

INTRODUCTION

ON JUNE 11, 1485, at the pilgrimage town of Guadalupe in western Spain, the Holy Office of the Inquisition executed Alonso de Paredes as a heretic. Paredes was one of the first people tried in Guadalupe, in one of Fernando and Isabel's first ad hoc inquisitorial courts. His case, however, was unusual. The Holy Office of the Inquisition was established by the crown to root out apostasy among Jewish converts and their descendants (known as New Christians, or *conversos*), but the summary of Paredes's trial mentions no Jewish practices whatsoever, simply stating that he had been found to be a heretic and apostate. Unlike in other trial summaries, Alonso de Paredes (a New Christian) was not accused of leading Jewish services in his home, or of praying "in a Jewish fashion," or of failing to observe Christian dietary rules. Rather, Paredes almost certainly attracted the attention of the inquisitors for another reason: the economic and political threat he posed to the friars who both ran the town and helped manage the inquisitorial trials. Paredes was a wealthy cloth merchant and a force to be reckoned with. Only a few years before, he and several other converso merchants had tried to establish a monopoly in town; once, he had attacked the Jeronymite friars' tax collector; and the evidence suggests that he was involved in an attempt to bribe the friars to elect a prior more sympathetic to his concerns.

Alonso's life and death at the hands of the inquisitors is revealing of more than his own tribulations, however. His history, and the history of Guadalupe, shed much light on Spain's transformation from the late medieval to the early modern period. A close study of the town of Guadalupe reveals two interrelated points: first, that the Inquisition's investigation of conversos reshaped religious and ethnic identity; and second, that this refashioned identity transformed local political conflicts, thus altering the exercise of local and royal authority. By demonstrating the contingent nature of religious identity in fifteenth-century Spain, we can demystify the sources of inquisitorial power by locating them in the ability of the Holy Office to construct oppositions—and thus potential sites of power—out of ambiguities. That this ability could be employed by local as well as royal officials, and even to some extent by other residents of the community, meant that the Inquisition could, from its earliest appearance as an arm of the emerging Spanish

state, be used to establish and extend royal and local political authority. Thus, religious identity and political authority were contemporaneously and mutually constructed—each emerged out of engagement with the other.

This book's argument develops in three parts: first, it examines in close detail the complex range of practices of New Christians in the context of Old Christian communities. Second, it connects Christians' contested religious identity with the nascent and malleable power of the Inquisition. And third, it traces exactly how local and royal officials deployed inquisitorial power for their own ends. In the process, the work moves from traditional microhistory to the interrelation of local and proto-national concerns. In this history, the Virgin's shrine in Guadalupe emerges as a crucial site—a prominent element in the propaganda of Fernando and Isabel, and the stage on which the transformative conflicts among the crown, local officials, the church, and conversos like Alonso de Paredes were played out.

The first part of this argument—that religious identity in late-medieval and early modern Spain was negotiated, rather than emerging from simple either/or categories—is best seen at the local level, in a town like Guadalupe. Guadalupe was admittedly unique; the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe, located there, transfigured the religious landscape of the community and the peninsula.¹ When Isabel and Fernando's key Jewish tax-farmer and advisor, Don Abraham Seneor, converted to Christianity on June 15, 1492, he traveled to Guadalupe with his king and queen to do it. A few years later, on July 29, 1496, Christopher Columbus brought two Taíno Indians from the Caribbean to the Virgin of Guadalupe to have them baptized as Christians, and to thank the Virgin for her protection on his voyages. Columbus was not alone in his pilgrimage to the Virgin's shrine. Pilgrims of all social ranks traveled to her shrine from throughout the Iberian peninsula and beyond, making it the most popular pilgrimage site in fifteenth-century Spain. Many presumably stayed on, contributing to the town's rapid growth and somewhat fluid social hierarchies during the fifteenth century. And the presence of over 120 friars certainly colored local devotional practices, like lay religious brotherhoods and processions, in ways unfamiliar to many Iberians of the period. Religiously, economically, socially, even politically, Guadalupe was a "company town" in the service and shadow of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Still, in many ways, Guadalupe was typical of late-medieval and early modern Iberian towns. As in so many late-medieval towns, residents

¹ This is a different advocacy of the Virgin from the better-known Virgin of Guadalupe of Mexico. The latter Guadalupe was named by conquistadors from Extremadura.

and local lords—in this case the friars—entered into sharp debate over local governance. Townspeople struggled for more independent governing authority, while the friars attempted to consolidate their power. Local uprisings were a fact of life in Guadalupe in the later Middle Ages, as they were in so many towns. Religiously, too, Guadalupe shared characteristics with other Castilian towns of the period. As elsewhere in the peninsula, religious rites, processions, and other rituals marked out the year. Lay brotherhoods or confraternities tended to the poor and to the spiritual needs of their own members, encouraging lay devotional practices similar to those practiced across Spain. The devout rubbed shoulders with the profane, the curious with the uninterested. Discussions and debates about what practices and attitudes signified a devout Christian identity were common among the heterogeneous community of merchants, pilgrims, travelers, and locals. Furthermore, Guadalupe had a significant minority population of conversos—about 5 percent. This was not unlike other towns in Spain, whose Jewish populations had declined, but whose descendants remained behind.

It is these conversos who highlight the negotiated quality of religious identity in fifteenth-century Spain. Following a series of riots and anti-Jewish preaching in the peninsula in 1391, vast numbers of Jews converted to Christianity. Many of these conversions were forced, though as time went on others converted somewhat more freely. The social status and economic privileges of Christians appealed to some Jews, while anxiety about the future of Jews in Iberia influenced others. Whatever the reason, Iberian kingdoms were increasingly faced with a large and growing number of converted Jews with questionable loyalty to their new faith. The social, cultural, and political problems generated by friction between some so-called Old Christians and this new, partially assimilated but distinct population would plague Iberians for generations.

Not surprisingly, the religiosity of Jewish converts to Christianity and their descendants has attracted the sustained attention of scholars for many years. In part, this is because of inherent human interest in “secret lives” or double identity. But this research also has origins in a more specifically Jewish interest in conversos as an example of Jewish oppression, assimilation, and maintenance of cultural distinctiveness—all issues of great concern in the modern world. Many scholars, most notably Yitzhak Baer and his student Haim Beinart, have argued that New Christians were Christian in name only—that profound links to Jews and Judaism persisted for generations, and that those executed on orders of the Inquisition “went as martyrs to the stake.”² More recently,

² Haim Beinart, *Conversos on Trial: The Inquisition in Ciudad Real* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1981), 285; see also Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, vol. 2

David Gitlitz and Renée Levine Melammed have developed more complex depictions of conversos in their work, though they, too, seem at times to envision a coherent ideology and community, and heroic crypto-Jews.³

Other scholars, particularly Benzion Netanyahu, Norman Roth, and more recently Henry Kamen, have argued that New Christians were entirely assimilated until Christians hostile to Jews used the Inquisition to fabricate converso devotion to Judaism. Netanyahu has argued that the Inquisition was the product of a fundamentally racist society, and that Jews were innocent of the spurious charges brought against them.⁴ Kamen, in a similar but slightly different vein, argues that descendants from the first generation of conversos—those converted after 1391—became, by the end of the fifteenth century, genuine if not devout Christians. Only after 1492 and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain (and the conversion of many) did real Judaizing emerge.⁵ Norman Roth, though he disagrees with Netanyahu in many respects, echoes the argument that conversos “were no longer to be considered part of the Jewish people in any way.”⁶

Between these extremes of genuine and feigned assimilation, other scholars, including I. S. Révah and, more recently, Mark Meyerson, Pilar Huerga Criado, and Yirmiyahu Yovel, have begun to consider alternatives to these stark models. As early as the 1950s, Révah was exploring the range of practices among New Christians, while Meyerson and Huerga Criado have both contributed to a new historiography that neither glorifies conversos nor demonizes Old Christians.⁷ David Niren-

(Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1966, repr. 1992), 424–425. The passage begins, “*Conversos and Jews were one people. . .*”

³ See David Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), and Renée Levine Melammed, *Heretics or Daughters of Israel? The Crypto-Jewish Women of Castile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). The term “crypto-Jew” seems problematic to me, since it implies a coherent religious ideology and clear-cut distinction between those observing Jewish law and assimilated New Christians.

⁴ These arguments are presented in *The Marranos of Spain: From the Late Fourteenth to the Early Sixteenth Century According to Contemporary Hebrew Sources*, 3d ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); and *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain* (New York: Random House, 1995).

⁵ Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), especially chap. 3.

⁶ Norman Roth, *Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), xii.

⁷ See I. S. Révah, *Spinoza et le Dr. Juan de Prado* (Paris: Mouton, 1959); Mark Meyerson, “Aragonese and Catalan Jewish Converts at the Time of the Expulsion,” *Jewish History* 1–2 (1992), 131–149; and Pilar Huerga Criado, *En la raya de Portugal. Solidaridad y tensiones en la comunidad judeoconversa* (Salamanca: University of Salamanca Press,

berg, in parallel work on relations among Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the medieval world, has made a similar point about interreligious contact: namely, that claims about religious difference were subject to a constant process of barter and negotiation, rather than being part of an unself-conscious persecuting discourse.⁸ Most recently, Yovel has fundamentally reoriented the debate through his important work on the duality of converso identity.⁹ This book builds on the work of these scholars by arguing that conversos—both individually and collectively—engaged in a range of Christian and Jewish practices. Those devotional practices might vary over time within the broader community, within a single family, or even within one individual's lifespan. By juxtaposing inquisitorial records with secular records from Guadalupe, I demonstrate that what it meant to convert, or to be the descendant of a convert, was not nearly as transparent as many contemporaries desired.

The lives of Old Christians in Guadalupe were apparently more straightforward than those of their new coreligionists, but they, too, exhibited a spectrum of religious practices and attitudes toward the church. Of course, the range of that spectrum was somewhat narrower than that of so-called New Christians. In the ritual activities of the Christian calendar one could witness a breadth of commitment, from the faithful confraternity member, to the man who frequented the tavern instead of attending mass on Sunday. The fact that both Old and New Christians engaged in Christianity in a variety of ways meant that the distinction between them was to an extent artificial. Both, for example, might complain about the attitudes of friars in the confessional, or disparage the Virgin Birth. Both might question the intent and purpose of the inquisitors. Yet the inquisitors (as well as later historians of New Christians) struggled to discern, from such noncanonical or heretical practices, distinct beliefs. This study of religious life in Guadalupe shows how counterproductive such a search must inevitably be; while I do not deny that distinct beliefs may have motivated similar actions, the effective boundaries between theoretically distinct groups of people were quite permeable.

The religious identities of the friars were equally complex. A significant minority of the friars—as many as 15 percent—were conversos.

1993). Angus MacKay, in his article "The Hispano-*Converso* Predicament," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, London, 35 (1985), 159–179, makes a similar argument, as does, to an extent, José Faur, "Four Classes of *Conversos*: A Typological Study," *Revue des Etudes Juives* 149 (1990), 113–124.

⁸ David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 6.

⁹ Yirmiyahu Yovel, "The New Otherness: Marrano Dualities in the First Generation," Swig Lecture, Swig Judaic Studies Program, (University of San Francisco, 1999).

Several of these friars were suspected of observing Judaism in secret, while other friars, both Old and New Christian, overtly or covertly supported converso factions in town. Still others expressed great devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe, and the miracles they witnessed and repeated to one another sustained their Christian faith. Once again, simple binary oppositions, such as New Christian/Old Christian, replicate historical, quasi-racialist categories, while obscuring mutable distinctions of religious practices, political sympathies, and personal beliefs.

It is out of the contested religious identities of friars and residents in Guadalupe, as well as the friars' blending of political and religious concerns, that we move to the second part of my argument, namely, that the power of the Inquisition came from its ability to construct difference out of ambiguity. In their pursuit of intention, as well as act, the inquisitors in Guadalupe and elsewhere created clearly defined categories of innocence and guilt, Old and New Christian. Yet this power of definition was not limited to the inquisitors themselves. All residents of Guadalupe were expected to come before the inquisitors to accuse, and thus define, their neighbors, rivals, and family. Of course, some voices carried more weight before the inquisitors: the friars, for example, held more influence than lay residents of Guadalupe, and some witnesses—adults, men, those with property, those who appeared more religious—were considered more reliable than others—children, women, those without property, those who appeared only casually religious. Yet the potential power given to anyone willing to speak before the inquisitors was not lost on Guadalupenses themselves. This is what I mean by “demystifying” the sources of power of the Holy Office of the Inquisition. As is becoming increasingly clear to scholars of the Inquisition, the Holy Office was not an oppressive state court, imposed upon a helpless populace from without. Indeed, it could not have succeeded without the opportunistic support of locals, who often willingly participated with the inquisitors in order to gain their own ends, be they casting suspicion on a neighbor, exacting vengeance on a former employer, or undermining a business rival. Others went so far as to criticize particular friars, with devastating effects within the friary. In Guadalupe, a close examination of civil and inquisitorial records and the citizens involved in them makes clear the political and social context of this widespread popular participation in the activity of the Inquisition.

The political implications of the power of definition bring us to the third and final element of my thesis. From the very beginning of the Inquisition's status as an arm of the Spanish state, local residents and local officials, as well as royal officials, made use of the Holy Office to further their own political ends. In Guadalupe, this is evident even in how the Inquisition arrived at the shrine site in the first place. In 1483 a small group of friars and lay conversos (possibly including Alonso de

Paredes) attempted to influence through bribery the outcome of the prior's election. The election of a new prior was of political importance to all Guadalupe's residents, since the friars governed the town, but the bribe was a failure. The candidate of this small group lost, and the newly elected prior, apparently aware of the political maneuvering that preceded his election, requested that the Inquisition come to Guadalupe soon after. In return, the Crown named him chief inquisitor.

As an arm of the state, the Inquisition represented a new, usually unwelcome intrusion of royal political authority into municipal government. In Guadalupe, though, the inquisitors, working in conjunction with the friars, actually bolstered the influence of the local friary through a wholesale redefinition of Guadalupe's residents as primarily New or Old Christian, devout or heretic. While pursuing the stated purpose of the Inquisition by trying those conversos suspected of practicing Judaism, the chief inquisitor also targeted converso opponents of his election as prior. This silenced opposition to the friars' authority, permitting the friars to gain the kind of control over the town that they had always desired. At the same time, the Crown used the popularity of the shrine to spread knowledge of the new institution of the Inquisition, which moved from its successful prosecution of conversos in Guadalupe to more permanent bases in other cities in Spain. In those cities, too, the inquisitorial courts became quickly embroiled in local and royal political concerns. The presence of the Inquisition in Guadalupe had profound political repercussions that all residents were aware of, and that many residents, more or less successfully, attempted to turn toward their own ends. Ultimately, though, those most successful at utilizing the power inherent in the Inquisition were the friars who had brought it to Guadalupe.¹⁰

Despite fears of local officials elsewhere when first confronted by the Inquisition, Guadalupe proved that the Holy Office provided another field for fighting local battles, rather than merely subjugating local officials to a new royal bureaucracy. Local and royal attempts to garner power were not necessarily operating at counterpurposes, particularly

¹⁰ This argument both engages and enriches the recent historiography of the Inquisition. Scholars including Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), and Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie, *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error*, tr. Barbara Bray (New York: Vintage, 1978), have used inquisitorial records to build an impressive understanding of medieval and early modern culture, while Spanish historians such as Jaime Contreras, *Sotos contra Riquelmes: Regidores, inquisidores y criptojudíos* (Madrid: Anaya and Mario Muchnik, 1992), have begun to address the role of the Inquisition in local and national political conflicts in the sixteenth century and beyond. My analysis complements the work of these scholars by focusing on how opportunities for local authorities and townspeople to employ the Inquisition for their own specific political and social ends were present from the first establishment of the Holy Office.

when religion created a common bond among allies and a common enemy against which to rally. Helen Nader has argued cogently for the interdependence of local municipalities and the absolutist Hapsburg state, but I wish to return attention to the local conflicts that could help cement that alliance. In Guadalupe, the friars welcomed the introduction of Fernando and Isabel's Inquisition. Guadalupense friars early learned what later became apparent elsewhere as well: that local as well as royal officials could employ the Holy Office to bolster their authority in their respective domains.

The political repercussions of the presence of the Holy Office extended long past the departure of the inquisitors. Here again, a close study of Guadalupe reveals the intersecting interests of local and royal authorities. For the friars who governed the town of Guadalupe, the Inquisition became only the first element of their attempt to exert more thorough control over the community. The inquisitorial trials enabled them to eliminate many of their wealthiest and most powerful rivals in town, and the authority this demonstrated, backed by the implicit support of the Crown, allowed them to cow other residents as well. Perhaps even more importantly, the friars were more united among themselves than they had been previously. New Christian friars, and those sympathetic to New Christians, had been reprimanded, imprisoned, or in one case executed; as a result, discord within the ecclesiastical community diminished.¹¹ With their newfound unity of purpose and evident support from the Crown, the friars finally defeated residents' attempts to gain an independent town council. The failure of Guadalupe's Old Christians to gain more independent authority for themselves, despite repeated attempts during the sixteenth century, reveals that the interests of church and Crown, when working in parallel for common ends, could derail the general tendency for decentralization in Hapsburg Spain. But the long-term importance of the Inquisition was not limited to local sites like Guadalupe. Just as the friars strengthened their secular authority through association with the Crown, so too did the Crown strengthen and sacralize its authority through association with the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the Holy Office of the Inquisition. The aura of the sacred continued to surround royal activity for decades to come.

The first chapter of this book introduces the Virgin of Guadalupe, her friars, and the town that grew up around her shrine as her cult grew in

¹¹ A copy of the witnesses' statements from the first set of inquisitorial trials against the friars in 1485 is housed at the Archivo del Monasterio de Guadalupe (AMG), unnumbered, internal Inquisition.

popularity in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Early histories of the shrine and the friars, as well as evidence about the construction of the town, provide a means of surveying the physical, social, and spiritual landscape of the community. This descriptive, narrative chapter reveals the tensions present from the establishment of the town. From the first arrival of the friars, citizens of Guadalupe resented the authority granted to the clerics by the Crown and the archbishop of Toledo, and civic unrest was common. Furthermore, the prominence of New Christians as lay officials for the friars engendered political and religious suspicions among Old Christians in town. The religious significance of Guadalupe was undeniably unique, but the religious, social, and political tensions that plagued the town were common throughout Castile at the end of the Middle Ages.

Chapter 2 demonstrates how religious identities were constructed by examining how Christians, both Old and New, defined their religiosity in a town that was explicitly Christian but not uniformly devout. Remaining civic records, confraternity documents, local ordinances, and inquisitorial records reveal much about religious practices in Guadalupe from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries and clarify the range of acceptable Christian practices for those living in the shadow of the Virgin of Guadalupe. A “thick description” or interpretive description of life rituals, weekly worship, and religiously oriented communities demonstrates the broad range of acceptable practices, the interactions of so-called Old and New Christians, and the limits of what was tolerated at the shrine site.¹²

Chapter 3 moves from the thick description of practices to a closer analysis of those forced most explicitly to negotiate an ambiguous religious identity, namely, conversos. New Christians were not a community apart from other Guadalupenses, nor were they uncomplicated devout Christians or unreconstructed Judaizers. Rather, they were fully integrated into Guadalupe’s social, political, and religious life. The sometimes plaintive record of inquisitorial documents and civil papers reveals that individual conversos can be placed across a continuum of Jewish and Christian practices, their own activities changing over time and in response to the demands of family, friends, and the community as a whole. It is this contingent, mutable self-understanding of religious identity that has so challenged historians of New Christians in the past.

Given this analysis of social and religious identity in Guadalupe, we can then re-examine the purpose and impact of the Holy Office of the Inquisition. This begins in chapter 4 with a close study of the events

¹² On the concept “thick description,” see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Harper, 1973), chap. 1.

leading up to the introduction of the Inquisition in Guadalupe. Social conflict in Guadalupe was on the rise in the second half of the fifteenth century. Arbitrary lordship, in the person of the prior, Diego de París, exacerbated tensions both within the community of friars and in the town of Guadalupe as well. Suspicion of the conversos who helped govern the town as lay functionaries grew, though Old and New Christians united in their hostility toward the friars who permitted little of the self-governance typical of Castilian communities. Even the friars were at odds with one another and the town. What Guadalupe's residents found to be heavy-handed government seemed in the eyes of the friars barely controlled anarchy, and the friars were divided among themselves about what, if anything, needed to be done. All that changed with the prior's election of 1483. When that small group of friars and conversos attempted—without success—to bribe the friars to elect "their" candidate to the priorate, the new prior wasted little time in requesting that the Inquisition be brought to Guadalupe.

In chapter 5 we can begin to see how the inquisitors' vision of those they tried changed the status and even the identity of New Christians in Guadalupe. The chapter traces the actions of the Holy Office over the course of the year 1485, from their first arrival in town to the final sentencing at the last *auto de fe*. The structure of the trials, and the haunting experiences of those who lived through them, paint a stark picture of the effects of the Inquisition on those pursued by it. At the same time, careful, comparative examination of inquisitorial records and contemporary civil records reveals how many residents of Guadalupe made use of the Holy Office to pursue their own ends.

However, New Christians on trial before the Inquisition were not without options, as chapter 6 makes clear. Many of Guadalupe's residents made use of the legal structures of the Holy Office for their own ends, and New Christians, while less successful, were no different. Even within the walls of the inquisitorial prison, the accused were able to manipulate, to some extent, their collective fate at the hands of the inquisitors. The inquisitors were largely unchallenged in their activities in Guadalupe, but this chapter shows that there were limits to their ability to remold religious and political realities in town.

Chapter 7 turns attention to yet another aspect of the politically transformative power of the Inquisition—namely, the importance of the Holy Office in ending the internal struggles among Guadalupe's friars. Out of extant documents from the friary, as well as the voluminous inquisitorial testimony of the friars against one another, we can see the deep fissures that separated the friars on political and religious questions. Indeed, the friary serves as a microcosm of divisions within Guadalupe itself. The friars, like Guadalupe's residents, exhibited a range of

Christian and Jewish practices—a fact even more astounding for occurring within the walls of the friary. As on the outside of the friars' community, inquisitorial trials revealed these divisions, delineated them in clear categories, and allowed "devout" friars to exert control over their "heretical" brethren, whether that heresy entailed primarily religious acts or political maneuvering. This internal reorganization of the friars' community in Guadalupe marked a turning point in their relations with the town as a whole.

Finally, the continuing repercussions of the Inquisition after its departure are made clear in chapter 8. Here the arguments about the intersections of local and royal authority are brought to a close. Once again, the comparison of civil documents from the town of Guadalupe with inquisitorial records reveals that, in unexpected ways, the Inquisition continued to affect life in Guadalupe long after it had left. Despite the Inquisition's apparent focus on heretical acts, for example, Judaizing New Christians quickly returned to Guadalupe from their sentences of "perpetual" exile. In addition, those conversos who had supported the friars' governing received solicitous attention from the friars for years to come. But in other ways the Inquisition's presence radically transformed life in Guadalupe. New Christians may not have disappeared, but resistance to the friars' overlordship was severely undercut. Using their increased authority, based in part on a new internal solidarity and on the secular support of the Crown, the friars handily defeated Old Christian protests against ecclesiastical government in Guadalupe. At the same time, the Crown took advantage of the sacred approval of the friars and, by extension, the Virgin of Guadalupe, to emphasize a spiritual underpinning for their regime. The sacrality of the early modern Spanish state, which appears in its first outlines here, would come to have increasing importance in the reign of Philip II and beyond.