acumen could give Spain in its war against the Dutch. Therefore, he brought in Portuguese *conversos* to serve as financiers to the crown, despite strenuous objections from the Inquisition and the Italian banking establishment.<sup>84</sup>

Unfortunately for the Spanish crown, Iberian *conversos* did not limit themselves to exclusively financing the Spanish war machine, but they also continued to secretly trade with their brethren in the Netherlands, creating a vast network of contraband that helped sustain the Dutch war effort. In other words, they were given the means to undermine Spanish hegemony in Europe while being shielded from inquisitorial persecution, by the same Spanish government they were supposed to be helping.

The effect of the war was also felt in Spain's American colonies, and after the end of the Twelve Years Truce (1609-1621), the Dutch became a serious threat to Spanish commercial hegemony in the New World. The Dutch West India Company, acting in a military capacity on behalf of the rebel government in the Netherlands, conducted an unrelenting naval war against Spanish America, including the territories colonized by the Portuguese. In 1624 they captured

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<sup>84</sup> Bernardo J. Lopez Belinchon, "Olivares Contra Los Portugueses. Inquisicion, Conversos y Guerra Economica," in *Historia de la Inquisicion en España y America. 3 vols.*, ed. Joaquin Perez Villanueva and Bartolome Escandell Bonnet ( Madrid: Centro de Estudios Inquisitoriales, 1984-2000). 502-504

San Salvador and six year later Pernambuco, in Brazil. They held control of most of the Brazilian northeast coastal region for the next twenty-five years.<sup>85</sup>

Additionally, Dutch privateers roamed around the Gulf of Mexico in hopes of capturing the silver fleets that carried the riches of its New World colonies back to Spain. In 1627, for instance, a Dutch fleet commanded by Piet Heyn succeeded in capturing a Spanish fleet off Cuba's northern coast carrying a shipment rich in silver, gold, indigo, sugar and logwood, which was sold in the Netherlands for fifteen million guilders, a huge windfall for the Dutch West India Company. The Company also harassed the Spanish fleets as far south as the coasts of Chile and Peru, threatening Cartagena as well.<sup>86</sup>

Consequently, the Dutch presence in the New World was seen as a threat to the survival of Spain's American empire and *conversos* associated with Dutch interests were branded as traitors. Even though the hostility shown to *conversos* in Cartagena was mainly driven by suspicion of their religious character, their illegal economic activities and perceived association with Spain's enemies were also important motives. According to Inquisition records, a number of prominent crypto-Jews had commercial links and maintained regular correspondence with Dutch agents.

Iberian crypto-Jews with business ties to the Netherlands were believed to be part of what was known as la *Cofradia de Holanda*, literally the Confraternity of Holland. This was an organization dedicated to supporting Dutch economic interests at the expense of Spain's. In the *proceso* against Duarte Lopez Mesa, there is testimony that he and other prominent crypto-Jews

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<sup>85</sup> Although Brazil belonged to Portugal, this was an issue of concern for the Spanish crown as well in light of Portugal's union with Spain. Haring, *Trade and Navigation*, 236.

<sup>86</sup> Haring, *Trade and Navigation*, 237-240.

in Cartagena belonged to the *cofradia*. Lopez Mesa confessed to being part of this group and provided details of its operations. For example, he stated that the leadership of the *cofradia* was composed of twenty-four wealthy men, including five Portuguese, and that they met daily in a house in Amsterdam with the sole purpose of plotting against Spain.<sup>87</sup> Manuel de Fonseca Enriquez also admitted being a member of the *cofradia* and confessed to the Inquisition that he had been contributing three hundred pesos to its coffers, every year since 1632.<sup>88</sup>

Besides having a mutual economic interest in the trade with the New World, Iberian crypto-Jews and their Dutch masters also shared an intense contempt towards Spain rooted in their religious ethos. Jews in the Netherlands enjoyed the freedom to practice their religion without fear of persecution, so it is plausible that they identified with the Protestant cause in a way they could never do with Christianity, especially the recalcitrant Catholicism championed by Spain. Thus supporting the Dutch government in its war with Spain was another way for crypto-Jews in Cartagena to subvert the status quo and rebel against the oppressive system in which they were forced to live under.

Religious prejudice notwithstanding, the fact is that crypto-Jews were involved in all manner of illegal economic activities, from smuggling silver from Argentina to Brazil and Portugal to bringing undeclared merchandise in slave ships permitted to sail directly from Africa to American ports, and which were only supposed to carry slaves.<sup>89</sup> Whatever the contraband

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<sup>87</sup> *Proceso* against Duarte Lopez Mesa, in Splendiani, *Cincuenta Años de Inquisicion*, vol III, 49-51.

<sup>88</sup> Splendiani, *Cincuenta Años*, vol I, 167.

<sup>89</sup> Israel, Jonathan. *Empires and Entrepots: The Dutch, the Spanish Monarchy and the Jews, 1585-1713* (London: Hambleton Press, 1990) 274

was, crypto-Jews benefited greatly from it. As one historian notes, they “were the driving force behind the illicit trade of the Spanish Indies, from Buenos Aires to the Caribbean, since 1580.”<sup>90</sup>

### The Portuguese Rebellion and the End of Tolerance

In addition to its war with the Dutch Republic, Spain became entangled in another European political crisis that had a more direct impact on the crypto-Jewish community in Cartagena. A rebellion in Portugal had been brewing for some time advocated by its nobility, who wanted to sever the kingdom’s ties to Spain. Led by the Duke of Braganza, the revolt took place in 1640, and succeeded in gaining Portugal’s independence.<sup>91</sup> This was an event that greatly impacted the New Christian community in Cartagena, since most of them were of Portuguese descent and were seen with suspicion by the Old Christian establishment as being sympathetic to the Portuguese cause.

The Portuguese background of most crypto-Jews had social implications as well, particularly as it the Inquisition was concerned. Having Portuguese ancestry immediately made them suspect in the eyes of the Holy Office, as it was widely believed that all Portuguese New Christians were secret Jews.<sup>92</sup> To a certain extent such perception was correct if only because *conversos* comprised a large segment of Portugal’s population, dating back to 1492. After the Catholic kings expelled from Spain those Jews who refused to convert to Christianity, many of them chose to immigrate to the Lusitan kingdom. Eventually, the Portuguese crown imposed a

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<sup>90</sup> Israel, *Empires and Entrepots*, 276.

<sup>91</sup> Elliot, J.H. *Imperial Spain, 1469-1716* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 346.

<sup>92</sup> In a letter to the Spanish king, inquisitor Antonio Ordoñez argued for the establishment of a new tribunal to oversee the territory of New Granada stating that large numbers of foreigners made their way to the country through port cities like Cartagena. Ordoñez mentions the Portuguese, in particular, whom he assumes are all Jews. “y los Portugueses, que son todos Judios.” Medina, *Historia*, 18.



second forced conversion upon the Jews and this time they did convert in order to avoid being expelled again. In any case, Portugal became home to a large number of converted Jews and their descendants.

The Portuguese preeminence in the slave trade, presented a dilemma for the authorities in Cartagena. On the one hand, there were rules in place to keep foreigners from entering the city, which the authorities were supposed to enforce. However, time and time again Portuguese merchants found a way to not only conduct their business in the city, but to establish residence in it and other surrounding areas as well. On the other hand, Cartagena's economy was becoming increasingly dependent on African slaves, because of the dwindling indigenous labor force and the proscription of the *encomienda* system, decreed by the Spanish crown.

Consequently, it is understandable that a zealous enforcement of immigration policies was not in the best interests for Cartagena's commercial life, considering the need for slaves and the dependence on Portuguese merchants to procure them. In fact, while Portugal was united with Spanish, at least for the first two decades of the seventeenth century, the prosecution of Portuguese crypto-Jews by the Cartagena Inquisition remained a marginal subject at best. The tribunal focused largely on crimes dealing with witchcraft among the African population and solicitation by members of the religious establishment.<sup>93</sup>

### The Politics of Faith and the Persecution of the Crypto-Jews

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<sup>93</sup> For example, in the *auto-de-fé* of 1622, seven women appeared convicted of witchcraft, one Spaniard convicted of bigamy and a Portuguese man, Francisco Simon, convicted of proposition, for stating that men lacked free will. In the *auto* of 1626, out of twenty-two culprits, only nine were convicted of judaizing. Medina, *Historia*, 81, 95-98.

With regard to their social organization, once crypto-Jews settled into a new environment, they followed a pattern of social interaction designed to insulate themselves from Old Christian society. They sought and befriended fellow crypto-Jews in order to establish a community based on their shared Jewish heritage and antipathy towards the Catholic establishment. This was certainly the case in seventeenth century Cartagena, where in addition to their common Portuguese origin and Jewish roots, New Christians also shared certain social characteristics that defined them. For instance, they were mostly young or middle aged, single and involved in some type of commercial activity, the most common and lucrative one being the slave trade. They favored marriage to other New Christians and basically all of them practiced Judaism in secret and followed ancient Jewish customs as best as they could, with the assistance of learned crypto-Jews among them.

They had also already experienced persecution in their extended families at the hands of the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions and from other New World tribunals. For example, Juan del Campo, *reconciliado* in Cartagena in 1636 and whose real name was Gonzalo Baez, had his father, stepmother and sister arrested by the Inquisition in Lisbon; Pedro Duarte's father was *relajado* by the Inquisition in Evora and his brother Sebastian, by the Lima tribunal. And the brothers Luis and Manuel Franco Diaz had their paternal grandmother *reconciliada* in Lisbon and their mother and sister sentenced as Judaizers in Seville.<sup>94</sup>

To prosecute suspected crypto-Jews inquisitors needed proof that they had relapsed back into Judaism before they could arrest them and seize their property. According to the instructions of Inquisitor-General Fernando de Valdés, unless there was enough evidence to arrest and

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<sup>94</sup> Alvarez Alonso, *La Inquisicion en Cartagena*, 118-120

imprisoned a suspected heretic then nothing should be done against this person. The reason being that an arrest made with insufficient evidence would only serve to warn this individual and others close to him.<sup>95</sup> Incriminatory evidence could be obtained in many ways, including the testimony of informants, employees, and even members of the suspect's own family.

To help determine who was a possible heretic, the Inquisition clearly identified a set of social characteristics and religious customs and practices commonly associated with crypto-Judaism, and they relied on these instructions to identify suspected judaizers. Such practices were described in the edict of faith that was read to the general public whenever a new tribunal was established. They included dressing in clean garments and the changing of linen and mantelpieces on Saturday; eating meat during Lent; not eating pork or fish without scales; fasting on Jewish holidays such as the feast of Esther, and many others.<sup>96</sup>

Whether or not these and other practices were really a part of ancient Jewish traditions is not completely clear. What is certain is that the Inquisition believed they were and that, most importantly, crypto-Jews themselves believed them to be. Furthermore, since New Christians were presumed to be secret Jews, looking for any of these rituals in their daily lives, seemed a safe way for Old Christians to confirm their suspicions and turn them in to the Inquisition.

Many times, the Holy Office accused New Christians for simply following a pattern of behavior that people believed was suspect, including the practices mentioned above. However, Old Christians did not have the theological basis to understand Judaic practices, when most of them were not even familiar with Christian dogma. Crypto-Jews on the other hand, had a general understanding of the basic tenets of Christianity, if only to maintain appearances. They had no

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<sup>95</sup> Jiménez Monteserín, *Introducción a la Inquisición Española*, 200.

<sup>96</sup> Medina, *Historia*, 25-26.

choice but to familiarize themselves with Catholic principles, in order to deflect unwanted attention from the Old Christian establishment.

Therefore, crypto-Jews demonstrated a general knowledge of Christianity and could engage in a religious argument with Old Christians. However, being familiar with Christian doctrine did not preclude some crypto-Jews from failing to validate that knowledge when they needed to. For instance, there was the case of Juan Rodriguez Mesa, who when asked by Inquisition officials to cross himself (*santiguarse*), could not do it correctly, and ended up confessing to being a secret Jew.<sup>97</sup>

Nevertheless, failure to demonstrate a deeper understanding of Christian dogma cannot be blamed entirely on *conversos*, as it was the direct result of an inadequate conversion process. It is important to understand that Iberian New Christians, from before and after the Expulsion, were basically left to assimilate on their own into the Christian religion, without “any systematic education in Christian beliefs or practices.”<sup>98</sup> What this means is that after being forced into Christianity, Jews did not receive the theological support needed to thoroughly assimilate into their new faith. Under such circumstances, *converso* adoption of Christianity could never have been thorough or sincere, even if undertaken voluntarily.

Ironically, there were provisions instructing inquisitors on how to deal with Christian converts that had reverted back to Judaism, which stated that a forced conversion could not be relied on to determine the sincerity of a convert’s Christianity.

It has been decided that Christians who transfer or return to the Jewish rite (even if these returning were baptized as infants or from fear of death, but not if they were absolutely forced to accept baptism), shall be proceeded against as heretics provided they have confessed to

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<sup>97</sup> Splendiani, *Cincuenta Años de Inquisicion*, vol. III, 44.

<sup>98</sup> David M. Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews* (Albuquerque, UNM Press, 2002), 135.

this or been convicted either by Christians or Jews.<sup>99</sup>

It is hard to imagine anything that can have a more forceful effect on people than the possibility of death, especially when presented to them as the only alternative to conversion. Therefore, such a contradictory statement as the one above underscores the difficulty inherent in enforcing Christian orthodoxy among those forced to embrace it against their will.

And so for the Inquisition in Cartagena, the problem with prosecuting New Christians became more political than religious in nature. Given the low numbers of crypto-Jews processed by the Inquisition during the seventeenth century, it seems that there was reluctance on the part of the Holy Office to vigorously go after the crypto-Jewish population in the city. This, however, was not the case. The fact is that the Holy office's efforts to eradicate crypto-Judaism were hindered by the corrupt colonial establishment, who was only concerned with protecting its interests in the contraband sale of slaves, and all other illegal commercial activities. A good example of this state of affairs was the case of Don Juan de Mañozca, one of Cartagena's first inquisitors, who saw his efforts to persecute New Christian businessmen stymied by the collusion between the colonial authorities and the merchant class. Mañozca often clashed with colonial administrators and with members of the clergy, to the point that the Inquisition lost their support and good will. Therefore, Mañozca had to redirect his energies to stamping out an epidemic of witchcraft among the slave population before being forced to leave Cartagena for good.<sup>100</sup>

Mañozca's case clearly illustrates the potential for conflict inherent in the relations between the Inquisition and the colonial establishment in the Indies, particularly as it concerned

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<sup>99</sup> Bernard Gui, *The Inquisitor's Guide: A Medieval Manual on Heretics*, translated and edited by Janet Shirley (London: Ravenhall Books, 2006), 139.

<sup>100</sup> Quiroz, "La Expropiacion," 253.

the limits of inquisitorial jurisdiction. The strong likelihood that inquisitors would exceed their authority while executing their duties, was something the Spanish crown envisioned. Therefore, it instituted a set of regulations designed to keep the inquisitors from overstepping their boundaries. In 1633, for example, a royal *cedula* was sent to Cartagena stating a number of regulations that inquisitors were to abide by, which included a specific provision forbidding all officials of the Holy Office, from interfering in any aspect of the political process in the colonies. In other words, the Inquisition's sole concern was to be with matters of the faith, a restriction the inquisitors often ignored.<sup>101</sup>

During the seventeenth century, the Cartagena Inquisition processed only 84<sup>102</sup> individuals for being crypto-Jews, a rather low number when considering the prominence Portuguese crypto-Jews had on the slave trade and commerce in general. This apparent apathy on the part of the Holy Office reflects the indifference that the Old Christian society in Cartagena exhibited towards the crypto-Jewish population in the city, which is not to say that New Christians were widely liked or held in high regard. A more plausible explanation is that they were simply tolerated as they provided the goods and services most valued in the city, especially slaves.

In all fairness to crypto-Jews, they did control the slave market, provided jobs and loaned money, and a few of them even managed to endear themselves to Cartagena's political and clerical elite. Whatever the reason, the fact is the Old Christian population did not go out of their way to assist the Inquisition in persecuting these individuals. Truth be told, the majority of

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<sup>101</sup> Real Cedula de lo que ha de Observar el Santo Oficio de la Inquisición por la Concordia que su Magestad Manda, in Eduardo Gutierrez de Piñeres, *Documentos Para la Historia del Departamento de Bolívar*. (Cartagena de Indias: 1924), 484.

<sup>102</sup> Alvarez Alonso, *La Inquisicion en Cartagena*, 117.

crypto-Jews processed by the Holy Office were denounced by other crypto-Jews who sought to implicate as many as their coreligionist as possible in order to court favor with the inquisitors and lessen their own sentences.<sup>103</sup>

As previously stated, Crypto-Jews in Cartagena, as in other areas of the New World often gathered in the home of a prominent crypto-Jew to secretly engage in their Jewish rituals. Since crypto-Jews could not possibly practice Judaism openly and in the absence of synagogues or temples, this was the only way for them to obtain a measure of privacy and security to worship in their true faith. Therefore, the risk of one member of these *juntas* denouncing the others if they were to be arrested first by the Inquisition, was always a possibility. In Cartagena, such a scenario proved to be the rule rather than the exception. Excluding the case of the mulatto Diego Lopez, a Christian who incriminated a number of crypto-Jews with whom he was acquainted, every other crypto-Jew prosecuted by the Holy Office had been denounced by a fellow crypto-Jew, usually a member of his own congregation.<sup>104</sup>

In some instances, the initial accusation against one or more crypto-Jews came from another crypto-Jew under the custody of a different tribunal. One of the most effective methods the Inquisition relied on to prosecute offenders was its willingness to share information among its various tribunals, of anyone already processed and convicted anywhere the Holy Office operated. Moreover, if someone was accused in the testimony provided by somebody else already imprisoned under the jurisdiction of a different tribunal, then that information was considered evidence to be used in the case against that person. In other words, anybody could

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<sup>103</sup> Splendianni, *Cincuenta Años de Inquisicion*, 160.

<sup>104</sup> Splendiani, *Cincuenta Años de Inquisicion*, 159.

incriminate anyone, anywhere, especially if the incriminated party was a *converso* or a descendant of *conversos*.

A good example of this situation was the mass arrest of *conversos* in 1636. In this particular episode, the leading figures in the crypto-Jewish community in Cartagena were arrested following a chain of mutual denunciations, however initiated by the accusations of a crypto-Jew imprisoned by the Inquisition in Lima. Pablo Duarte, arrested in Panama and taken to Lima where he had been accused, proceeded to implicate Juan Rodriguez Mesa, a rich Portuguese merchant resident of Cartagena, once he was in custody. Rodriguez Mesa was then arrested on March 15, 1636. and in turn accused Duarte Lopez Mesa and Francisco Piñero. These two men then incriminated Luis Fernandez Suarez, Manuel Alvarez Prieto, Manuel Fonseca Enriquez, Blas de Paz Pinto, Juan del Campo and Francisco Rodriguez de Solis. There were many other conversos implicated in this case, including Felipe Alvarez, Sebastian Cutiño and Duarte Pereira, all of whom were arrested based on the allegations of other conversos imprisoned in Lima.<sup>105</sup>

Sometimes the accusations overlapped from one case to another. For instance, Diego Lopez had already accused Blas de Paz Pinto before Juan Rodriguez Mesa did the same. Francisco Piñero and Manuel Alvarez Prieto also testified against De Paz Pinto once their own *procesos* began. There are many other instances in which crypto-Jews implicated other crypto-Jews including members of their own families, to try and save themselves. For these people, the thought of losing everything they had worked for was too much to bear, so they became

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<sup>105</sup> Alvarez Alonso, *La Inquisicion en Cartagena de Indias*, 125-126.



*buenosconfitentes*, literally good informants, as soon as they found themselves in the Inquisition's jails.

Although there was a degree of rivalry among some crypto-Jews resulting from their various business interests, their willingness to implicate their friends and associates cannot be attributed solely to entrepreneurial disagreements. The social stigma associated with being a relapsed Judaizer and the fear of losing their wealth and social status was more likely the reason why they turned against each other. It was their basic instinct for self-preservation that drove many of them to collaborate with the Inquisition.

The fact is that crypto-Jews, regardless of their unity and commonly shared rejection of Christian values, did not hesitate to betray anyone close to them if that could somehow spare them from the embarrassment of appearing in an auto-de-fé or having their possessions taken away. There were a few instances, however, where some *conversos* implicated others only after being tortured in accordance with Inquisition procedure. Such was the case of Blas de Paz Pinto, who incriminated everyone in his *junta* before dying of wounds sustained under torment. For others like Manuel de Fonseca and Francisco Rodriguez de Solis, the mere threat of torture was incentive enough for them to confess and denunciate others.<sup>106</sup>

Let us remember that the Inquisition's most effective weapon was fear, and it was fear that motivated many crypto-Jews to cooperate with the inquisitors, since they came from the Iberian Peninsula where the brutality of the Holy Office's methods was well known. Surprisingly enough, however, there were a few cases of crypto-Jews who refused to confess and incriminate others, even after enduring torture. For example, there is the case of Antonio Rodriguez Ferrerin,

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<sup>106</sup> Splendianni, *Cincuenta Años de Inquisicion*, 160-161., Alvarez Alonso, *La Inquisicion en Cartagena de Indias*, 131.

a Spaniard arrested in 1636 accused of being a crypto-Jew, who did not confess to anything while being tortured and was absolved of the charges on appeal. Other similar cases were those of Antonio de Acosta, Luis Gomez Barreto y Manuel Lopez de Noroña.<sup>107</sup>

Torture, however, was not the worst punishment that crypto-Jews could expect from the Inquisition. Languishing in prison while their cases evolved exerted tremendous psychological pressure on the prisoners, often to the point that some of them attempted suicide while others went insane. Gaspar Arias del Valle, for example, stated that he heard voices and saw strange figures wondering around in his cell. Manuel Pereira, who after spending two years imprisoned in the Inquisition's secret jails, went completely mad, according to the testimony provided to the inquisitors by the prison's warden. He was sent to a hospital to recuperate but after three months without any improvement, his case was dismissed.<sup>108</sup>

In the matter of sentencing, once a conviction was secured, there were a number of scenarios that applied to each prisoner, depending on the gravity of the crime and the severity of the sentence imposed by the Holy Office. A prisoner could be *relajado*, which meant that he was released to the civil authorities to be burned at the stake as an unrepentant heretic. Only three Judaizers were *relajados* during the entire seventeenth century in Cartagena. One, Juan Vicente, a Portuguese shoemaker, was the only one to be punished in person. The other two *conversos*, Manuel Alvarez Prieto and Francisco de Andrade, were burnt in effigy, since they had died before they could be executed. In the case of Alvarez Prieto, he died in prison while waiting for an answer from the Suprema to his appeal.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Medina, *Historia*, 115-116.

<sup>108</sup> Alvarez Alonso, *La Inquisicion en Cartagena de Indias*, 130, 140.

<sup>109</sup> Alvarez Alonso, *La Inquisicion en Cartagena de Indias*, 134.

It is worth noting that not even in death were convicted heretics spared the prosecutorial zeal of the Inquisition. If there was enough evidence that a deceased person had been a heretic, then their remains were dug up and burnt at an auto-de-fé, same as if they were alive. Most unfortunate for their families, however, the Inquisition had the right to “demand and take the goods, with their fruits that the condemned left to any heirs and successors in whose power those goods may be found.” In other words, their assets and all profits accrued from them would be seized by the Holy Office, by virtue of their posthumous conviction as heretics. Their guilt was passed down to their descendants regardless of how long ago those convicted had passed away.<sup>110</sup>

A more common outcome for convicted Judaizers was to be *reconciliado*, in which case the prisoners confessed to have engaged in heretical behavior, begged for forgiveness and to be accepted back into the Christian faith. They would then appear at an auto-de-fé wearing a *sambenito*, as part of their sentence. Throughout the seventeenth century the Cartagena tribunal reconciled thirty-seven Judaizers, with the majority of them ordered to appear at a public auto-de-fé.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, confiscation of property was a penalty imposed on convicted heretics whether they were *relajados* or *reconciliados*. Once all maintenance expenses and personal debts were paid, the residual monies went straight into the Inquisition’s coffers.

In some cases, however, the confiscated property was returned to a person under specific circumstances. For instance, Melchor Vaez Mendez had his property returned, after the charges against him were dropped for lack of evidence. The same was the outcome in the *proceso* against

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<sup>110</sup> Gaspar Isidro Arguello’s “Instructions of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, Handled Summarily, Both Old and New. Part I,” in Lu Ann Homza, ed., *The Spanish Inquisition, 1478-1614: An Anthology of Sources* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2006), 69.

<sup>111</sup> There were also less elaborate autos-de-fe, which took place within the confines of a church or a cathedral. These were known as autos particulares. Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 204.

Luis Fernandez Suarez, whose assets were returned to him after the Suprema ruled in his favor after reviewing the manner in which the inquisitors in Cartagena handled his case.<sup>112</sup>

The truth is that New Christians, who were never really marginalized from mainstream society before the intrusion of the Inquisition in their lives, would become immediate pariahs the moment they were paraded in an auto-de-fe wearing a *sambenito*. This was a shame that remained with them for life and would keep them from participating in public and religious affairs, not to mention the humiliation that being branded heretics entailed.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, *conversos* did whatever was necessary to maintain a façade of good Christians in public while in private they remained loyal to their Jewish heritage.

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<sup>112</sup>Alvarez Alonso, *La Inquisicion en Cartagena de Indias*, 140; Rotbaum, *De Sefarad al Neosefardismo*, 291.

<sup>113</sup>Splendianni, *Cincuenta Años de Inquisicion*, 165.

## CHAPTER V – CONCLUSION

In studies of the Holy Office in seventeenth century Spanish America, greater emphasis has been placed on the activities of the tribunals in Mexico and Perú, often to the point where the Cartagena tribunal is barely acknowledged in the historiography of this institution. The operational scope of the Cartagena Inquisition and the consequences its actions had on the *conversos* under its jurisdiction, was far greater than the number of *procesos* indicate. The Portuguese New Christians, through their dominance of the slave trade and other commercial enterprises, became the lifeblood of the city's economy during the timeframe of this study. They also played an equally important part in altering the political dynamic among the major European powers vying for control of the region, by providing the financial resources these powers needed to continue fighting with each other, both in the European continent and in the New World.

In Cartagena itself, the Inquisition's ability to persecute crypto-Jews was conditioned by the interaction between the colonial administration's economic and political interests and the tribunal's duty to enforce religious orthodoxy among the population. New Christians often enjoyed the protection of colonial officials, who were often more concerned with their own financial interests than in assisting the Holy Office with its work, as they were supposed to do. Nowhere was this contradiction more evident than in the slave trade, which was the most important commercial activity in Cartagena, and where *conversos* exerted the most influence. As the main port of entry for slaves into Spanish America, Cartagena offered New Christians traders the opportunity to expand and consolidate their hold over this enterprise, becoming a rich and powerful minority in the process.

Only when Spain's imperial designs in Europe came to an inglorious end under the administration of the Count of Olivares, was the Cartagena Inquisition able to move against the *conversos* unhindered. And even then, only through their mutual denunciations could the Holy Office successfully carry out its campaign, since they did not receive any significant support from the colonial establishment nor from the population at large.

New Christians in Cartagena exhibited a collective identity based on their common Jewish ancestry and Portuguese origin, shaped by their contempt for Christian dogma and values. Forced to live by the tenets of a despised religion, they secretly continue to honor their Jewish traditions and customs in a group environment that ultimately led to their downfall. It only took one *converso* to implicate others for the entire community to unravel in a mass of mutual accusations, regardless of friendship, business partnerships and familial ties. Individual survival took precedence over any notion of group unity *conversos* may have felt before they fell under the Inquisition's grasp.

In any case, the persecution of the *conversos* in Cartagena cannot be solely attributed to the anti-Semitism inherent in the Inquisition's machinery of repression, nor on their stubborn adherence to Judaism. After all, the crypto-Judaism of the Portuguese New Christian was the logical result of a flawed conversion process, which only deepened as generations passed. If anything, Spain's imperial politics and economic interests during the seventeenth century, had a much greater effect on the way crypto-Jews lived, prospered and were ultimately persecuted in Cartagena and the rest of the New World as well.

## GLOSSARY

asentista.	Individual with whom an <i>asiento</i> was contracted.
asiento.	Contract with a person or a company, for the procurement and delivery of slaves.
audiencia.	Each session in the inquisitorial process in which the accused had to appear in front of the inquisitors.
auto de fé.	Literally “act of faith.” A usually public ceremony in which the Inquisition read the sentences against those it convicted.
autillo.	A private ceremony conducted at the main location of the Inquisition tribunal, where sentences to those convicted of minor offenses were given.
cédula.	Any official document identifying an individual or granting authorization to exercise a right.
cofradia.	Association or union of people sharing a common interest, whether religious, political, commercial, etc.
confiscación.	Confiscation or seizure of the property and belongings of an accused individual upon his/her arrest by the Inquisition.
confitente.	Confidential informant, usually a detainee, whose objective was to snitch on his fellow prisoners in hopes of having his sentence reduced.
converso.	Term used to identify former Jews and Muslims converts to Christianity. Applied to all of their descendants as well.
encomienda.	A system of tributary work established in Spanish America after the conquest, whereby Spaniards controlled the labor of the indigenous population in exchange for their protection and instruction into the Catholic faith.
encomendero.	A person who was granted an <i>encomienda</i> .
factor.	Business representative in charge of receiving the cargo arriving in the colonies, mostly associated with the African slave trade.
familiar.	Lay official whose job was to spy on the population in order to identify and denounce suspected heretics to the Inquisition. Although <i>familiars</i> did not receive a salary for their services, they enjoyed certain privileges such as the right to carry weapons and not pay taxes.
reconciliar.	To “reconcile,” or accept back into the Cristian faith repentant heretics.
relajar.	Literally “to relax.” The act of releasing a prisoner to the secular authorities for execution.
relajados.	Those convicted by the Inquisition and released to the civil authorities for execution.
sanbenito.	Penitential garment that those convicted by the Inquisition had to wear for a determined period of time according to their sentences.

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