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Conversos and Identity in Fifteenth-Century Poetry

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Introduction

Civil wars plagued the fifteenth century, including the one waged in the early years of the reign of Queen Isabella of Castile (r. 1474-1504). Already by the fourteenth century, the nobility had undergone important changes that caused previously minor nobles to come into new political power as a result of complex issues, including: the dying out of some of the main noble branches, a more active role of the minor nobles in royal administration, power struggles related to civil wars, as well as changes in family and inheritance structures. Since 1369, noble families tended to pass all their wealth to the first-born male child, which concentrated wealth. This aristocratic structure had also placed great emphasis on the idea of lineage (*linaje*), at times widened into *bandos* (alliances) that included other members of urban society.

Periodic waves of plague starting in 1348 decimated the Iberian population, leaving Catalonia with one fourth less of its population. The demographic crisis affected the cities and had a clear impact on agrarian growth. The ill effects that the plague had on agricultural production in the fourteenth century were eventually surmounted and periods of growth followed. Due to increased demand, the fifteenth century also saw economic growth in some areas, such as the great expansion in sheep raising, which was regulated by the Mesta, a national association that protected ranchers and shepherds, and of the wool industry.

In constant power struggles with the nobility, the emergent absolutist monarchy moved toward increasing royal control, which necessitated the existence of a solid bureaucratic system that would ensure that laws and royal orders would reach all peoples in the realm. There was also a need for a solid system of both financial and legislative control. Many members of the upper nobility had their permanent residence in cities, and tried to dominate urban government and attract the loyalty of local aristocracies that formed what has been called “urban oligarchies” or “urban patriciates.” Urban oligarchies were heterogeneous, consisting of *hidalgos* (nobles), *caballeros* (knights), royal administrators, lesser nobles, and wealthier merchants and artisans, as well as rural owners with urban residence. A considerable number of all these were *judeoconversos* (converts or descendents of converts from Judaism). Power equilibrium in the cities depended not only on noble rank and royal intervention but also on economic capital. The upper level of the *común* (commoners) had the means to be on par with the elites and played an important part in city affairs. An important urban group was that of the *medianos*, middle class professionals, artisans and merchants, some of whom could be relatively wealthy.

The establishment of the Inquisition in 1478 represented yet another form of control. The pogroms against Jewish communities in 1391 had marked the end of a century filled with conflict and opened an equally violent one. The preachings of Ferrant Martínez and Vicente Ferrer, and the disputation of Tortosa (1414-1413), a series of sessions orchestrated by the Avignon Antipope Benedict XIII looking to indoctrinate and convert Jews, show the earlier pressures for conversion and assimilation of non-Christians that derived in the statutes of purity of blood, the first of which was issued in Toledo in 1449. These statutes were fully in effect by the sixteenth century and were intended to banish anyone with Jewish or Muslim ancestry from positions of political, social or economic power. The numerous conversions of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries brought about the growth of a substantial number of converts or *conversos*, which proved to have a destabilizing effect on both religion and society. Often characterized as hybrids (as in the anonymous *Libro del Alborayque*), neither Jews nor Christians, *judeoconversos* were part of the general population and were employed in a variety of jobs. The obvious benefits drawn by close proximity to the monarchy were the occasion of much competition among groups and individuals and at times were the source of animosity against *conversos*, who were portrayed as illegitimate *arrivistes*.

Approximately three quarters of all extant medieval Spanish texts date from the fifteenth century, a century that witnessed an unparalleled growth in poetry. Collective or personal anthologies, miscellanies, and different



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kinds of texts have preserved well over seven thousand poems (more if fragments and different versions are taken into account) involving the work of around seven hundred poets. Some of the manuscript poetic compilations or *cancioneros* are luxury presentation copies, but most are modest in production. In addition, many poems have been preserved in non-literary manuscripts, proof of the pervasive nature of the poetry of the period.

It is clear that by the fifteenth century poetry had become a favored means of communication to treat all kinds of topics, from political and religious to casual exchanges about minute daily business. Being able to write in verse was a way to show wit, acumen, and learning and was much appreciated as an element of sociability. Poems circulated freely, first written on pieces of paper forwarded to a recipient, and then disseminated in increasingly wider circles as copies were distributed to friends and acquaintances. Once an author or another person had accumulated many such poems, they compiled them into a single volume, some times organizing and classifying the poems.

Because of his deft use of language and different poetic registers, Antón de Montoro, a tailor and used-clothes tradesman (*ropero* and *aljabibe*) living in Córdoba, is one of the most interesting poets of the period. He may have been born around 1404 in Montoro, near Córdoba, and most likely died some time between 1483 and 1484. He had made his will in Córdoba in 1477, when he declared himself to be gravely ill. He either converted from Judaism to Christianity at a very young age or was born to parents who may have converted as a result of the pogroms of 1391. His poem to Queen Isabel studied here was written when, as he states, he was in his seventies. In the poem he presents himself as a practicing Christian. During his life time he witnessed anti-Semitic violence, for example in the pogroms of Easter 1473, about which he wrote a long poem denouncing the ill treatment of conversos addressed to Alonso de Aguilar, a prominent member of the political elite. Montoro's wife was burnt at the stake accused of heresy and of being a "Judaizer" (Christian practicing Judaism clandestinely). Through his profitable work as a tradesman, he belonged to the socioeconomic group of the *medianos*, an urban middle class that was "in the middle" between the peasantry and the nobility. As cities and trade had started to grow significantly in the fourteenth century, the *medianos* became more numerous and prominent. Due to his economic standing, Montoro was a *caballero*—*caballero mediano*—, expected to keep a horse and help in battle as needed. Although Montoro has been traditionally portrayed as a jocular, lowly artisan, his will reveals that he was in fact quite wealthy. Through his poems, we learn about his numerous contacts with important people of the time, members of the political, intellectual and court elites, to whom he addressed some of his poems and with whom he sometimes exchanged poetic compositions. An urban dweller well acquainted with power circles, Montoro wrote a substantial body of poetry that survives in several *cancioneros* (collections of courtly poetry), which are witness to the popularity of Montoro's work and its wide circulation. Montoro's poems have several distinctive features, including rubrics or explanatory titles that head a great number of his poems. The rubrics help us understand the circumstances under which a poem was written or explain its content. The presence of rubrics is common to all manuscripts that contain Montoro's work and help situate his poetry in an Andalusian and, more concretely, in a Cordoban environment, the poems being an active element in urban networks and transactions.

Diego Román (second half of the fifteenth century) was a knight commander (*comendador*) who spent years in the service of the Duke of Alba and as *continuo* (in continuous service) of Queen Isabel. In his own poems as well as those addressed to him by others, Román is at times portrayed as a having a mixed heritage that may have included Muslim and perhaps North African, as well as Iberian Christian backgrounds. Román's heritage is the object of self-mockery and slander by others. His poems were disseminated alongside Montoro's, as their exchanges reached a wide readership. Like Montoro, Román also penned compositions of a serious nature, most notably a long poem on Christ's Passion, *Coplas de la Pasión con la Resurrección* (published by Mazzocchi), which follows the strong trend of writing on the topic of the Passion of Christ during the second half of the fifteenth century. This trend was linked to the rise in anti-Semitic literature and legislation. It also became a common theme, alongside that of Mary's Virginity, in some prose and verse works by conversos as it could help them prove that they were sincere Christians.

The two poems examined here showcase the position of conversos (and Jews) in daily life and in poetic practice. Román exemplifies the practice of slander against conversos while Montoro's poem tells of the converso experience in his own words. Román's poem is one of the many that Montoro and Román exchanged during Román's stay in Córdoba. This exchange is marked by its slanderous, insulting nature. In the poem, Román sets in detail all the stereotypes regarding Jews at the time, as the poem is intended to uncover Montoro as a hidden Jew, a common accusation against conversos. The poem portrays Jewish rituals, clothing and food practices, and depicts the work of a late-medieval tailor. Tailors were some of the artisans and craftsmen of mediano status that were sometimes stereotyped as exercising a typically Jewish profession. Poems such as Román's help us understand medieval practices through the particular details they provide. By adopting a rhetoric of denunciation and uncovering, these texts provide precious depictions of the daily life and material culture of Jews and conversos in Sepharad, the biblical name that refers to a place to which Jews were sent after the destruction of Jerusalem and which Spanish Jews identified with the Iberian Peninsula since around the second century.

In a similar vein, it is important to understand the value of poetry for social advancement in relation to the poets' socioeconomic and professional status. As a rival poet, Román attacks Montoro's poetry by focusing on his opponent's socioeconomic level and religious identity. Román presses Montoro to write in a lowly style that would be fitting to a converso tailor. Montoro's courtly connections and aspirations obviously make Román uneasy, for he worked for the court and aspired to an increased status as a poet and perhaps in his role at court. Neither Román nor Montoro had a high position or noble title. Nevertheless, they had multiple contacts with the upper political echelons and could enter into conversations with members of the sociopolitical elite and thus use courtly discourse, which would heighten their value and status. The slanderous, poignant language that Román and Montoro use in their exchanges exposes the uneasy position of those in social situations that may allow for a certain upward mobility, as they debate the suitability for someone with a lower socioeconomic status to adopt the language and aspirations of those with a higher social status. The mutual insults and reprimands only served to increase their standing as poets, since such compositions usually garnered much interest and secured wide dissemination, as is clear in the slanderous exchanges between Montoro and other poets, particularly Juan Poeta. In some ways, these exchanges may be understood as a practice akin to poetic or music battles in current hip-hop culture, though it must be noted that, for the most part, *cancionero* exchanges were first produced and disseminated in writing. In the poem addressed to Queen Isabel, Montoro adopts a serious tone complaining about the wide perception that he is a hidden Jew in spite of the fact that he has spent his whole life going out of his way to prove that he is a devout Christian by showing his knowledge of Christian doctrine, praying and eating a lot of pork. The tone of the poem is that of a disheartened poet at the end of his life, defeated and discouraged by the worsening conditions for conversos.

A topic of interest that appears in both Román's and Montoro's poems is food and its meaning as a social and religious marker. Román refers to kosher dietary laws,¹ eating kosher animals like beef (brisket cut), and mutton, slaughtered following kosher practices, and to refraining from eating animals that are *tref* or not kosher, such as pork, hare or eel. His reference to gathering the blood as a kosher practice is unclear, as Jewish law forbids from consuming blood and slaughter practices include identifying an area where the blood of the slaughtered animal can be drained and then covered with dirt. Christians, however, did gather the blood of the slaughtered animal in order to use it for cooking or making such food items as blood sausages (*morillas*). Román also refers to the Jewish practices of keeping the Sabbath from sunset Friday to sunset

¹ Jewish dietary laws or *kashrut* are taken from Deuteronomy and Leviticus and detail the type of animals that are fit or unfit for consumption, as well as other related laws, such as the prohibition to consume meat and milk together. Generally, land animals fit for consumption are those who both chew their cud *and* have cloven hooves. Though there are some exceptions, birds of prey, creeping creatures and fish without scales and without fins are also forbidden by kosher laws.

Saturday, blessing the wine, eating dishes cooked overnight on Friday in order to avoid cooking on the Sabbath, and eating unleavened bread (though Román wrongly points to Sukkot,² instead of Passover,³ as the holiday when unleavened bread is consumed). Interestingly, Román’s poem also provides information on foods that are not forbidden by kosher law and thus could be considered as “unmarked” by any type of religious prescription, although the consumption of eggplant was widely identified with Jews and Muslims at the time. The poem seems to suggest that there were certain foods that were favored by Sephardic Jews. These include: stuffed crops, chickpeas and spinach, eggplant, cilantro and chestnuts. The many references by non-Jewish authors to Jewish and converso foods and daily life point to the great degree of familiarity that the different groups had of one another during the medieval period and show a porous society where daily sociability with one’s neighbors, regardless of religion, was the norm. The value given to food consumption as a religious and social marker in relation to Jews and conversos is also evident in other texts such as Andrés Bernáldez’s *Memorias* and the anonymous *Libro del Alborayque*, as may be seen in the excerpts included here.

Anti-Converso Slander: Comendador Román’s “Antón, parias sin arrisco”

<p>Antón, Parias sin arrisco os⁴ cumple que me las déis, porqu’estoy tan basilisco que de verme moriréis, y haced de vos justicias corrigiéndoos el vivir, que ponzoñas y malicias que os tengo para decir a mí me hacen temir.</p>	5	<p>Anton, tributes without risk you must give me because I am made a basilisk such that you will die upon seeing me, bring yourself to justice correcting your way of life, for the poisons and malice that I have to tell you make even me tremble.</p>
<p>Y sin otra detenencia os cumple de confesar, porque soy la pestilencia que os vengo para matar; mirad que salen de juego estas coplas que a vos van, que mis trovas llevan fuego que es peor que de alquitrán, con que luego os quemarán.</p>	10 15	<p>And without further ado you must go to confession, because I am the pestilence that comes to kill you; see that they come out to play these stanzas that go to you, for my verses carry fire that is worse than that of tar with which they will quickly burn you.</p>
<p>Porque tornéis a la vara de vuestra remendaría os amenaza Guevara</p>	20	<p>So that you return to the yardstick of your patchwork workshop Guevara threatens you</p>

² Also known as the Festival of the Tabernacles or *Fiesta de las Cabañuelas* in Spanish, Sukkot commemorates the wanderings of the people of Israel in the desert, and may have roots as a harvest festival.

³ Passover or Pesach commemorates the Jewish Exodus from Egypt after having been freed from slavery. Unleavened bread is eaten during this holiday in order to remember the bread that the Jewish people ate before leaving Egypt in haste and thus being unable to wait for the dough to rise.

⁴ The poet uses the form ‘vos’ to talk to Montoro as a form of formal address different from the more familiar ‘tú.’ The verbal conjugation corresponds to the ‘vosotros’ forms in current Spanish. ‘Vos’ is still used as a second person singular pronoun in countries such as Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, as well as El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and parts of Mexico and Bolivia.

<p>y también Hernán Mexía; que vos, con cara que toca y cuerpo cativo, lacio, vos hurtáis con vuestra boca las razones del palacio,⁵ presumiendo de Boccaccio.</p>	<p>25</p>	<p>as does Hernán Mejía; for you, with a face that upsets and an ugly, limp body, steal with your mouth the words of the palace, boasting to be another Boccaccio.</p>
<p>Que vos trovéis⁶ palanciano este trovar más os mata, porque si van a la cata bien sabrán que sois marrano. Pues trovar de amor trovando os está tan mal contado, trovad vos lo que yo os mando y no seréis reprochado por hombre desmesurado.</p>	<p>30 35</p>	<p>For you write courtly verses and writing poetry kills you further because if they pay attention they will know that you are a marrano. Since writing love poetry is so unbecoming to you, write what I command you and you will not be reproached for being an unconscionable man</p>
<p>Trovar las tales razones, en trovar por bien trovar, trovar gordos ansarones para hacer cecinar; trovar muy grande la jaca —esta tal obra miradla—, trovar la pieza de vaca, que os la saquen de la falda y traerla por guirnalda.</p>	<p>40 45</p>	<p>Write verse about such topics, writing poetry by doing it properly, write verse about fat goslings to cure their meat; write verse about a very large mare —this needs to be well looked at—, write verse about the cut of beef that you take from the flank and wear it as a garland.</p>
<p>Trovar⁷ por vuestros dineros, con razones no muy flacas, lindos garbanzos cocheros y gentiles espinacas; trovar en vinos catar con sutiles albedríos; trovar también en guardar</p>	<p>50</p>	<p>Write verse about your money, with reasons not too slim, fine chickpeas to cook with ease and nice spinach; write verse about wine tasting with subtle judgement; write also about keeping</p>

⁵ During the medieval and later period, ‘razón’ or the plural ‘razones’ may mean ‘word,’ ‘sentence,’ or a reasoned argument. Here, it is generally translated as ‘words.’

⁶ From here on, Román uses the verb “trovar” in a way that is intended to imply *both* of the main meanings that the word had during the period: to ‘write verse’ and to ‘find.’ Through the first meaning, Román is directly listing the topics that are worthy of Montoro’s pen, which include foods and activities related to his socio-professional level, looking to stereotype Montoro. As a professional tailor and a covert Jew or converso/marrano, he states that Montoro is unworthy of touching courtly topics and instead should focus on the religious and material themes within his purview. The infinitive ‘trovar’ and the command ‘trovad’ are used almost interchangeably throughout the poem, suggesting that the person addressed is not only Montoro, but also the reading public, who is encouraged to “find” Montoro’s hidden practices. The verb is translated as ‘write verse’ here, but it should be born in mind that the meaning of ‘finding out’ or ‘uncovering’ is suggested throughout.

⁷ From here on, ‘trovar’ takes on a stronger meaning of ‘to find’ in some of the instances, although it is intended to still allude to topics suitable for Montoro’s verses. This is explained by the fact that the following stanzas list all the items that Montoro needs to be an observant Jew, *and* he needs to be found out as such. It would be an interesting exercise to read the stanzas substituting ‘write verse’ for ‘find’ in order to better understand the double meaning.

el sabad con vuestros tíos en las fiestas por los ríos.		the Sabbath with your uncles, celebrating by the river.
Trovar redonda mesilla, trovar olla que no quiebre, trovar nunca con anguilla ni mucho menos con liebre; ⁸ trovar en ser carnicero como la Ley ordenó;	55 60	Write verse about the round table, write verse about the pot that does not break, never write verse about eels or much less about hares; write verse about being a butcher as the law commanded;
trovar en comer carnero degollado cara al Dió, ⁹ cual vuestro padre comió.		write verse about eating a calf whose throat was slit facing God as your father ate it.
Trovar en pláticas buenas, por estas tales pasadas, en culantro y berenjenas y castañas adobadas; trovar con lindo sosiego en estos tales guisados, en bellotas tras el fuego y también huevos asados, vos y vuestros allegados.	65 70	Write verse about good conversations passed off as such, on cilantro and eggplant and seasoned chestnuts; to find with pleasant repose such dishes, acorns before the fire and also roasted eggs, you and your closest relatives.
Trovar en estilos sanos la oración de San Manguil; ¹⁰ trovar en lavar las manos por pico de aguamanil; trovar no comer tocino, ¹¹ pues la Ley os lo veda; trovar decir sobre el vino vuestra santa barahá, ¹² como aquel que la sabrá.	75 80	Write in verse the prayer of purification in wholesome styles; write verse on the washing of hands by the beak of the ewer; write verses about not eating pork, as the law forbids you; write verse about saying over the wine your holy blessing as one who knows it well.
Trovar en rábanos buenos porque nadie no os reproche; trovar papillos rellenos en los viernes en la noche; trovar en sangre coger	85	Write verse on good radishes so that nobody reproaches you; write verse on stuffed crops ¹⁴ on Friday nights; write verse on collecting the blood

⁸ Eels and hares are not kosher or permissible according to Jewish dietary law.

⁹ ‘Dió’ instead of ‘Dios’ (<Latin ‘Deus,’ sing. ‘God’) was the form favored by Jews and conversos as the latter form, though singular, sounded too much like a plural and thus suggestive of polytheism. Judaism is strictly monotheistic and rejects the Christian trinity as polytheism.

¹⁰ Reference unclear as it is supposed to mock a particular Jewish prayer. Possibly in reference to a prayer such as *netilat yadayim* said after handwashing. The translation offered reflects this interpretation.

¹¹ ‘Tocino’ could refer to either fatty cuts of pork, cured pork products, or pork in general, thus the translation offered here is ‘pork.’

¹² Blessing

¹⁴ Necks of fowl that were traditionally stuffed and cooked.

<p>de lo que habéis degollado; trovar en nunca comer lo del rabí devedado, sino manjar trasnochado.¹³</p>	<p>90</p>	<p>of what has been slaughtered; write verse on never eating what is forbidden by the rabbi and only eat food that has been cooked overnight.</p>
<p>Trovar en traer empresa¹⁵ de rellenas tabahías;¹⁶ trovar en poner la mesa que se esté para dos días; trovar en cara muy leda el día que es de costumbre, y nunca tocar moneda y menos llegar a lumbre, con reposo y mansedumbre.</p>	<p>95</p>	<p>Write verse on bringing as a symbol stuffed <i>tabahías</i>; write verses on setting the table, set for two days; write verse with a very cheerful face the day that is accustomed, and never touch money and much less go near the fire, with repose and meekness.</p>
<p>Trovar en ser zahareño en corro con las mozuelas; trovar en comer cenceño la fiesta de Cabañuelas; trovar en ser denodado con los de suerte menor; trovar estar encerrado el buen ayuno mayor con lágrimas y dolor.</p>	<p>100 105</p>	<p>Write verse on being gruff in the circle with young women; write verse on eating unleavened bread in the celebration of Sukkot; write verse on being bold with the least fortunate; write verse on being shut in during Yom Kippur with tears and pain.</p>
<p>Trovar en corte de rey en jubones remendar; trovar en ir a meldar,¹⁷ trovar en saber la Ley; trovar en alzar las greñas sin ningún medio ni tiento;¹⁸ trovar en dar buenas señas</p>	<p>110 115</p>	<p>Write verse in the king's court on mending doublets; write verse on going to pray write verse on knowing the law; write verse on lifting your shaggy hair without any measure or care; write verse on giving good signs</p>

¹³ During the medieval period, ‘manjar’ means food or anything edible. ‘Trasnochado’ was one of the terms used to refer to the meal that was set on the fire on Friday before sundown so that no cooking needed to be done on the Sabbath.

¹⁵ ‘Empresa’ is a term taken from chivalric vocabulary and refers to symbol or image that was worn by a knight in allusion to a referent (often a symbolic object or something that he wanted to achieve) and was usually accompanied by a verse or verses offering clues about its meaning. It is translated as ‘symbol’ here, but the reference to a chivalric practice would be clear to a reader from the period.

¹⁶ It is unclear what this word means. It could refer to a form of stuffed vegetable or, as in the reference to stuffed crops in the previous stanza, some kind of stuffed tripe or entrails.

¹⁷ ‘Meldar’ (< late Latin ‘meletare,’ ‘to learn while reciting aloud’) is a ladino or Judeo-Spanish term meaning both pray and study in a meditative way.

¹⁸ The text is alluding to the stereotype of Jews rocking their heads while praying.

del arca del Testamento ¹⁹ y no del Advenimiento.		of the ark of the Testament and not of the Advent.
Trovar en traer jubón largo para el cuerpo sano; ²⁰ trovar que os besen la mano y que echéis la bendición, ²¹ trovando estas y ciertas trovaréis vos bien a osadas; ²² trovar con calzas abiertas y con botas derribadas, y de flojas, abajadas. ²³	120	Write verse on wearing a doublet, long for a healthy body; write verse on having your hand kissed and on casting the blessing, writing verse on these and certain others in truth you will write well; write verse with open breeches and with droopy boots, so loose they fall.
Vuestro trovar ha de ser ropa larga, no hendida; ²⁴ trovar la beca cumplida, y capirote traer; ²⁵ trovar señal colorosa ²⁶ con que andéis la ladera, que no será tan vistosa cuanto a vos es cumplidera por ley, forma y manera.	130	Your verse writing must be long tunic without slits; write the long shawl and wear a hood; write the red mark, with which you may walk the hillside, ²⁷ that will not be as colorful as it is fitting to you by law, form and manner.
	135	

¹⁹ This and the next lines contrast the “ark of the Testament” or ark of the Covenant, in reference to the Jewish Bible, and Advent, coming of Christ, or New Testament. The stanza also refers to the importance of knowing Jewish religious law (“saber la ley”) or *halakhab*.

²⁰ The ‘jubón’ or doublet was similar to a short, waist-length jacket that had a slim fit. By suggesting that Montoro wear a long doublet in order to help his health, by presumably keeping him warm, Román is playing with the stereotype of Jews as cowardly and hypochondriacal and over-concerned about their health. From a medical point of view, the Jewish body was characterized by lacking heat and having a melancholic temperament. Román’s suggestion is also emasculating, as a long doublet would look more like women’s clothing than men’s. The fashionable male silhouette at the time emphasized men’s lower body through the use of the doublet and the tight-fitting ‘calzas’ or breeches.

²¹ These are allusions to the expected treatment to men who are respected or have a certain status in the Jewish community.

²² ‘A osadas’ can mean ‘certainly’ or ‘in truth,’ as well as ‘daringly.’ It is not clear which of the two meanings is intended here.

²³ The flaccid boots continue to be a metaphor for the weak Jewish body and stand as a sexual innuendo on Montoro’s dubious masculinity, another stereotype applied to Jews, conversos and other minorities.

²⁴ Although ‘ropa’ can generally mean ‘clothing’ during the period, it is also used to refer to a very specific piece of clothing, a tunic that has slits either on the front and back or on the sides. The poem uses the term in the latter meaning, as is clear from the reference to the slits (“hendida”).

²⁵ ‘Beca’ was a type of shawl or scarf that could be part of the ‘capirote,’ a hood. The description of the clothes advised for Montoro in these verses is intended as a stereotypical depiction of Jewish dress. A special capirote or *corozca* marked those condemned by the Inquisition.

²⁶ In reference to the ‘rodela colorada’ or red circle that Jews had to wear as a distinctive mark. In the next few verses, Román underlines the need for the mark to be as prominently displayed as possible on Montoro, as it will never be as obvious as it needs to be on him.

²⁷ Many Jewish cemeteries were placed on hillsides, which were deemed as less desirable spaces due to difficulty of access and natural erosion from the elements. The verse may be alluding to ritual visits to honor the dead.

<p>Vos trovaréis con placer veinte cestos de retal,²⁸ trovar en bien conocer buena aguja y buen dedal; trovar cantar con gritillo, vos sentado en vuestras gradas, y menudillo el puntillo, dando veinte cabezadas al echar de las puntadas.²⁹</p>	<p>140</p>	<p>With pleasure you will write verse on twenty baskets of cloth remnants, write on knowing well a good needle and good thimble; write on singing with small cries, sitting on your steps, and making tiny stitches, giving twenty head shakes when sewing.</p>
<p>Trovar linda faltriquera, en ella, jabón y broca; trovar en torcer la boca³⁰ al cortar de la tijera; trovar razones de muza,³¹ aunque en esto os doy loores;³² trovar en her carapuzas³³ de secientas mil colores y venderla a los pastores.³⁴</p>	<p>145 150</p>	<p>Write verse on a nice waist pouch, in it, soap and spindle; write on twisting the mouth when cutting with the scissors; write words of muza, though in this I give you praise; write on making a hood of six hundred thousand colors and sell it to the shepherds.</p>
<p>Así trovando dichoso en los casos que he hablado, trovaréis más provechoso y no tanto reprochado; y cobraréis gran conorte en saber que nunca errasteis sin que vos trovéis de corte, pues jamás en ella entrasteis para haber estos contrastes.</p>	<p>155 160</p>	<p>Thus happily writing verse in the cases that I have mentioned, you will write with more profit and will not be reproached as much, and you will receive great consolation in knowing that you never erred, refraining from writing in a courtly manner, because you never entered the court to have such contrasts.</p>
<p>Cabo Que si ponéis en bullicio a muchos con vuestras artes, es por veros tal oficio</p>	<p> 165</p>	<p>Ending: For if you cause a ruckus for many with your arts, it is for seeing you doing such work</p>

²⁸ This stanza lists some of the instruments and materials used in Montoro's tailor work.

²⁹ Román is portraying Montoro as a tailor sitting outside of his shop, praying in a stereotyped Jewish way, rocking and shaking his head, while sewing.

³⁰ Román is mocking the facial gestures of tailors as they cut the cloth.

³¹ 'Muza' was a type of fur collar that was worn over the shoulders that is documented as an article of clothing worn by shepherds. 'Muza' was also a common Muslim name ('Moses' in Arabic, so that the reference 'words of Muza' refer to the Hebrew Bible), so the possible double meaning is fully exploited in poems against conversos, as they can be grouped with Muslims when the object of slander. The poet associates Jews and conversos with other disparaged groups such as Muslims and shepherds is fully suggested.

³² Román suggests that Montoro's writing in line with Muslims and shepherds is to be praised, since they represent a level opposite to the courtly style that Montoro strives for and that Román thinks unsuitable for Montoro.

³³ 'Carapuzas,' a form of 'capirote,' was a hood with a pointed end favored by shepherds.

³⁴ The poem suggests that Montoro's work is of such low quality that it is mostly fit as clothing for shepherds.

<p>y tan lejos de las partes; pues que partes en rodar³⁵ tenéis vos más aparejo, tomaréis mi buen consejo: que dejéis este trovar y os vayáis a remendar.</p>	<p>170</p>	<p>and so far from your rightful place; since of parts to roll you have the better stock you will take my good advice: that you leave this verse writing and go back to your mending.</p>
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The Converso Voice: Antón de Montoro’s “Oh Ropero, amargo, triste”

<p>¡Oh, Ropero, amargo, triste que no sientes tu dolor! Setenta años que naciste y en todos siempre dijiste <i>“inviolata permansiste”</i>³⁶ y nunca juré al Creador.</p>	<p>10</p>	<p>Oh, bitter, sad, tailor do you not feel your pain seventy years ago you were born and in all of them you always said <i>“inviolata permansiste”</i> and I never swore against the Creator.</p>
<p>Hice el Credo y adorar³⁷ ollas de tocino grueso, torreznos a medio asar, oír misas y rezar, santiguar y persignar y nunca pude matar este rastro de confeso.</p>	<p>10</p>	<p>I recited the Creed and adored pots of thick bacon half cooked rashers, I heard mass and prayed, I crossed myself and I made the sign of the cross and I could never kill this converso mark.</p>
<p>Los hinojos encorvados y con muy gran devoción, en los días señalados, con gran devoción contados y rezados los nudos de la Pasión,³⁸ adorando a Dios y Hombre por muy alto Señor mío, por do mi culpa se escombre,</p>	<p>15 20</p>	<p>With bent knees and with great devotion on the appointed days, with great devotion I counted and prayed the stations of the Passion, worshiping God and Man as my exalted Lord, through which my guilt may be cleansed,</p>

³⁵ The reference is unclear, but may be alluding to the rolling and unrolling of fabric in tailor’s shops, which had large rolls of fabric ready to be cut for dress making, as shown by images in medieval manuscripts and paintings.

³⁶ A verse of the prayer “Salve Regina,” which sings the praises of Mary’s virginity, a point of Christian faith that was particularly resisted by Jews. Therefore, conversos needed to emphasize their belief in Mary’s virginity to show that they were true or sincere converts. Montoro quotes the verse in Latin to show that he is fully knowledgeable of Christian prayers.

³⁷ The ‘Credo’ or ‘Apostle’s Creed’ is the prayer where Christians state the main articles of their faith, including belief in Christ.

³⁸ The Stations of the Cross were prayed with the help of a knotted or beaded string that helped keep count when praying, much like a rosary.

no pude perder el nombre de viejo puto judío. ³⁹		I could not lose the name of old Jewish faggot.
Pues, alta reina sin par, en cuyo mando consiste, gran razón es de loar y ensalzar la muy santa fe de Criste. ⁴⁰	25	Thus, exalted, peerless queen, in whose command it lies, great reason is to praise and extol the very holy faith of Christ.
Pues, reina de gran valor que la santa fe crecienta, ⁴¹ no quiere nuestro Señor, con furor, la muerte del pecador, mas que viva y se arrepienta.	30 35	Thus, most valued queen who expands the holy faith, Our Lord does not want, with rage, the death of the sinner but rather that he may live and repent.
Pues, reina de gran estado, hija de angélica madre, aquel Dios crucificado, muy abierto su costado, con vituperios bordado e inclinado, dijo “perdónalos Padre.”	40	Thus, queen of great state, daughter of an angelic mother, that crucified God, with his side wide open, pierced with insults and drooping said “forgive them, Father.”
Pues, reina de autoridad, esta muerte sin sosiego cese ya por tu piedad y bondad hasta allá por Navidad, cuando sabe bien el fuego. ⁴²	45	Thus, queen of authority may this death without rest cease by your mercy and goodness until Christmas time when fire is welcome.

³⁹ Montoro is writing this poem toward the end of his life. The discourse on Jews, conversos and other minorities involved emasculating and feminizing them, frequently representing them as homosexuals.

⁴⁰ Montoro may be using the Latin form, in order to further show his knowledge of Latin prayers and Latin language. Some editors have suggested a change to Cristo and a concomitant change of “consiste” to “consisto” in rhyme position in the earlier verse, but this would cause the meaning of the verses to change. Although ‘Criste’ (Christe) is the vocative form, it appears used in what seems to be the genitive, which would fit its use in Montoro’s poem from a grammatical standpoint, also in other authors and texts, for example in reference to ‘corpus criste.’ It seems to have been a common mistake, perhaps supported by the relative familiarity with certain phrases such as “Christe eleyson” that were part of the liturgy.

⁴¹ This is a likely reference to the efforts in the war waged in areas under Muslim rule in Spain, a war that had been defined along religious lines as a confrontation of Christians versus Muslims or ‘moros.’ Isabel took a leading role in the shaping of the war during her time. In addition, she built a reputation of being very pious and devout.

⁴² The reference to fire is clearly a bitter allusion to the burning of conversos.

Andrés Bernáldez, *Memorias*:

Andrés Bernal or Benález was a priest in Los Palacios y Villafranca, a town in Seville, Spain. He was chaplain to the General Inquisitor of Castile Diego Deza, who was also archbishop and tutor of Prince Juan. In his *Memorias* or *Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, Bernáldez discusses some of the main developments of his time, including the War with the Muslims in Granada, the Expulsion of the Jews and the vicissitudes of Christopher Columbus, who was his personal friend.

Habéis de saber que las costumbres de la gente común de ellos antes de la Inquisición, ni más ni menos eran que de los propios hediondos judíos; e esto causaba la continua conversación que con ellos tenían. Así eran tragones y comilitones, que nunca dejaron el comer según costumbre judaica de manjarejos y olletas de adafinas y manjarejos de cebollas y ajos refritos con aceite, y la carne guisaban con aceite, y lo echaban en lugar de tocino y de grasa, por excusar el tocino; y el aceite con la carne y cosas que guisan hace muy mal oler el resuello, y así sus casas y puertas hedían muy mal a aquellos manjarejos; y ellos eso mismos tenían el olor de los judíos, por causa de los manjares e de no ser bautizados.

Y puesto caso que algunos fueran bautizados, mortificado el carácter del bautismo en ellos por la nulidad y por judaizar, hedían como judíos. No comían puerco sino en lugar forzoso; comían carne en las cuaresmas y viglias y cuatro témporas, en secreto; guardaban las pascuas y sábados como mejor podían; enviaban aceite a las sinagogas para las lámparas; tenían judíos que les predicasen en sus casas en secreto, especialmente a las mujeres. Tenían judíos rabíes que les degollaban las reses y aves para sus negocios; comían pan cenceño al tiempo de los judíos carnes tajeles, haciendo todas las ceremonias judaicas en secreto, en cuanto podían, así los hombres como las mujeres (96-97).

You should know that the customs of the common people among [the conversos] before the Inquisition were no more and no less than those of the foul-smelling Jews themselves, and the cause of this was the continuous contact that they had with them. [The conversos] were so greedy and such gluttons that they never stopped eating according to Jewish custom dishes and pots of *adefinas* [Sabbath stew], dishes of onions and garlic fried in oil; and they cooked the meat with oil, which they used instead of salt pork and fat so as to avoid using pork; and the meat cooked with oil and all the other things that they cook cause terrible breath, and likewise from their homes and doors emanated a horrible stench because of those dishes; and they themselves smelled like Jews because of all these foods and because they were not baptized.

And even assuming that some were baptized, since nullity and judaizing deadened the character of baptism in them, they reeked like the Jews. They did not eat pork unless they were forced to do it; they ate meat during Lent, vigils and in the four periods of mandated abstinence in secret; they observed their holidays and Sabbaths as best they could; they sent oil for the lamps to the synagogues; they had Jews who would preach to them in their homes in secret, particularly to the women. They had rabbi Jews that slit the throats of cattle and birds for them; they ate unleavened bread when it was mandated for the Jews and clean meat, performing all the Jewish ceremonies in secret, whenever they could, men as well as women.

Libro del Alborayque

The *Libro del Alborayque* was written during the second half of the fifteenth century and printed in the sixteenth century. The book lists the twenty identifying marks of the converso based on the peculiar characteristics of the *alborayque*, the steed that in the Quranic legend took Muhammad to heaven. The converso is depicted as a monstrous being with human feet and eyes, a snake for a tail, the mouth of a wolf and the body of an ox, for a total of twenty corruptions in its body. The conversos, the book says, are nominally Christian, but their nature is that of Jews ("the name of Christians the conditions of the Jews"), just as bats are more land animals than birds because of the food they eat (93). The identifying mark number fifteen of the converso is that of the food they eat:

“La 15 condición del Alborayque es que come de todos manjares. Así, los alboraycos comen conejos, perdices muertas de manos de cristianos y de moros, y pescado (que ellos comen poco tocino), liebres y otros animales y aves, adafina como judíos. Y cómenlo en todo tiempo, y en la Cuaresma de los cristianos: y en el ayuno de los judíos y en el ayuno de los moros, los más de ellos, que pocos guardan las ceremonias de los otros” (94).

[The 15th condition of the Alborayque is that it eats of all foods. Thus, the alboraycos eat rabbits, partridges killed by the hands of Christians and Moors, and fish (for they eat little pork), hares and other animals and birds, *adafina* like Jews. And they eat it at all times, and during the Lent of Christians: and during the fasting of the Jews and during the fasting of the Moors, that is most of them, for few keep the ceremonies of the others].

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