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Preserving Jewish Heritage: Conversas after the Establishment of the Barcelona Tribunal (1487-1505)

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Abstract

The study explores the world of Jewish women conversas and their devotion in the perpetuation of Jewish legacy after the reestablishment of the Barcelona Tribunal in 1487 until 1505. This investigation, based on the manuscript *Liber descriptionis reconciliationisque, purgationis et condemnationis hereticorum ALIAS de Gestis Hereticorum* written by the inquisitorial notary of the Barcelona Tribunal, Pere Miquel Carbonell, will furnish new insights into the lives and spiritual endeavour of these heroic women who faced the wrath of the Inquisition. Through a close and fine-grained analysis of the trial records and legal proceedings of the Barcelona Tribunal, this study will provide a better comprehension of a complex period and a fuller reconstruction of the conversas' religious practices as a system with its own structure.

The present research concerns the world of Jewish women conversas and their devotion in perpetuating Jewish religious heritage in the late medieval period, after the Barcelona Tribunal was established in 1487, until 1505, based on inquisitorial trial records. The study will contribute to a better understanding of the spiritual lives of the last generation of Judeo-Conversas with personal knowledge of Jewish religion, whose dualistic lifestyle made them far from passive victims of the inquisition.

In the past decades, there has been a remarkable interest in the study of Sephardi female religiosity from the late medieval and early modern period. Conversas' devotion to perpetuating the spiritual practice of their ancestors and their attempts to resist inquisitorial authorities based on trial records have been examined in depth by Renée Levine Melammed. First, her meticulous historical work, *Heretics or Daughters of Israel: The Crypto-Jewish Women of Castile*,² published in 1999, and based on archival dossiers has advanced the world of Castilian Judeo-Conversas in an impressive manner. In this study, Levine reconstructed the religious practice of conversas in an environment in which Jewish public oriented rituals and institutions had been prohibited while crypto-Judaism survived as a system on its own inside of homes, where these women took the role of female leaders. In addition, Levine's sub-

1. This study was undertaken as part of FFI2015-63659-C2-1-P, MINECO-FEDER, EU, and 2017 SGR 1787 at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, whose principal investigator is Cándida Ferrero Hernández.
2. Levine Melammed, Renée (1999), *Heretics or Daughters of Israel: The Crypto-Jewish Women of Castile*, New York-Oxford, Oxford University Press.

sequent rich opus continued to focus on this theme; for instance, in the article, “Crypto-Jewish women facing the Spanish Inquisition: Transmitting Religious Practices, Beliefs, and Attitudes,”³ she investigated in which circumstances under the haunting presence of the inquisition these women maintained clandestine Judaic observances, and thus preserved their religion. In the following essay, “The Ultimate Challenge: Safeguarding Crypto-Jewish Heritage,”⁴ using inquisitorial trials records from the court in Toledo in the period between 1492 and 1520, Levine provided an analysis of 111 proceedings of women who were sentenced for Judaizing. She revealed that the home became a central and the only safe place for learning, where conversas could safeguard their religious legacy clandestinely. In the last few years, a growing interest in Judeo-Convertas’ religious and intellectual identity from other Iberian regions and diasporas has emerged. For instance, in a 2016 publication, “Literacy and Education among Judeo-Converta Women in Castile, Portugal, and Amsterdam, 1560–1700,”⁵ Sara T. Nalle shed light on the literacy and literary production of early modern conversas by revealing that these Castilian women had an unusually high level of education, significantly higher than most of their Old Christian female contemporaries. Additionally, Gretchen D. Starr-LeBeau analyzed the proceedings of conversas based on their depositions and the strategies by which they protected themselves and their family members to affirm their identity at the end of the sixteenth century in Guadalupe. At the time, the Extremaduran city was a popular pilgrimage site inhabited by a remarkable number of New Christians, even prior to the issuing of the Edict of Expulsion in 1492. LeBeau published her findings in the paper, “Writing (for) Her Life: Judeo-Convertas in Early Modern Spain.”⁶ However, none of these works has addressed the central question of the first generations of Judeo-Convertas, who continued practicing *mitzvot* in secret after the renewal of the Aragonese inquisition in Barcelona. Hence, this study will remedy this gap, examining these women’s commitment to Judaism and ritual practices, especially reflected in inquisitorial archival documents. This study will focus particularly on a primary source of heresy inquisition, *Liber descriptionis reconsiliationisque, purgationis et condemnationis hereticorum ALIAS de Gestis Hereticorum*, written by the notary of the Barcelona Tribunal, Pere Miquel Carbonell. A close analysis of this manuscript will reveal the lives and spiritual endeavour of the conversas who faced the wrath of the inquisition during first seventeen years after its establishment in 1487 Barcelona.

3. Levine Melammed, Renée (2000), «Crypto-Jewish women facing the Spanish Inquisition: Transmitting Religious Practices, Beliefs, and Attitudes», in Meyerson, Mark D.; English, Edward D. (Eds.), *Christians, Muslims and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain: Interaction and Cultural Heritage*, Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, pp. 197-219.
4. Levine Melammed, Renée (1986), «The Ultimate Challenge: Safeguarding Crypto-Jewish Heritage», in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 53, pp. 91-109.
5. Nalle, Sara T. (2016), «Literacy and Education among Judeo-conversa Women in Castile, Portugal, and Amsterdam, 1560–1700», in *Early Modern Women* 11/1, pp. 69-89.
6. Starr-LeBeau, Gretchen D. (2017), «Writing (for) Her Life: Judeo-Convertas in Early Modern Spain», in Vicente, Marta V.; Corteguera, Luis R. (Eds.), *Women, Texts and Authority in the Early Modern Spanish World*, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, London – New York, pp. 57-72.

Permanent tribunals under the Aragonese inquisition's jurisdiction were renewed and established in Zaragoza (1482), Valencia (1482), Barcelona (1487), and Mallorca (1492).⁷ On July 29, 1487 the tribunal of Barcelona in the Palau Reial Major was established, having a prison for heretical convicts and chambers for the inquisitor and members of their personnel.⁸ With the advent of the inquisition, the Edict of Grace was pronounced, and a grace period was declared during which significant information about Judaizing activities was collected, which served as a basis for future trials. Uncommonly prolonged, a grace period lasted for approximately five months; hence, on Friday, December 14, 1487 thirty conversas conscious of their and their co-conspirators' heretical practices voluntarily repented. The inquisition began operations in Barcelona in the next year on January 25, on the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul the Apostle.⁹ The first *auto de fe* was presided by Dominicans, inquisitors Alfonso de Spina and a second inquisitor, Sanxo Marín, both experts in theology, who both remained in these function until 1493. From 1493 until 1501, in charge of the Tribunal were the autochthonous inquisitors Antonio de Contreras and Pere Pariente, experts in canon laws; and finally, from 1501, Francesco Pays de Sotomayor, an expert in canon and civil laws, and the Dominican Joan Enguera, future Grand Inquisitor of the Crown of Aragon, took charge over Barcelona's tribunal.¹⁰

The records of 198 women prosecuted for Judaizing during this period provide the basis for the present study. These processes resulted in twenty-six capital punishments (eight during the reign of Alfonso de Spina; two during Antonio de Contreras, and Pere Pariente, and sixteen during the mandates of Francesco Pays de Sotomayor and Joan Enguera); eighty life sentences (thirty-nine during the Spina and Marín; twenty-three during the Contreras and Pariente mandate; and eighteen during the Pays de Sotomayor and Enguera mandate), eighty-two sanbenito sentences (during the mandate of Alfonso de Spina and Sanxo Marín), and ten acquittals (during the period of Antonio de Contreras and Pere Pariente). Additionally, 348 women were prosecuted and sentenced in absentia and their property was confiscated.¹¹

Transcripts of legal proceedings reveal the data about the conversos' knowledge and activities. A plethora of these transcripts provide only basic information about the proceedings, such as the list of culprits, the date and place of trials, the names of the Tribunal members, and the imposed sentences. Yet a certain number are preserved in a more extensive form and also include documents of the proceedings (the prosecution and examination of the defendant, stages of the defence, arguments

7. Contreras, Jaime; Dedieu, Jean Pierre (1980), «Geografía de la inquisición española: La formación de los distritos 1470-1820», in *Hispania* vol. 40, Nº 144, p. 41.

8. Barcelona, Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, Registro sobre negocios de la Inquisición de Fernando II, Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684, CXXIV.

9. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684, CXI-CXI'.

10. Fort i Cogul, Eufemià (1973), *Catalunya i la inquisició*, Barcelona, Editorial Aedos, pp. 157-221.

11. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684.

arguments of confronted sides, confessions and depositions of the accused), consultation of the sentence, the final verdict, and the subsequent public execution.¹²

Each of inquisitorial trials were based on fixed elements: a preliminary investigation about the defendant had to be done, which summarized the gathering of evidence based mainly on eyewitness testimonies. For instance, as was discovered in this manuscript – the servants were potential informants. The majority of conversos were from the middle or the upper middle class; hence, they had servants who worked as as teachers for their children or in the kitchen where they were obligated to follow Jewish dietary laws and restrictions. Since the inquisition was well-informed about Judaic dietary customs, it created a network of spies who paid special attention to the culinary habits of the converso community and infrequently cooperated inside of the converso homes. For instance, a conversa, Marquesa Badia, tried by the inquisition in 1496 in Barcelona, specifically stated in her confession that during the Passover she and her sisters, contrary to the tradition, ate unleavened bread only on a first day of holiday, so they do not provoke a suspicion of Christian servants:

[...] ella e dites ses germanes lo primer dia de dita Pascha manjaven pa alis e guardavan aquell empero los altres dies no manjaven del dit pa alis per que tenian en casa moços e mestre que eran christians de natura perque no fossen descubertes empero be tenian devotio de fer e servir dita Pascha si poguessen.¹³

The information collected by witnesses varied from one accused to another; however, certain socio-religious practices of conversas quickly become apparent. During the period in question, converso education of the generation that personally experienced the establishment of the Barcelona tribunal and the Expulsion was based on a profound knowledge of religious laws and tradition. Judaizing parents and especially mothers took the role of transmitting their religious knowledge to the future generation seriously. Therefore, the following examples will demonstrate that religious instructors were women, usually family members, and mostly mothers who encouraged children to follow the laws of the *mitzvot* by creating an unbreakable link among generations of Judaizers. For instance, three sisters, the eldest Marquesa, wife of merchant Pau Badia, the middle Catherina, wife of the royal scribe, Galceran Bertran, and the youngest, a widow Joana Libiana, who were tried by the inquisition in 1496 in Barcelona, confessed that they were influenced and instructed in Judaism by their mother Na Marquesa. Joana confessed in her testimony that she was under her mother's influence, who encouraged her to observe the *mitzvot* while she was still single, prior to her marriage to Francesc Libia at the age of 16 or 17: “en diverses vegades e confessions ha dit e confessant com ella dita Joana stigue en poder

12. For detailed inner workings of the Inquisitorial court, trial preparation and execution, see: Beinart, Haim (1981), «The Court of Ciudad Real at Work», in *Conversos on Trial: The Inquisition in Ciudad Real*, Jerusalem, Magnes Press, Hebrew University, pp.105-195.

13. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684, CXLV.

dena Marquesa quondam mare sua fins ques casa ab En Franci Libia quondam que era de edat ella dita Joana de setze fins desset anys.”¹⁴ Catherina, the middle sister, stated that her indoctrination under her mother’s guidance begun in her parents’ house even before she was 13 years old, when she got married:

[...] ella confessant era de edat de tretze anys poch mes o menys fins que ella se casa ab son marit En Galceran Bertran que era de edat de desset anys poch menys ella confessant sempre stigue fora de la creença de la Sancta fe catholica creent la ley de Moyses esser bona axi com la dita sa mare ley havia induida [...].¹⁵

The oldest sister, Marquesa Badia confessed that she intended to persuade her sisters to repent for their sins during the time of grace and confessed the heretical life they had led while living under their mother’s roof: “ella confesant dix a dites ses germanes que en temps de la gratia fora bo ques confessassen de la mala vida habían tenguda ab sa mare.”¹⁶ At the time, Marquesa was 38 years old and had been married for 22 years. Before she got married around the age of 16, she confessed that her mother had educated her in the *mitzvot* since she was an 11- or 12-year old girl:

E mes ha confessat la dita Marquesa com en lo mes de janer prop passat ella hague XXXVIII anys e que ha ques casa ab En Pau Badia marit seu vint e dos anys. E que es veritat que despuys que ella comença haver discretio ço es de onze en dotze anys poch mes o menys ella confessant sempre cregue en la ley de Moyses creent aquella ley esser millor que la ley dels christians.¹⁷

Mothers were aware of the dangers they exposed their family to by instructing their children to observe; if they waited for maturity, the Catholic beliefs could become too deeply instilled to be rooted out. However, if they started child initiation from early youth, their immature babble could jeopardize the whole family. Children were exposed to Judaism from early adolescence, because, according to Jewish law, Jewish boys and girls at ages 12 or 13 years old become accountable for their actions and undergo the ritual Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah; therefore, this age, by the converso community, was considered ideal for beginning the initiation into the rituals of Judaism.¹⁸

Some conversas were influenced by more than one individual. For instance, in the case against Isabel Pallares, who was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment in 1496 in Barcelona, it was discovered that her stepmother Na Clara had taught her to observe before she got married and was still living in her father’s house: “... ha

14. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684, CXXI’.

15. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684, CXXV’.

16. Ibid.

17. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684, CXXIV’.

18. Roth, Cecile (1959), «The Religion of the Marranos», in Id., *A History of the Marranos*, New York, Meridian Books, p. 70.

confessat com ella per inductio de na Clara madastre sua muller den Berthomeu Limona quondam pare della confesant ella en lo temps de les figues e dels raimen en lo mes de setembre ha fet un dejuni abans de sopar.”¹⁹ Additionally, after she got married, she continued to practice the religion of her ancestors, instructed also by her aunt Elionor Colella: “Lo qual dejuni faea per inductio de una tia sua nomenada Elionor Colella muller den Colell... La qual tia sua deya a la dita Isabel semblants paraules – Isabel, dema o tal dia sera lo dejuni feslo.”²⁰

Each of these conversas was treated differently during the trials in which they were accused of heresy. However, certain patterns became obvious; for instance, in their confessions they not only provided a description of indoctrination, they also chose to reveal their sources, but only if they were deceased at the time of the trial, or previously sentenced in absentia for Judaizing. The offenders collapsed under inquisitorial pressure and revealed *dogmatizadora*'s (woman teacher of religion) identity and accused them in turn for their heretical activities, and consequently got away with minor penalties. For instance, in the case against sisters Marquesa Badia, Caterina Bertran, and Joana Libiana, we know that their mother Na Marquesa was dead at the time of their trial; hence, their depositions placing the guilt on her could be justified to a certain extent. The same pattern followed Isabel Pallares, whose stepmother Na Clara was sentenced in absentia on the 10th of April 1495, and whose father Berthomeus Limona and aunt Elionor Colella were deceased at the time of her trial.²¹

Celebrating Shabbat, the principal holidays, and observing the dietary laws or *kashrut*, which formed a set of dietary restrictions, played a central role in maintaining Jewish life. In comparison with the Old Christian's food, Jewish and crypto-Jewish cuisine differ in three ways: first, Judaic culinary tradition prescribes which foods can or cannot be eaten; second, it prescribes how food must be prepared and how meat must be made kosher; and finally, conversas created a certain number of traditional meals which future generations preserved and prepared for Shabbat and other festivals.²² On the one hand, these dietary laws were easier to remember because they were observed more frequently on a daily and weekly basis; however, as was mentioned previously, they were most easily noticed, especially by anyone working in the household or by neighbours. Therefore, having that in mind, the inquisition put pressure on potential witnesses to gain the information about which foods were consumed and the way they were prepared inside of conversos' home. The following examples will demonstrate how the inquisition used a cultural heritage of conversos as a heretical charge in creating a case against them. For instance,

19. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684, CXLVII'.

20. Ibid.

21. Carbonell, Pere Miquel (1865), *Colección de documentos inéditos del Archivo General de la Corona de Aragón*, tomo XXVIII, *Opúsculos inéditos del cronista catalán Pedro Miguel Carbonell*, vol. II, Publicada de real orden por su archivero, D. Manuel de Bofarull y de Sartorio: Barcelona, p. 78.

22. Gitlitz, David M.; Davidson, Linda Kay (1999), *A Drizzle of Honey: The Lives and Recipes of Spain's Secret Jews*, New York, St. Martin's Press, pp. 4-5

the confessions of defendant Joana Libiana revealed that they ate *afami*, a typical judaizer dish, and that she, as well as her sisters and mother, abstained from forbidden food, such as hares or jackrabbits and fish without fins or scales: "...que ella ni sa mare ni dita Marquesa sa germana no menjaven conills ni lebres... ni peix sens scata..."²³; additionally, they ate only mammals and birds slaughtered in accordance with the Jewish law, which had not died of natural causes or were killed by other animals: "...ni nenguna manera de ocells offegats"²⁴; and finally they did not eat meat with dairy, in this particular case, cheese: "...ni apres que havian manjat la carn no menjaven formatge per que deya sa mare que los juheus non menjaven."²⁵

Studying the depositions of conversas revealed that in maintaining dietary laws they obeyed the rule of removal of forbidden fat and the sciatic nerve and its adjoining blood vessels. For example, while preparing a Jewish meal, Aldonça Comte removed fat before she soaked and salted the meat: "ella dita Aldonça levava lo greix de la carn e la posava en sal e apres de una stona la posava a coure."²⁶ Additionally, Joana Libiana removed the nerve which was prohibited by biblical rule by following the procedure known as *nikkur*: "E mes dix e confessa que una vegada vea com la dita sa mare prengue una cuixa de carn e obri aquella e de aquella trague una ver-toleta."²⁷ In the absence of religious functionaries and ritual slaughterers to perform these tasks, many women carried them out; although Jewish law permitted them to do so, these tasks were usually reserved for the men. Preparing the unleavened flatbread (*matza*) for the Passover is frequently identified with conversas from the period in question. For instance, conversa Marquesa Badia prepared a *matza* to celebrate the Passover, which was eaten during the entire week of the holiday, as well as rice with fish, and peas: "Ella confessant e la dita sa mare e dites ses germanes dessus dites faen la Pascha dels juheus del pa alis la qual durava vuyt dies e la dita sa mare los dits vuyt dies sempre manjava pa alis e arros e peix e faves tenres."²⁸

Properly keeping Shabbat required advanced preparation; for instance, the house had to be cleaned, the family members had to be dressed up, and a festive meal was prepared a day before, everything had to be previously done for a day of rest. The positive precepts of Shabbat (lighting candles, wine blessing) as well as negative (abstaining from work) were seen by the inquisitors as clear proofs of guilt.²⁹ As a home-oriented holiday, Shabbat was marked as one of the most persistent crypto-Jewish observances. Marquesa Badia reported that she intended to keep Shabbat holy and refrained from undertaking any type of forbidden work, whenever possible, from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday: "E que es veritat que si ella pogues

23. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684, CXLII.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684, CXLVIII'.

27. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684, CXLII.

28. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684, CXLV.

29. Gitlitz, David M. (2002), *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of Crypto-Jews*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, p. 317.

colre e servir lo dia del dissapte complidament ella lo divendres lo sol post se lexara de fer faena e lo dia del dissapte se abillare e no faera alguna faena fins al vesper.³⁰

The ingredients of the Sabbath meal did not provoke the suspicion of the Inquisition; rather, it was how and when the food was prepared. It was prepared prior to sunset on Friday and it stayed untouched until Saturday lunch. For example, Joana Libiana confessed that on Shabbat she and her sister Marquesa ate cold meals prepared a day before, which their mother justified as being more delicious when it was eaten that way: “E mes confessa la dita Joana que ella e Marquesa germana sua deyan a la dita sa mare per que lo dissapte manjava la vianda apparellada lo divendres que era freda e aquella responia que millor li sabia la vianda freda que calda,”³¹ Aldonça Comte provided a similar example in her confession when she admitted that in her house the Shabbat stew, containing chickpeas, spinach, and eggs, was prepared one day in advance:

[...] e les dites Beatriu e Isabel apparellaven lo divendres la vianda que havian a manjar lo dissapte e una vegada o dues les dites Beatriu e Isabel apparellaven una certa vianda ço es spinachs com ciurons e ous e altres coses e la dita vianda apparellada lo divendres manjaven lo jorn del dissapte tots los de casa.³²

The lighting of candles at sunset on Friday marked the beginning of Shabbat; it was one of three commandments reserved especially for women, as one of the most constant traditions found in these records. The flame that converso families maintained on Shabbat was frequently seen by the inquisitors as an incriminating evidence of Judaism. The Shabbat light could not be extinguished by any means by observant Jewesses, and it was left to burn itself out. In her confession, Aldonça Comte admitted that for this ritual she elected new or cleaned wicks and pure olive oil: “E axi mateix ella confessant lo divenres a vespre per manament de dita Beatriu natejava los cresols e aquells encenia ab metxes noves e aquells no apagaven fins que ells mateys se apagaven.”³³

According to the inquisitorial documents, after Shabbat, Yom Kippur, with its central themes of atonement, repentance and fasting the day was the most frequently observed holiday among conversas, despite all the perils of discovery by the inquisition. The calculation of this holiday was far too difficult to be determined due to the existence of only an orally transmitted knowledge of Judaism. Hence, the depositions of conversas typically mentioned that the observance of the Day of Atonement was in September, during the time of the harvest of grapes and figs, when the conversas, such as Isabell Pallares fasted for the entire day until the stars became visible on the sky: “en lo temps de les figues e dels raims en lo mes de se-

30. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684, CXLIV.

31. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684, CXLIII.

32. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684., CXLVIII.

33. Ibid.

tembre ha fet un dejuni que no manja ni begue de tot lo dia fins a la nit les esteles vistes... Lo qual dejuni dix la dita Isabel ques nomenava de Equipur.³⁴ Therefore, it is open to discussion whether Yom Kippur was intentionally not observed on its proper date when the vigilance of the inquisition slackened, and conversas could tranquilly prepare the holiday, or due to its complexity in determining of the exact date. Additionally, it seems that this observance acquired one more misconception among the converso families in Barcelona. One of the characteristics of the holiday came to be the formal acts of forgiveness between family members for received offences, especially by younger members. Thus, for three years in a row, Isabell Pallares asked her father and step-mother for forgiveness: “Lo qual dejuni ella apres feu per tres vegades ço es per tres anys següents en lo dit mes de setembre ensemps ab los dits son pare e madestre e sempre los demanava perdo lo vespre del dejuni els besava les mans abans de sopar.”³⁵

The most important Jewish fasting day after the Yom Kippur was Purim, renamed the Fast of Queen Esther. It commemorates the salvation of the Jewish people of Persia from Haman, the minister of King Ahasueros, who had conspired against them, as is written in the Book of Esther. Both Marquesa Badia and Catharina Bertran reported to the inquisition that their mother instructed them to abstain from eating and drinking in honor of the Fast of Queen Esther: “E mes confessa que en lo dit temps ella feu lo dejuni de la Regina Aster.”³⁶

As a rule, at the end of defendant’s list of charges, final accusations of being bad Christians were brought forth; they appeared at this spot because they were insufficient to sentence the offender. Therefore, with these statements they expressed the refusal to accept the imposed Christianity. Conversas led a dual lifestyle, in which the clandestine denial of Christianity played an important role, while publicly they were forced to appear as true believers. With the designing of this defense mechanism, their former religion was affirmed by maintaining certain unchristian acts. For instance, Marquesa Badia confessed that she and her mother intentionally displayed disrespect for the Church and disbelief in the Sacrament and confession:

E mes ha confessat la dita Marquesa que es veritat que en lo dit temps ella confesant ab la dita sa mare anaven a la ecclesia no per devotio que hi ha haguesen sino per demostrar que eran bones christianes. E mes dix e confessa que en lo dit temps ella confesant no crea en los Sacramentos de Sancta mare Ecclesia ni crea que per la confessio li fossen perdonats los peccats ni en aquell temps encara que ella se acostumava de confessar no confessa james que fes ni servas las ceremonies damunt per ella confessades.³⁷

34. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684., CXLVII’.

35. Ibid.

36. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684., CXLIV’.

37. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684, CXLV.

Marquesa also admitted that, under the influence of her mother, she questioned Mary's virginity, comparing its image to a worthless piece of stone: "E mes que ha confessat que en lo dit temps ella confessant no crea que la Verge Maria fos verge axi com la dita sa mare ley havia induida abans crea de la imatge de la Verge Maria que los christians crean es un tros de pedra."³⁸ A similar motif is found in the Joana Libina's testimony where she admitted that her mother owned an image of the Virgin Mary holding baby Jesus in her arms, not out of respect, but rather out of fear of that they could be denounced to inquisitorial authorities:

E mes confessa que en la casa de dita sa mare havia una imatge de la Verge Maria la qual tenia lo Jesus en lo braç de la qual una persona se burlava e ella confessant e dita sa mare li deyan que callas que avegades les parets tenian orelles e aço ella confessant e dita sa mare deyan no perque creguessen en la dita Verge Maria sino perque no fossen descubertes.³⁹

Joana Libiana confessed that from the entire Christian religious panoply she only knew a small part of the *Pater noster* and the *Ave Maria*, which, in the accepted formula frequently used by the conversos, neglected to mention the name of Jesus Christ or the Virgin Mary. Moreover, she was unfamiliar with other Christian hymns or prayers, such as *Credo in Deum* or the *Salve Regina*:

E mes ha confessat com no sabia lo credo in Deum ni la Salve Regina sino un tros e que lo Pater nostre e Ave Maria sabia be empero que no les deya e que sabia dues altres orations empero que no led deya per quant si nomenavan Jesu Christ e la Verge Maria.⁴⁰

The first period from the renewal of the inquisition in Barcelona until 1505 was characterized by a policy of hatred and persecution of conversos whose life was dominated by fear. A significant majority of the converso population were women who had experienced personally the arrival of the inquisition and the circumstances leading to the Expulsion. Some of them were third- or fourth-generation conversas, baptized during the previous centuries' mass conversions, while others belonged to the first converso generation, who presented with the choice between leaving their native soil and forced conversion choose the latter. However, in maintaining the religious and cultural legacy of their ancestors they acted the same. At the time, the influence of Judaism was strong, and although the ceremonies were limited by collective fright, they were not characterized by ignorance. The conversas of this time were not uninstructed and isolated: women, and especially mothers, presented

38. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684, CXLIV'-CXLV.

39. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684, CXLIII.

40. Real Cancillería registros núm. 3684, CXLIII'.

themselves as strong spiritual guardians: the dietary laws were observed completely, celebrating Shabbat, Yom Kippur, Passover, and Purim were kept with all accuracy, and they even developed the defence mechanism in which denial of the newly imposed religion occupied a significant part. In the end, all that we know about these women is hidden in inquisitorial dossiers containing several depositions and forced confessions for which they finally paid a high price for remaining loyal to their people and religion.