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Trading with the ‘Other’: Economic Exchanges between Muslims, Jews, and Christians in Late Medieval Northern Castile

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On 7 September 1305, Andalla (or Audalla) the Moor, and his wife, Doña Cienso, sold houses on the street of Salinería to Pedro de Mená, alcalde del rey (a royal judicial official) in Burgos for the amount of 5000 maravedies (mrs). The record of this transaction, extant in the cathedral archives of Burgos, opens a window on the life of Mudejars (Muslims living under Christian rule) and their relations with Christians in a city deep in the rearguard of the advancing frontier with Islam. This transaction provides important information not only on the type of economic exchanges that took place between Christians and members of the two other religious groups in Iberia (Jews and Muslims), but also on aspects of Muslim life in a predominantly Christian city.

Introduction

In his pioneering work, Angus MacKay introduced complexity to the study of the relations among Jews, Christians, and Muslims in medieval Iberia. MacKay’s insightful rendering of Castile’s past, in particular his keen analysis of the way in which religious, sexual, and trade relationships affected the social, political and cultural life of Christians and non-Christians in the peninsula, have long served as an inspiration and guide to numerous historians. I, for one, through this modest contribution, wish to acknowledge a great and old debt of gratitude to Angus and to add to the growing body of work on themes MacKay opened up for historical inquiry.

In the following pages, my aims are limited in scope. I wish to explore the nature of economic exchanges between the dominant Christian majority and subaltern religious minorities and to determine what these exchanges meant for the social life of Jews and Muslims under Christian rule. What do these interactions tell us about the changing economic climate in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century northern Castile? The history of the relations among these religious groups has received a great deal of attention lately, but this
attention has usually focused on cultural, religious, and social aspects. The paradigmatic model established long ago by Américo Castro, a literary scholar with great influence on the study of Castilian medieval culture, was that of convivencia: the peaceful intermingling of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Iberia and their bonding across cultural and religious boundaries. For Castro and his followers, this idealized vision of coexistence was most vividly articulated in the court and scriptorium of Alfonso X (1252–84). In that setting, so the story goes, representatives of the three religious toiled harmoniously, side by side, to further Alfonso X’s ambitious cultural programme. I have never been enamoured of this formulation and regard convivencia as having little to do with the Christians’ penchant for riding roughshod over those below. If anything, relations were fraught with animosity and mistrust, and often mediated by punitive legislation and pejorative cultural representations.

Property transfers, tax collection, and the retail trade functioned as sites for social interaction and contestation because they encoded complex symbolic and cultural conventions: ideologies of class, gender, and ethnicity; discourses of religion and politics. In the following pages, I will focus on economic exchange among members of the three religious groups to show how the public debate over intergroup commerce manifested itself in various social and cultural practices. But most economic transactions were pragmatic in nature and fell within the established parameters governing economic relations among Christians. That is, documents recording the purchase and sale of lands or houses between Christians and non-Christians were indistinguishable from those recording such transactions among Christians, except for the fact that one of the participants was a member of a religious minority. This detail, however, meant all the difference. When business was transacted with Jews and Moors, their religious affiliation was clearly stated; in transactions among Christians, religion affiliation was not mentioned. Moreover, despite evidence to the contrary, the records show Christians for the most part purchasing property, and Jews and Muslims selling it. Religion thus, to a large extent, determined how transactions were recorded and whether they survived.

A tentative typology of economic transactions, and of measures regulating those transactions, will provide a preliminary framework for understanding pluri-religious interaction in the economic sphere. As such, it may serve as a springboard for further study of a topic that merits greater attention.

Instances of exchange and regulation can be categorized as follows:

1. Retail transactions among Christian, Jewish, and Muslim merchants, artisans and their clients.
2. Moneylending and transfers of property among members of the three groups.
3. Legal provisions to regulate or restrict economic exchanges between Christians and non-Christians.

The chronological boundary for this study starts in the early thirteenth century, when rapid changes in Castile’s political and economic structures brought a turn for the worse in attitudes toward and representations of religious minorities. It ends in 1350, when the Black Death led to violent local attacks against Jews, and to Castile’s descent, shortly afterwards, into endless social, political, and economic crises. The geographic locale is northern Castile, specifically the towns for which we have information of economic exchanges between Christians and members of the other two religions. But here I must introduce a caveat. The sources available for this history are, at best, fragmentary. Worse, documents showing property purchases by Jews and Muslims are rare indeed. Considering the indirect evidence of Muslim and Jewish ownership of property (references to the real-estate of Jews in petitions to the king for the abolition of Jewish tax-exemption; internal evidence in the few surviving records of transactions between Christians and non-Christians that mention houses owned by third-party Jews or Moors), one must assume that such records were either suppressed or discarded. Extant sources thus represent a minuscule portion of the land and other transactions in question. The fact that these documents, above all those showing Jews and Muslims as purchasers of property from Christians, are missing from the record tells us a great deal about general attitude toward religious minorities in late medieval and early modern Castile. The documentary silence is an integral part of this story. It may have been acceptable to transact business with the ‘other’, but it also seemed wise—at least to the Castilians—to eradicate the evidence of such transactions. And for good reason. At the cortes of Haro in 1288 and of Valladolid five years later, the urban procurators demanded that the Crown forbid the sale, donation, or gifting of property to Jews and Muslims because, as the petition stated, ‘great damage is done to our [ability to collect] taxes and we lose our rights’. The erasure of evidence can be atcribed to a fear of losing tax revenue and a latent mistrust of Jews and Moors.

Legal provisions to regulate economic exchanges between Christians and non-Christians

Though records of individual transactions may be scarce indeed, the ordinances of the cortes provide revealing glimpses of their frequency and character. From the mid-thirteenth century until the end of the Middle Ages, the legislation of the cortes sought to restrict and regulate economic exchanges between the dominant Christian population and Muslims and Jews. The frequency of these prohibitions, and the tedious repetition of restrictive measures against Muslims and Jews, tells us how often these injunctions were ignored or circumvented; they also signal the importance of these transactions in the economic life of the realm. Not all of these measures were economic in nature; at least, they were not overtly so. Some of the cortes’ ordinances sought to prevent Jews and Muslims from having intimate contact with Christians and to differentiate them by regulating their clothing and hairstyle. But even these ordinances were seldom enforced; and the fluid movement across religious lines
continued to feed the resentment of both the ruling groups and those at the lower levels of society. Most of the petitions to the king at the regular meetings of the cortes came from urban oligarchical groups devising coherent programmes to restrict the economic activities of Jews and Muslims. These petitions sought to bring an end to the longstanding competition between Christian mercantile elites and the Jews (and, to a lesser extent, Muslims) for control of trade, usury, and other sources of income (though competition sometimes spawned business partnerships, especially in matters of moneylending). In many respects, the concern of urban procurators – all of them members of the ruling elite – with the matter of who had the right to collect taxes in Castile, and how taxes should be collected, became a central issue in the economic warfare against the Jews. This does not mean that Jews were singled out for abuse, while Muslims could do as they pleased. It just means that Muslims or Mudéjars, on the whole occupying a lower economic level and engaged in different occupations in northern Castile in this period, were not seen as threats to the economic well-being of Christians.

At the cortes of Palencia (1286), the urban procurators asked for, and received, exclusive rights to collect taxes. Between 1286 and 1350, the Castilian concejos (municipal councils) made their right to collect taxes the outstanding issue of debate at the cortes. In part, the concejos’ desire to control tax-collection stemmed from the abuses royal tax collectors had inflicted on the cities. But protests against tax-farming were almost as widespread as claims to tax-collating rights by urban knights (the caballeros villanos) and good men (omnes bonos or buenos). Since large-scale tax-farming was often in Jewish hands, or perceived to be in their hands, the petitions to the king at the cortes and the protests from the Castilian municipalities were in fact anti-Jewish measures. The minority religions thus developed strategies to deal with these obstructions. At the realm’s highest levels, Jews and a few Muslims engaged in active lobbying, disputes, and even cooperation with Christian royal and municipal officials about the always troublesome business of collecting, farming, and dispatching tax revenues to the Crown.

From another perspective, paying taxes to a Jewish tax farmer involved an economic transaction that put Jews ‘on top’. And the wealth of some Jews was considerable. In 1291, to cite one example, the aljama (the Jewish community) of Burgos, the second largest in the kingdom, paid 109,921 mrs in head tax and service (a form of tax). The aljama of Ávila, a smaller city, paid 74,142 mrs. These large sums reflect the presence of wealthy tax farmers and, in the case of Ávila, a large artisan and mercantile Jewish population. Their political and financial influence was likewise remarkable. The almojarife mayor, or royal treasurer, was often a Jew who, as in the case of Cag de la Málaga in 1277 and Abraham el Barchilón in 1287, farmed the taxes for the entire kingdom. Abraham el Barchilón exemplifies perfectly the role Jews played in royal finances and in cross-religious business transactions with Christians. When Abraham purchased the right to collect royal taxes in 1287, the alcaldes of the cities and villages in León and Castile were ordered to protect Abraham and those who collected taxes in his name. Seven years later, Abraham el Barchilón farmed the diezmos (tithe), even though just the previous year the ordinances of the cortes had reserved the farming and collecting of taxes within the kingdom to the good men and urban knights of the cities. The same year, 1294, a certain Don Samuel, a Jew, collected 30,000 mrs for the fonsadera of Pajares. Another Jew, Don Daniel, collected taxes in Zamora, and Don Todros served as almojarife (treasurer) for the entire kingdom. The collection of the diezmos de la mar from the ports of the Bay of Biscay was in Jewish hands in 1294, and probably throughout most of this period. That year Mier Celin and Abraham el Barchilón outbid Don Todros el Levi, Mosé Falcón, and Don Abreham Abenxuxen, though all three had held the concession the previous year. The most obvious evidence of Jewish-Christian economic exchange is found in the cortes’ thirteenth- and fourteenth-century ordinances that, caving in to the procurators’ monotonous demands, reduced interest rates for usurious loans and mandated the partial cancellation of debts to Jewish moneylenders. These legislative efforts to reduce debt at a time of crisis – in the 1280s, the 1310s, and afterwards – were also concerted efforts to undermine the economic standing of the Jews. But although not a single disposition of the cortes acknowledges a Christian role in moneylending, Christians also lent money at interest, sometimes in partnership with Jewish lenders (a tactic many used to circumvent injunctions against usury); even the procurators pleading with the king for sanctions against the Jews often profited from illicit loans. This conundrum unveils the somewhat contradictory nature of the policies being hatched: on the one hand, capping interest rates and restricting Jewish financial activity diminished profit returns for Christians as well as Jews; on the other hand, eliminating Jews from the moneylending circuit left the field wide open for Christians to ply the trade exclusively. It also helps to explain why these policies were rarely successfully enforced. Instead, a rather unimpeded commerce flowed among members of the three religions, as Christians and Jews (and Muslims) paid, garnered, and farmed taxes or granted, collected, and paid off loans, from a few pennies to vast sums of money (see below).

In the same manner – and so that we do not forget that most Jews were not rich – it should be noted that cortes’ ordinances also forbade Jews to serve as nannies to Christian babies or to cohabit with Christians. These measures regulating employment and sexual exchange shed additional light on the routine and intimate ways in which the three religions came together. The frequency of edicts banning these relations underscore how common they must have been. Christian babies were often brought up by Jewish and Muslim servants or slaves. Christian men visited houses of prostitutes, where sexual (and economic) transactions took place with the ‘other’. And Jewish and Muslim
mistresses competed with Christian wives for the attentions of Christian men. When the Spaniards expanded their empire, these complex social, economic and sexual interactions, so common to heterogeneous societies, were reproduced in relations with the natives and African slaves in the New World.

Retail transactions among Christians, Jews, and Muslim merchants and artisans

The short vignette opening this article – the sale of property in Burgos by the Muslim couple, Audalla and Doña Ciensó – identifies Audalla as a dyer (tintor), a trade usually associated with Mudejars throughout northern Castile. A document dated 7 September 1305 and another one, three months later, which record Don Pedro de Mena’s formal taking of possession, gain us further insight into the economic links between the different religious groups. We know that Audalla’s and Doña Ciensó’s four houses – which must have been quite a desirable piece of real estate, since 5000 mrs was one of the highest prices paid for urban property between 1200 and 1350\(^\text{17}\) – were bound by the street of Tintores (the dyers’ street which led to the gate of Tintes in the lower part of the city). On one side of the property were the ‘houses of Mohamat, the son of Don Çulema’, and one of the witnesses to the transaction was ‘Lope, son of Don Burgalés, the Moor’.\(^\text{18}\) The deed recording the transfer of the property from Audalla to Don Pedro de Mena shows that Audalla and his wife rented some of the aforementioned houses to Vellido and Yhuda, two Jews, and that Don Pedro de Mena, the alcalde of Burgos, upon taking title of the house, proceeded to rent it back to its former owners and inhabitants. The document graphically describes the symbolic gestures and rituals of possessions that attended the transfer of property. Don Pedro entered the house on foot, ‘taking possession of it bodily’, and putting Audalla, Doña Ciensó, Vellido, and Yhuda out of doors. After his rights had been asserted, Don Pedro allowed them back into the houses, but now as tenants. Çulema and Iohan López, both Mudejars, joined some clerics and other Christian citizens of Burgos in witnessing the ceremony.\(^\text{19}\)

In early fourteenth-century Burgos, the southwest corner of the city was the location for a series of dyer shops, most of them manned by Mudejars and Jews. Living close to their shops and stores, these religious minorities tended to the needs of the whole population. But this is not the only evidence we have for retail or craft shops run by religious minorities. In Burgos, Jews owned and worked in butcher shops, and had stores where they sold their weaving and similar products. In Ávila, where the evidence for commercial activity by religious minorities is far more abundant, one may assume that the majority of the city’s shops and artisan crafts was run by Jews or Muslims. Between 1240 and 1360, thirty-four Jewish storekeepers or artisans are identified as conducting business in Ávila. Twenty-nine of the thirty-four are mentioned in a 1303 inventory of the cathedral chapter’s property. In other words, we know of their existence because they rented their shops or dwellings from the cathedral chapter. Their number must have been much larger. In the Ávila documents, Muslims often appear as witnesses to documents and are mentioned as owners or inhabitants of houses adjacent to properties being transacted; on seven occasions, they are identified as artisans or merchants. These include fruit sellers, a locksmith, a painter, a weaver, and similar trades. Ávila was a small city in 1300, with approximately 4000 inhabitants, but at least forty shops were owned or run by Jews and Muslims. Throughout northern Castile, above all in cities and large towns, Christians must have shopped from and transacted business with members of religious minorities on a regular basis. Although for this period we do not have personal accounts that would tell us unequivocally that ‘on such or such day I bought a shirt from or had my cloak dyed by Audalla, the Moor’, it could not have been otherwise. This was particularly the case with trades that were the monopoly of one or the other of the religious groups. But Jews too actively engaged in the trade of dying cloth in Ávila, and a transaction in 1297 confirms that this was the case.\(^\text{20}\) In fact, a number of transactions in the late 1290s, briefly cited below, point to the artisanal activity of religious minorities in medieval Ávila.

We also know that most of the masonry and construction work in northern Castile was carried out by Mudejars; the style of the surviving buildings are living proof of Mudejar craftsmanship.\(^\text{21}\) By the same token, most physicians, before 1391, were either Jews or Muslims. The aristocratic nuns of Las Huelgas of Burgos – the Lady ruling the monastery was always of royal blood – had twelve Muslims doctors to attend to their health. Moreover, in 1270, Alfonso X granted the nuns of Las Huelgas jurisdiction over the Jews of Santa Cecilia of Briviesca, earning them the right to use a Jewish doctor to tend to their ailing sisters. The municipal council of Burgos, whose procurators constantly pushed for punitive measures against Jews and Muslims, often hired one of the latter as the municipal doctor.\(^\text{22}\)

The day-to-day economic exchanges among members of the three religions, in terms of trade and services alike, provided a unique context for social interaction. In many respects, these exchanges – most of which were not recorded and left no discernable traces in the extant documentation – brought diverse religious groups into closer intimacy than did some of the better-known cultural or violent encounters. Economic exchange did not necessarily lead to harmonious relations between different religious groups, but face-to-face encounters occasioned by small retail and service transactions bred a familiarity not unlike the kind that exists today, in heterogeneous neighbourhoods all over the world, among members of antagonistic ethnic groups.

Moneylending

Moneylending has had a long history as a stereotype of Jewish economic activity, but nothing was further from the truth in medieval Iberia. There, Muslims and Jews engaged in a wide range of economic endeavours, of which
moneymaking was one; and Christians, at both macro and micro levels, partook in the trade with undeniable zeal, often in open or covert partnership with Jews. What is remarkable about moneymaking is that despite the overwhelming circumstantial evidence for its existence in medieval northern Castile — and I have seen most of the documentation for the region between 1200 and 1360 — there is not a single document that directly records a lending agreement between a Christian and a Jew. Loans among Christians were recorded, but interest charges were always hidden in special clauses. This gap is even more striking, since Jews were legally permitted to lend money at interest.

The ordinances of the cortes that set the interest rate (at the very high level of 33 percent) clearly illustrate the terms under which loans were raised and paid back. But records of loans and other daily transactions were not of a kind to elicit concerns about preservation, especially in the ecclesiastical archives where most of the extant sources for the period can be found. Despite the absence of data, two types of loan transactions are known to have taken place among Christians, Jews, and Muslims. The first one was financing at the highest level. As observed above, Jews were often in charge of royal finances in thirteenth-and fourteenth-century Castile. Whether holding the office of almojarife or treasurer (a title of Muslim provenance), or discharging similar duties, Jews like Çağ de la Maleha, Abraham el Barchilón, Don Todros and others, played a prominent role in the economic life of the realm. In exchange for security against future tax income, these men advanced capital to the king, extended credit to the Crown, and helped run the financial branch of government. Unlike personal loans, these activities were carefully recorded. Moreover, their secondary activities as farmers for kingdom-wide and/or local taxes gave them an extra hand in driving the economic affairs of Castile. Jewish tax farmers were in continual contact, negotiation, and of course conflict, with local authorities over when and how much taxes were to be collected. Though farming taxes was a profitable enterprise, it required the outlay of considerable capital and risk. The ordinances of the cortes regulating commerce between Christians and religious minorities illustrate the vulnerability of Jewish financiers to the Crown’s changing edicts and increasingly intolerant stance. Sometimes it meant the severe loss of money; sometimes it entailed the loss of life. This was the case of Don Çağ de la Maleha who, like other Jewish tax collectors, lost his life to the wrath of the king, when the funds for the siege of Algeciras wound up in the hands of the rebellious Infante Don Sancho.24

Jewish tax farmers and royal financiers, however, only affected a limited number of Christians — mainly, the urban elites and royal officials with whom they organized tax collection — and their business, seemingly unprotected, was regulated by law and praxis. This was not always the case with petty moneymakers. Granting loans to nearby farmers and urban neighbours meant personal contact with a wider range of people, mostly the lower and middling sorts, who were in great need of immediate small loans and willing to pay usurious rates. As stated earlier, Jews were not alone in lending money at interest in Castile. Christians did the same, often in association with Jews serving as fronts for their activities. And, although we have only incidental information, literary references and the oft-mentioned ordinances of the Castilian cortes, they tell of robust lending and borrowing activity between Jews and Christians. The most compelling evidence in this period are the urban procurators’ petitions to the cortes that sought to cancel or reduce the interest rate on monies Christians had borrowed from Jews. The frequency of such appeals evinces a groundswell of resentment against Jews among Christians, and among Christian borrowers in particular, and the unwavering anti-Jewish antagonism of the urban elites represented in the cortes, an antagonism that was spurred by competition for mercantile and lending prospects, by mistrust of tax-exempt Jews in the cities, and by envy of their proximity to the royal court. Jews who acted as royal agents in late medieval Castile were frequently perceived as rivals and enemies. As Mackay and others have pointed out, violence and antagonism against Jews (and Moors) were often not-so-veiled attacks against royal authority. In these pages, however, I am far more interested in catching a glimpse of petty exchanges between Jewish moneymakers and Christian borrowers than in discussing royal policies, legislation, or finances. The evidence, albeit lean, is suggestive enough to show that trading with the ‘other’ indelibly marked the quotidian social relations of the three religious groups in Iberia.

As it does today, agricultural production often required an outlay of capital that would not be recovered until the harvest was completed. Rental contracts in late medieval Castile included provisions that took into consideration the impact of inclement weather or failed crops; rental dues were decreased in the event of natural disasters.25 But these kinds of protection were not enough to shield farmers from debt. Peasants often had to seek money elsewhere. In fourteenth-century northern Castile, judicial agents of small towns and villages confiscated farms and auctioned them off to ensure payment of outstanding debts to Jews. This is revealing in several ways: 1) it is an indirect but powerful confirmation of the Jews’ role in floating loans to small farmers; 2) it illustrates what could happen to those who were unable to repay their loans, whether to Jews or Christians. Losing one’s farm was a disaster of extraordinary dimensions in the rural world of northern Castile; 3) Jews had recourse to local authorities to enforce the terms of loans and to collect outstanding debts.

I have argued elsewhere that it was precisely this type of transaction that fed popular rancour against Jews, and that anti-Jewish or anti-Morisco sentiment manifested itself most violently among the lower social groups. Levels of antagonism varied among the religious groups in Castile and Spain, their articulation often pertaining to social status. The higher a person’s standing in society, the less likely that he or she would sustain virulent anti-Jewish or anti-Morisco sentiments.26
But to return to the actual examples. In the 1290s, the Cistercian monastery of Our Lady of Rioseco purchased several properties in and around the hamlet of Homa. Under the supervision of the alcalde del rey (a royal judicial official), several peasants were forced to sell their lands to satisfy outstanding debts to Jewish moneylenders from Medina de Pomar. On 12 January 1290, Sancha Alvarez sold her cereal-growing lands (de pan llevar) and vineyards to the monastery for 150 mrs. Shortly after that, on 19 February 1290, Muño García sold all his property in Homa to the nuns of Our Lady for 500 mrs, and on 7 December 1292 Doña Elvira sold her lands there for 250 mrs.27 All the transactions took place in winter, probably following a hard harvest the previous summer and early fall. There were well-established Jewish moneylenders in Medina de Pomar, a small town in northern Castile, located on the great commercial thoroughfare running from the Bay of Biscay ports to Burgos and boasting an important agricultural hinterland. These Jewish moneylenders—not identified by name in the documentation—were able to apply for royal protection and have clients’ debts liquidated by such extreme measures as confiscation or forced sale of their land. The prices paid for the land in Homa indicates that these were small independent farmers swallowed up by a late thirteenth-century deteriorating economy and caught between the demands of Jewish moneylenders and the territorial ambitions of the monastery of Our Lady of Rioseco. As a sad footnote to the affair, by 1352 Homa was deserted and the monastery no longer collected any rent from the place. What happened to the peasants and farmers who lost their lands? The documents do not tell. They probably joined theswelling ranks of the displaced and the growing tide of anti-Jewish protesters among the poor.

One more example illustrates the dynamics of economic exchanges between Christians and the ‘other’. In 1347, a period of harsh weather and famine in many regions of northern Castile, the council of Toviella sold village lands, possibly owned communally, to the aforementioned monastery of Our Lady of Rioseco for 3200 mrs to pay their debts to Jewish moneylenders. The numbers indicate that a significant amount of land was involved. Such forced sales must have crushed the inhabitants of Toviella and seriously threatened their fragile independence. Again, the sale occurred in October, after what must have been a failed crop.28

**Buying from and selling property to the ‘other’**

Thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Castile served as an active land and real-estate market.29 Most of the extant records show monasteries, cathedral chapters, and individual clerics buying property from lay sellers. The cathedral chapters of Ávila, Burgos, Segovia, Salamanca, and other northern cities owned close to half of all the dwellings within the walls of their respective cities in the thirteenth century.30 Nonetheless, the ecclesiastical grip on the real-estate market was dramatically eroded by the patrician elite’s aggressive purchases of urban property, and by clergymen who bought property, not for their monasteries, but for themselves and their families.31

Jews and Muslims played a role in this market, perhaps a more prominent one than the documents allow. Since most of the extant evidence shows Jews and Muslims selling rather than buying property, we must conclude that at one time or another they bought property, and that they continued to do so until their social and political milieu changed for the worse in the 1250s. A more efficient way to examine these transactions is to render them in table form, which shows the number of Jews and Muslims engaged in land and real-estate exchanges and the percentage these transactions represented within the overall market. Table 4.1 clearly illustrates real-estate and record-keeping patterns in Burgos.

Most of the Burgalese transactions, which occurred in the periods 1200–19 (115 transactions) and 1320–50 (97 transactions), comprised bulk acquisitions by a few individuals endeavouring to build large estates. The percentage of transactions involving religious minorities appears to have been exceedingly small: less than one per cent. But, according to the prices paid, the properties transacted by religious minorities seem far more substantial than those exchanged among Christians. It may be useful to examine in detail the three transactions that have survived in the records.

In December 1209, Don Martín Illán de Vega and his wife, Doña Sancha, sold houses with a wine cellar (lagar) and an attached garden to Don Auolafia (Abulafia) Caçon and Don Cach Cotar, Jews of Burgos. The houses, located in the Burgalese neighbourhood of Vega, abutted a garden owned by the cathedral of Burgos, a house owned by the sons of another Jew, Lop, and a road. The price paid for the property was 200 gold mrs. Eight additional transactions appear for that year in the Burgalese documentation (see Table 4.2). Only one involved more money than the 220 mrs paid by Don Auolafia and Don Cach, and the document for that transaction does not indicate whether the sale price was paid in gold mrs. Transactions in gold mrs represented several times the amount of regular (non-gold) mrs. Two other Jews, Mosse Eneamos and Nombre Bueno Algudiex, along with seven Christians, witnessed the latter transaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1 Number of transactions in Burgos, 1200–1350</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of transactions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purchases by religious minorities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sales by religious minorities</td>
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<td>Percentage of Jewish and Muslim transactions</td>
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*Source: Archivo de la Catedral de Burgos and Documentación de la catedral de Burgos in Fuentes medievales castellano-leonesas (Burgos, 1983 to the present), hitherto FMCL.*
Table 4.2 Other Transactions and monies exchanged in 1209 Burgos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 mrs (gold)</th>
<th>10 mrs (gold)</th>
<th>29 mrs</th>
<th>150 mrs</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 mrs (gold)</td>
<td>17 mrs (gold)</td>
<td>60 mrs (gold)</td>
<td>220 mrs</td>
</tr>
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</table>


Three years later, three Muslims, Don Espinel, his sister, Doña Galiana, and her husband, Abderramen, sold their garden in the Burgalese neighbourhood of Santa Agueda to Domingo, a canon of the cathedral chapter of Burgos, for 50 mrs and a passada of land. The exchange for a passada of land (an easement or right of way to a road or public way) indicates that the Muslims owned at least another property in the city. This Muslim urban holding (the one for which they obtained a right of way) was adjacent to the home of Doña Estefanía, the recent widow of Pedro Sarracin, many times alcaldé of the city and one of the leading and most powerful citizens of Burgos. The details of the third Burgalese transaction, involving Audallia the Moor, are outlined in the opening paragraph of this article.

Burgos, an important mercantile centre dominated by a Christian oligarchy, curtailed the role and number of Jews and Muslims in trade (long-distance as well as local), in artisanal occupations, and, as is obvious from the above data, in the market for land and real estate. Burgalese financial restrictions, however, were not typical. In Avila, Segovia, Sepúlveda, and Salamanca, where the ruling elite derived its income from livestock and land rents, religious minorities were far more prominent as shopkeepers and craftsmen. Not surprisingly, the extant records in these towns show far more active participation in the property market by Jews and Muslims. Table 4.3 foregrounds the role of local conditions in determining property exchanges between Christians and Jews.

In 1290s Avila, a series of real-estate purchases shown in Table 4.4 imparts more fully the meaning of economic exchanges between Christians and the ‘other’ in thirteenth and fourteenth-century Castile. Remarkably, most sales by Jews or Muslims were concentrated in the decade of the 1290s. In many respects, they tell us something about shifts in the relations between the hegemonic and the minority religions and provide glimpses into the lives of religious minorities in Castilian cities in the late thirteenth century.

In 1296, Dueña Cara, the widow of Abdalla the Alatar, and her son, Mahomad, sold two stores in the Alhatería to Don Fernando, a canon of the cathedral chapter of Avila, for 150 mrs. From the boundaries described in the transaction, we learn that Dueña Cara retained an adjacent store for her own use. Two Mudejars, Mahomad, the son of Yuçaf and Daziz surveyed the property. Another Yuçaf, Hamad, Zohra, and Hatima, the children of Dueña Cara, agreed to the sale and pledged themselves as guarantors of the transaction. All the Muslims mentioned in the document were ‘the vassals of Blasco Muñoz’, the son of one of the most influential citizens of Avila, Don Blasco. A year later, Menahén, a Jewish dyer, and his wife, Çimá, sold to Pascual Sánchez, a cleric of the church of St. Vicente of Avila, two houses in the central market of the city (near the cathedral and in the fashionable part of medieval Avila) for 1300 mrs. The document informs us that Menahén and his wife lived in one of the houses and that another Jewish couple lived next door. Altogether, in just a decade, 15 Muslims and 41 Jews are mentioned in the documents as pledgers or surveyors of property, or as owners and renters of property adjacent to the real-estate being sold. From 1300 to 1360 only three Jews appear as sellers of property, and the number of Jews or Muslims mentioned in Avila records falls precipitously from the height of the 1290s. What conditions in that decade prompted this rush of sales by religious minorities?
Trading with the ‘other’

In this essay I have attempted to contribute to our general understanding of the economic conditions of Jews and Muslims in late medieval Castile. To this end, I have provided examples of the type of economic exchanges that took place between Christians, Jews, and Muslims. The record of these exchanges, or absence thereof, alert us to the fact that Christians were buying up Jewish and Muslim properties and slowly strangling the economic lifeline and independence of these two groups. Following the restrictive legislation of the cortes, attitudes towards religious minorities from the mid-thirteenth century onwards shifted drastically. This hardening in the treatment of minorities rose and fell according to changing economic conditions. The late 1290s, for instance, suffered a period of great civil unrest, because of Ferdinand IV’s minority. Jews in Avila and elsewhere in the realm could no longer count on the monarchy to protect their economic pursuits or, eventually, even their lives.

While the documents may not tell the whole story, their silences and omissions have failed to conceal the robust economic role that Jews and Muslims, despite their changing fortunes, played in northern Castile. Nonetheless, frequent economic exchanges did not foster greater understanding in religiously-plural Castile. On the contrary, something ominous loomed in the pattern of sales, in the vanished records of Jewish and Muslims buyers. These patterns did not bode well for the future. The violence of 1315 and, worse, that of 1391, were after all just around the corner.

Notes

1 Archivo de la Catedral de Burgos (ACB), vol. 41, part 2, f. 374 (7-IX-1305). The document is published in F. Javier Pereda Llarena, Documentación de la catedral de Burgos (1294–1316) in Fuentes medievales castellano-leonesas (hereafter FMCL) 17 (Burgos, 1984), pp. 177–8.


3 This was most powerfully presented in Castro’s The Structure of Spanish History, trans. E. L. King (Princeton, 1954).


5 I am presently completing a book manuscript on property, entitled From Heaven to Earth: Property, Salvation, and Representation in Late Medieval Castile. Although it does not deal directly with Jews and Muslims, it seeks to provide a context for economic exchanges in late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Castile.

6 For perjorative representations of Jews and Muslims we see my ‘Representación’, and n. 4 above.

7 Cortes de los antiguos reinos de León y Castilla, 5 vols; vols I and II (Madrid, 1861–63): I, Haro (1288), pp. 111–12, 115; Valladolid (1293), et passim. ‘Otroso al que nos pidieron que los judíos e los moros no ouiesen los heredamientos de los cristianos por compra nin por entrega nin en otra manera, que por esto se estragaua muy grande plaça delos nuestros pechos et perdímos nos ende nuestro derecho . . .’

8 See, for example, Cortes: I, Valladolid (1258), p. 59; Jerez (1268), pp. 68–9; Palencia (1313), pp. 227, 231, 244–5 et passim.


12 Memorial histórico español, 49 vols (Madrid, 1851–1948): I, 308–24; Amador de los Ríos, 260ff. Çağ was not the only tax farmer. Amador de los Ríos provides a detailed description of the large number of Jews engaged in some financial role in thirteenth-century Castile.


14 ibid., pp. 1; ii, iii, iv; lix.


17 T.F. Ruiz, Crisis and Continuity: Land and Town in Late Medieval Castile (Philadelphia, 1994), p. 229. A table for urban property transactions in Burgos between 1230 and 1350 show that although the highest price paid for property within the city walls was 8000 mrs. (Adalid’s property was second), the average price of transactions was 1594.9 mrs.

18 Documentación de la catedral de Burgos (1294–1316), pp. 177–9.