

# Religious Persecution and Fear in Muslim and Christian Spain (8<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> c.)

*Mònica Colominas Aparicio*

Persecution provides much food for thought to the historian of the period from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern era. Violence indeed rears its head more than once in the form of outbursts and attacks on religious minorities, even in contexts such as the Iberian Peninsula, known for its *convivencia*. It is here that one finds events that have deeply shaken what has often been regarded as a long-standing and relatively harmonious cohabitation of Muslims, Jews and Christians. One powerful example that marked a turning point in their histories is that of the Jewish converts to Christianity (*Conversos*) and their descendants. In addition, there are the experiences of the descendants of Muslim converts to Christianity (*Moriscos*), many of whom left for North Africa and northern Europe after the final decrees of expulsion were announced in 1609–1614. We are probably not very wrong in saying that such events tore apart the connective tissue of Iberian society and undermined forms of coexistence, with the impact difficult to overestimate.

Expulsion often represented the final stage of a process of increasing hostility towards religious minorities by the power-holding majority, for whom these minorities were seen as a threat to the cohesion and well-being of society, to its faith, or both. However, the sources are sometimes silent about these processes and the historian faces the difficult task of explaining such sudden eruptions of violence—or what appear to be isolated events—with persecution then seeming to amount to expulsion *tout court*.<sup>1</sup> In addition, it is easy to understand persecution as a specific form of harm, as some scholars have claimed by looking at history.<sup>2</sup> Yet, one cannot overlook the fact that to reduce a societal phenomenon that finds a place in individual

---

<sup>1</sup> F. Soyer, *The Persecution of the Jews and Muslims of Portugal: King Manuel I and the End of Religious Tolerance (1496-7)* (Leiden, Boston, MA, 2007) 8, is right to speak of the ‘forgotten persecution that is the expulsion of the Muslim minority from Portugal’ because of the far greater degree of scholarly attention paid to the expulsion of Jews in the same year. Part of his argument adds evidence to the few known sources on these events and explores them at length. See also, by the same author, ‘The Expulsion of the Muslims from Portugal (1496–1497)’, *al-Masāq* 20, No. 2 (2008) 215–234, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09503110802283432>.

<sup>2</sup> J. Kuosmanen, ‘What’s so Special About Persecution’, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 17 (2014) 129–140.

behaviour to a few core elements oversimplifies the complex nature of the events that occurred in Iberia. Such complexity can be seen when considering some context-specific issues. These include the ways in which believers relate and respond to persecution, as well as the tensions that arise at the interstices between the crossing and the keeping of the boundaries between the communities. In what follows, my aim is to briefly examine some of these aspects, drawing attention to each of the religious communities of the Iberian Peninsula—without thereby suggesting a necessary or exclusive link between the issues raised and the groups in question. The importance of pausing before the sources is core to my argument about the difficulty of providing conclusive answers about religious persecution in this period. At the least, it draws attention to what seems to be a recurring element, namely fear. Important considerations behind the choices made include the strong appeal of these cases in historiography and their usefulness when it comes to illustrating persecution and some of its relevant dynamics.

In order to better frame persecution, it is worth mentioning some particularities of the social organization in the territories in which religious difference was formally accommodated from the arrival of Islam in the eighth century to the forced conversions of Muslims in Aragon in 1526, both in Muslim and Christian areas. The asymmetry of power between the majority and the minorities resulted from a distinctive legal status for minorities arising through the payment of a special tax that granted protection but also imposed certain obligations. This was an asymmetry whereby the virulence of the persecution could quickly gain strength. Yet, this differentiated status of groups has also prompted some fundamental questions that are rigorously debated by scholars: firstly, whether this differentiation had a religious basis in Islam and, secondly, whether such a religious basis might have ensured the different treatment of non-Muslims in comparison to the treatment received by non-Christians in the Christian territories (i.e. questions about asymmetry as entailing subordination and, if so, to what degree).

The pact of Tudmīr or Teodomiro provides one of the earliest pieces of evidence of agreements made between the indigenous population and the newly arrived Muslim conquerors in the early eighth century. While the factual occurrence of a pact is generally assumed to be true, the text, as preserved in later sources, such as that by al-ʿUdhri (478/1085), raises a number of questions. Beyond the question of its faithfulness to the original, one important question concerns the nature of the first conquests. As Eduardo Manzano suggests, these could have been carried out by force in much of al-

Andalus and could have been based on pacts in the northern region (or, at least later authors of importance in the elaboration of tradition such as Ibn Ḥabīb [d. 238/853] would be responsible for such a rereading of the events).<sup>3</sup> In addition, the text of al-ʿUdhri does not follow what is called the *shurūṭ al-ʿummariyya*, or the well-known (and likewise fraught with questions) pact between caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13/634–23/644) and the Christians of Syria (ash-Shām).<sup>4</sup> The content of the pact of Tudmīr boils down to the general guarantee of protection of religious freedom for Christians and the stipulation of the amount to be paid as a fee, or *jizya*. In fact, to be precise, the Pact of ʿUmar is mentioned in texts by various Andalusī authors up to the end of the fifteenth century, for example Ibn al-Azrāq (d. 896/1490–91), but there is no evidence that it was actually enforced on Iberian soil under Muslim rule, nor that it served as a model for relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.<sup>5</sup> This leads us to another peculiarity of relations in Iberia; namely, that little is known about the specifics of the agreements in al-Andalus, just as only a limited amount of information can be gleaned from the pacts between the Christians and the religious minorities living under their rule.

In both cases, one might say that adherence to a code of conduct that establishes a certain social distance when it comes to the public expression of religion and ritual, as well as respect and deference to the majority group in power, serves as a guideline. In fact, the elaboration of the details of dealing with non-Muslim or non-Christian neighbours is found in a variety of sources, legal or otherwise, both directly and indirectly. Persecution, from its most subtle to its most overt virulent expression, finds a place to thrive in spaces that are subject to change due to the continuous elaboration of normativity over time and place. It is here that we also observe similar concerns—where we see that insults against the prophet of Islam are punished, just as insults against Jesus and the Christian religion, for example by Jews, are found to be

---

<sup>3</sup> E. Manzano Moreno, 'La transmisión textual sobre Teodomiro', *eHumanista/IVTTRA* 5 (2014) 243–261; 249–252. <https://www.ehumanista.ucsb.edu> and <http://hdl.handle.net/10261/199310>. Manzano argues the likelihood of an early tradition about the existence of a pact with Teodomiro (256).

<sup>4</sup> M.R. Cohen, 'What was the Pact of ʿUmar? A Literary-Historical Study', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 23 (1999) 100–157.

<sup>5</sup> Abū ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Azrāq/ʿAlī Sāmī al-Nashshār ed., *Badāʾiʿ al-sulūk fī ṭabāʾiʿ al-mulk*. 1st ed, 2 vols. (al-Qāhira, 1429H/2008CE); Vol. 2, 621–622.

punishable in Christian sources.<sup>6</sup> Some conditions suggest a harshness that in reality was only occasionally practised in societies where, as we will see, minorities valued keeping a certain distance. The latter does not amount to welcoming the restrictions imposed by the majority, but was rather a gentle reminder of the presence of different sensitivities and overlapping layers of understanding that were not necessarily compatible with each other, and of sources that do not necessarily help us to disentangle some of the issues.

This last point is illustrated by the first example here, concerning the most systematically persecuted group in the territories and beyond—the Jews. This is the extreme choice of self-sacrifice in the name of the god of Israel, which opens up as a possibility for the believer when faced with oppression and persecution. As Menachem Ben-Sasson notes, the expectation that Jews would perform such an act of devotion is not always fulfilled. Rather, adherence to the practice of self-sacrifice was not uniform, with differences among Iberian Jews living in Muslim and Christian territories.<sup>7</sup> His brief review of the various academic perspectives is led by the understanding that none of them really offers a sufficiently satisfactory answer as to the whys and wherefores of such differences. Some scholars have suggested a correlation between self-sacrifice and different forms and intensities of persecution in these two areas (empirical perspective); others have claimed that it is the way in which tradition took shape in each that was a determining factor behind the practices of groups (tradition-based perspective); while there are others who have sought the reasons in the different legal conditions imposed on minorities—for example, it is argued that there was a greater possibility of reverting to Judaism without punishment in cases of forced conversion to Islam (legal-religious perspective).

There is also the socio-historical perspective which, according to Ben-Sasson, casts doubt on whether, after all, there are differences between the situations under Islam and Christianity, even though, paradoxically, Jewish

---

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the Partida VII, Title XXIV, Law 2 by Alfonso X, in *Las siete partidas del Rey Don Alfonso el Sabio, cotejadas con varios códices antiguos por la Real Academia de la Historia. Tomo tercero. Partida Cuarta, Quinta, Sexta y Séptima* (Madrid, 1807), 670, <https://www.cervantesvirtual.com/nd/ark:/59851/bmc0k2b9>.

<sup>7</sup> M. Ben-Sasson, 'Remembrance and Oblivion of Religious Persecutions: On Sanctifying the Name of God (Qiddush ha-Shem) in Christian and Islamic Countries during the Middle Ages', in: A.E. Franklin et al. eds., *Jews, Christians and Muslims in Medieval and Early Modern Times: A Festschrift in Honor of Mark R. Cohen* (Leiden, Boston, MA, 2014) 169–194.

practices in each context remained very different.<sup>8</sup> According to Ben-Sasson, one cannot speak in truth about the persecution of the Jews being clearly distinct across the territories, just as it does not seem that one can speak of a distinct tradition or an absolute legal difference. There were, for example, also times when one could freely re-embrace Judaism in Christian territories. Conversions and martyrdoms seem to have definitely taken place under the rule of both Islam and Christianity without a clear distinction. In the case of the territories of Islam, it seems that conversions were not viewed with contempt nor martyrdom overly praised. Ben-Sasson thus reasons that we are faced with similar practices that, nonetheless, were remembered differently by the communities. Such memory, as it is expressed in historical sources, reflects the group's own perception and understanding of a precise moment in history: for Jews under Islam, including al-Andalus, this would have been social integration and the expectation of social advancement—in other words, what was meaningful to them, that is, 'salvation after difficulties'.<sup>9</sup>

Self-sacrifice among Jews thus points to a fundamental question related to the persecution of minorities more generally, which is the way minorities have dealt with it, questioning the expectation of certain responses. It also makes us pause to consider the specific weight of the agency of individuals—and not just groups—in maintaining or crossing the boundaries of their communities. This is an agency that, if we consider Jonathan Ray's examples of Jews in Christian areas, strongly calls into question any assumption of a simple opposition between Andalusī Jews who were expecting social advancement and showing admiration for and desire to integrate into Islamic culture, on the one hand, and an open direct opposition to Christianity by their coreligionists in Christian areas, on the other.<sup>10</sup>

Individual agency has no doubt a direct bearing on how *convivencia* is understood, as it is often taken as a measure of the degree of tolerance of religious difference. Yet, this approach simplifies and reduces its meaning, if one bears in mind that religious affiliation is but one of the aspects that make up the multiple identities of people in their daily lives. It must also be added that when the ways of thinking and acting of individual agents are taken into

---

<sup>8</sup> Ben-Sasson, 'Remembrance and Oblivion', 177.

<sup>9</sup> Ben-Sasson, 'Remembrance and Oblivion', 191.

<sup>10</sup> Even if here one admits a cooperation on certain levels as in Ben-Sasson's argument. See J. Ray, 'Beyond Tolerance and Persecution: Reassessing Our Approach to Medieval "Convivencia"', *Jewish Social Studies* 11, No. 2 (2005) 1–18.

account—here those of Jews, but not necessarily them alone—*convivencia* and exclusion of communities become more elastic notions. Thus, it is possible to argue that *convivencia* both encompasses attempts by Jews to advance socially through strategies that often parallel those of the Christian majority,<sup>11</sup> but also appeals by minorities to maintain internal group cohesion and avoid too close or excessive contact with others.<sup>12</sup>

This calls for reflection with regard to current understandings of *convivencia* and exclusion, for while these may coincide with the sensibilities of the time, they do not always do so. The question closely relates to the even more interesting fact that the tensions produced by the crossing of borders between communities did not necessarily lead to intervention by the majority on the various minorities. In addition, these tensions were also a source of concern among minority members themselves, who were quick to maintain borders. In these cases, it was generally the religious leaders of the minorities who monitored moral issues and the actions of those who maintained problematical relationships with members of the other groups; although, occasionally incidents also came to be resolved under the jurisdiction of the majority in power.<sup>13</sup> For Jews in Christian territories, the examples provided by Ray reveal an immersion in the dominant culture and an admiration that, in general, is comparable to what Ben-Sasson notes about Andalusī Jews, ranging from commerce to friendships and sexual relations, to cite a few examples. Instances of boundary-crossing between communities are recorded in various sources that include internal documents, such as sanctions for the violation of intra-community norms. Sometimes, however, these violations clearly prove to be more far-reaching and affect relations with the majority, particularly when minorities challenge the public behaviour expected of them.

It is precisely the embodiment of defiance by early Christians—known as the ‘martyrs of Cordoba’—that is central to the second example to be

---

<sup>11</sup> Ray, ‘Beyond Tolerance and Persecution’, 11–12.

<sup>12</sup> Ray, ‘Beyond Tolerance and Persecution’, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Ray, ‘Beyond Tolerance and Persecution’, 5. David Nirenberg provides numerous illuminating examples of the intimate relations between Muslim and Jewish minorities in Christian Spain and gives examples of events that were brought before Christian courts at the behest of those involved. D. Nirenberg ‘Love between Muslim and Jew in Medieval Spain: A Triangular Affair’, in: H.J. Hames ed., *Jews, Muslims, and Christians In and Around the Crown of Aragon: Essays in honour of Professor Elena Lourie* (Leiden, Boston, 2004) 127–155.

discussed. The events, in many cases involving children of mixed marriages (and thus legally Muslim) or Muslim converts to Christianity, are related to questions about the conditions imposed on minorities more broadly. Our main sources of information are the writings of one of the protagonists, Eulogio, and his biography, which was penned by his companion, Alvaro, and edited by Ambrosio de Morales (1513-1591) in 1574.<sup>14</sup> Current research has distanced itself from an interpretation, often in a heroic key, provided by traditional nationalist and Catholic historiography. It has done the same with respect to the criticism of these Christians for sacrificing their own lives in a context in which the general consensus is that there was no particularly intense persecution of their groups.<sup>15</sup> More recent work examines the motives that led them to voluntarily seek martyrdom and the power of the Muslims to order their execution, rather than putting the focus on an evaluation of their actions.<sup>16</sup>

Regarding Muslim policies in al-Andalus, there seems, on the one hand, to be insufficient evidence that they echoed those applied to Eastern Christians at the time.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, some contemporary surviving Islamic opinions, such as that of al-ʿUt̄bī (254/868), show a jurisprudence that allowed for a rich casuistry and, in which, therefore, punishments were not applied uniformly.<sup>18</sup> This is in addition to the existence more broadly of a jurisprudence that reserved punishments for defiant non-Muslims, just as it did for Muslim dissidents.<sup>19</sup> There is also a recurring element of ‘identity’ with

---

<sup>14</sup> The latter, as we know, with important differences with respect to the missing original codex, is preserved in Oviedo. See, E. de Córdoba/P. Herrera Roldán ed., *Obras completas de San Eulogio de Córdoba* (Madrid, 2005) 41–42.

<sup>15</sup> For a review of scholarship up to the 1950s, see the introduction by Edward P. Colbert to *The Martyrs of Córdoba (850-859): A Study of the Sources* (Washington DC, 1962) 1–16. Here I have used the translation by J.M. Sáez Castán trans., ‘La bibliografía sobre la España mozárabe’ (Alicante, 2011), <http://hdl.handle.net/10045/16802>.

<sup>16</sup> J. Albarrán Iruela, *La cruz en la media luna. Los cristianos en al-Andalus: realidades y percepciones (siglos VIII-XIII): Estado de la cuestión y perspectivas de investigación* (Murcia, 2013) 38–41.

<sup>17</sup> E. Lapidra, ‘Los mártires de Córdoba y la política anticristiana contemporánea en oriente’, *Al-Qanṭara: Revista de Estudios Árabes* 15, No. 2 (1994) 453–464.

<sup>18</sup> A. Fernández Félix, *Cuestiones legales del islam temprano: la ʿUt̄biyya y el proceso de formación de la sociedad islámica andalusí* (Madrid, 2003) 475–480.

<sup>19</sup> M. Fierro Bello, ‘Accusations of ‘zandaqa’ in al-Andalus’, *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 5/6 (1987-1988) 251–258, or by the same author, ‘Religious Dissension in Al-

respect to Christians, if we follow Fredrick Barth's understanding of identity as a discourse that symbolically constructs a border, by which groups are separated from some and brought closer to others.<sup>20</sup> From this perspective, Christians may have viewed acculturation and conversions to Islam with concern, and this may have been especially true of their elites, as assimilation created a difference within their groups and jeopardized the privileged position of their more affluent members.<sup>21</sup> Whatever the reasons for these defiant acts by Christians in al-Andalus, the example foregrounds individual agency, aimed in this case at maintaining separation between groups, and adds to questions, already discussed, about the relationship between persecution and certain acts of piety.

Let us now turn to the final example of Muslim communities that lived as minorities in Christian areas—the Mudejars and Moriscos. Most of what was said in the previous cases seems also to apply to them. The fear of cultural assimilation—of losing the distinctive features of the group in the face of increasing pressure and persecution of their communities—found an outlet in passive and active resistance and also in strategies of reform and adaptation to the needs of changing situations, also after conversion.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, a tension arose between Islamic normativity and the behaviour of Muslims, whose relations with Christians and Jews were of a similar nature to those just mentioned. One should also bear in mind one fact that is of equal importance in the case of the Christian minorities of al-Andalus: the real

---

Andalus: Ways of Exclusion and Inclusion', *Al-Qanṭara: Revista de Estudios Árabes* 22, No. 2 (2001) 463–487, where, on p. 483, it is noted that Muslim dissidents were often accused of being Jews and Christians.

<sup>20</sup> Here, I am freely translating Cyrille Aillet's reference to Barth's ideas: 'S'intéressant à la manière dont les groupes humains définissent la limite qui les sépare et les rapproche des autres groupes, Fredrick Barth interprète l'identité comme un discours qui construit symboliquement cette frontière', in: C. Aillet, *Les Mozarabes: christianisme, islamisation et arabisation en péninsule ibérique (ix<sup>e</sup>-xii<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Madrid, 2010) 37.

<sup>21</sup> E. Manzano Moreno, *Conquistadores, emires y califas* (Barcelona, 2006) 338–340.

<sup>22</sup> See, among her many publications on Moriscos, M. García-Arenaland and F. Rodríguez Mediano, *The Orient in Spain: Converted Muslims, the Forged Lead Books of Granada, and the Rise of Orientalism*, C. López-Morillas trans. (Leiden, Boston, MA, 2013). Also I. Poutrin/N. Martínez Junquero trans. into Spanish, *Convertir a los musulmanes: España, 1491-1609* (València, 2020), and the most recent edited volume by K. Ingram ed., *The Conversos and Moriscos in Late Medieval Spain and Beyond, Vol. 4: Resistance and Reform* (Leiden, Boston, MA, 2021).



possibility that the minorities would seek the support (and obtain it) of the Muslims and Christians in power on the other side of the border, which could lead to armed uprisings, military attacks and the occupation of the territories.<sup>23</sup>

Well known is the fate that awaited the Christians who, in 1125, joined the Aragonese King Alfonso I, ‘the Battler’ (1073–1134), who for a very short time managed to take Granada under his power. The sources of the period, however, report that the banishment forced on these Christians a year later for breaking the pact of the *dhimma* was not imposed directly by the Almoravid ruler at the time but only after consultation with the jurists; and a second banishment occurred only a few years later, in 533/1138.<sup>24</sup> As Maribel Fierro’s forceful argument goes, it seems more likely that the Almoravid policy towards minorities cannot be reduced to fanaticism, and that both their attitudes and those of the Christian minorities fluctuated. The attitudes of the Muslims ranged between the pragmatic use of minority groups (it should be remembered, for example, that part of the militias in Muslim areas were made up of Christians) and turning them into scapegoats, while those of the Christians ranged between adaptation to and rebellion against Muslim rule.<sup>25</sup> To this must be added a third deportation under the Almohad government that followed (541/1147). Even with the nuances to our understanding of the harsh policy of expulsion of minorities from al-Andalus during this time, the scholarly consensus is that it was at this time that the Christian *dhimmis* disappeared, and only captives and slaves, paid militiamen and merchants remained in al-Andalus.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> In this regard, it is worthwhile to note that Jews in al-Andalus, and unlike Jews elsewhere in Muslim lands, seem to not have been restricted in the carrying of arms until the Almohad period. See N. Roth, ‘Arms, Jews and.’, in: N. Roth, *Medieval Jewish Civilization: An Encyclopedia* (London, New York, NY, 2003) 35–37; 36.

<sup>24</sup> See, for an account of these events, the authoritative work by F. J. Simonet y Baca, *Historia de los mozárabes de España: deducida de los mejores y más auténticos testimonios de los escritores cristianos y árabes* (Madrid, 2018) 513–521.

<sup>25</sup> M. Fierro Bello, ‘Christian success and Muslim fear in Andalusī writings during the Almoravid and Almohad periods’, in: U. Rubin, and D. J. Wasserstein eds., *Israel Oriental Studies XVII. Dhimmis and Others: Jews and Christians and the World of Classical Islam* (Winona Lake, IN 1997) 155–178; 155–161.

<sup>26</sup> Simonet y Baca, *Historia de los mozárabes*, 526, and Fierro Bello, ‘Christian success and Muslim fear’, loc. cit., particularly 159, where Fierro notes that Jews did not disappear in al-Andalus; and 158, referring to Molénat’s views that the sources regarding the abolishment of *dhimma* status under the Almohads are challenging. For

Despite the various centuries separating the events, historians have sometimes talked about the expulsion of Christians under the Almoravids and their later disappearance under the Almohads by reference to the ultimate fate of Muslims already converted to Christianity in the Christian territories, known as the Moriscos. Alternatively, they make comparisons to the policy of increasing pressure on the Mudejars, Muslims still dwelling freely in Christian areas, to convert. In the case of these Muslim groups, they follow the reasoning that the concern of the majority about the faith of the new converts might have been a strong incentive to minimize contact with those who were still Muslim and, thus, it can be imagined that a similar situation could have occurred with the Christians of al-Andalus.<sup>27</sup> The possibility of a tension produced by the simultaneous presence of Muslim converts to Christianity and those who continued to live as Mudejars cannot be ruled out as a reason for the edicts that confronted the Mudejar communities with the dilemma of forced conversion or expulsion. Yet, this would only add to a concern on the part of the Christians that, in my opinion, was quickly reoriented from the desire to educate the neophytes to a much more intense and visceral interest in preserving the purity of the existing Christian community—that formed by the ‘old Christians’. This concern also had great weight for the subsequent expulsion of the Moriscos.<sup>28</sup>

As in the case of the Andalusī Christians, the attitudes of the Mudejar and Morisco communities swung back and forth between remaining within the processes of accommodation to the system in their daily life and uprising. The Mudejars revolted against Castile in 1264–66 by joining forces with the sultān of Granada, Muḥammad I. We also know of other revolts that occurred for different reasons and at different moments in the thirteenth century, towards the end of the fifteenth century and at the beginning of the

---

a more recent publication along these lines, see M. Chérif, ‘Encore sur le statut des *ḍimmī*-s sous les Almohades’, in: M. Fierro and J. Tolan eds., *The Legal status of *ḍimmī*-s in the Islamic West (second/eighth-ninth/fifteenth centuries)* (Turnhout, 2013) 65–87.

<sup>27</sup> Simonet y Baca, *Historia de los mozarabes*, 517, in reference to the Moriscos and Fierro, ‘Christian success and Muslim fear’, 159, where the author wonders if the comparison with the Mudejar period serves as a guide to a better understanding of the politics of the Almohad period.

<sup>28</sup> M. García-Arenal and G.A. Wiegers eds., *The Expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain: A Mediterranean Diaspora* (Leiden, 2014).

sixteenth.<sup>29</sup> One of the powerful triggers was the social and state pressure on the Moriscos shortly after their conversion, which soon led to ‘Pragmaticas’ that banned their customs and habits: these provided the spark that ignited their uprisings in the Alpujarras in 1568 and 1571.<sup>30</sup> Fierro is not without reason in pointing out that in al-Andalus, Muslim fear of Christian victories was an important factor in prompting a reaction against Christian minorities in Almoravid and Almohad times.

In the Christian territories, the fear of religious mixing, culminating in fear of blood impurity (*pureza de sangre*), was joined by the fear of armed incursions from and conquest by the kingdom of Granada, North Africa, and later by the rising Ottoman power. This provided a most powerful catalyst for attacks against the Mudejars which roughly coincided with the attacks on Jews and, on more than one occasion, were prevented by official intervention.<sup>31</sup> Yet, the reign of Fernando the Catholic (1479–1516) is a telling example of how the intense crusading spirit of a monarch does not necessarily align with his internal policy towards the Mudejars, revealing that the collision between groups was not the only factor that fuelled the outbreaks of violence and popular persecution of Mudejars. Economic or social changes were often factors that played a crucial role here, as was the case in the time of Fernando’s grandfather, Alfonso V, when they helped increase the fear of Mudejar uprisings or Islamic attacks and provided the fuse for Christian attacks on the Valencian Mudejars in 1455.<sup>32</sup>

A similar picture emerges at a later period, when one looks at important factors behind the damage caused to Mudejars during the uprising of the Germanías in 1521, which was precluded by popular hostility and the

---

<sup>29</sup> See for the most intense period of revolts in the thirteenth century R.I. Burns, ‘The Crusade against al-Azraq: A Thirteenth-Century Mudejar Revolt in International Perspective’, *American Historical Review* 93 (1988) 80–106.

<sup>30</sup> The ‘Pragmaticas’ were one of the factors that incited the Moriscos’ messianic hopes, which were fanned by the rise of the Ottoman power, as discussed by M.G. Mercado, *Visions of Deliverance: Moriscos and the Politics of Prophecy in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Ithaca, NY, 2020) 64–99.

<sup>31</sup> Meyerson mentions several of the assaults on Muslim quarters or *morerías* and outbreaks of violence between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries in the kingdom of Valencia, and *apud* Ferrer i Mallol notes that these tend to coincide with a heightened fear of attacks from Granada and its mitigation by official intervention, see M. Meyerson, *The Muslims of Valencia. In the Age of Fernando and Isabel: Between Coexistence and Crusade* (Berkeley, CA, 1991) 63–64, and note 6.

<sup>32</sup> Meyerson, *The Muslims of Valencia*, 61–64.

intense fervour of Christian preachers.<sup>33</sup> When compared to official policies, the unravelling of the core of popular Christian attitudes towards religious minorities was, according to Meyerson:

more elusive, mainly because they were so often rooted in stereotype, imagined wrong, and irrational fear. The material success of a few individuals could earn for an entire minority group the animus of those Christians resenting the economic advancement of their social inferiors. Violence might be perpetrated for reason of crusade or for alleged minority complicity in the spreading of plague, reasons that often masked more base economic and personal motives. The violence initiated by the few could easily spark a social riot involving mass participation. Popular attitudes and their behavioral manifestations were unpredictable, volatile, and at times uncontrollable.<sup>34</sup>

This gives a general impression of how persecution of Muslim and Jewish minorities could have seeped into the popular thought of Christians and shaped relations with religious others, some indeed also overlapping with those in official Christian policies of the time. More important for current purposes is to note that the same could be said of both the official and popular attitudes of Muslims towards the Christian and Jewish minorities in Muslim Iberia.

One notion that is suggested by this quote, which underlies and links the above factors of violence, is fear: fear of compromising one's own identity, and thus the need to maintain boundaries; fear of losing political control and becoming a minority oneself; fear of losing one's position of social privilege even while enjoying political dominance; fear of being infected. In short, there was fear of what might be called 'social death', which sometimes meant physical death as well. Fear was an important factor in both contexts, as we have seen not only for the majority but also for minorities. In the latter case, fear is compounded by fear of persecution itself, which causes suffering. In many such cases, the historian knows little or nothing from the voices of those who experienced it, such as for the Muslims expelled from Portugal.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Meyerson, *The Muslims of Valencia*, 86.

<sup>34</sup> Meyerson, *The Muslims of Valencia*, 85.

<sup>35</sup> Soyer, *The Persecution of the Jews and Muslims*, 241.

Even when we do, the reading of the sources handed down to us requires a critical approach, as the examples discussed suggest. Pausing before the sources, as argued here, is a necessary, if not always easy exercise. A final thought that seems to fit into this brief consideration of persecution is that peaks of persecution, with the official or unofficial consent of the majority in power, often coincided with moments of change, real or perceived, gradual or abrupt. Often to the misfortune of the minorities, change was endemic in Iberian history.