

Sentencia-Estatuto de Toledo, 1449

[Translated by K. B. Wolf]

This text, from Toledo in 1449, is the earliest known reference to Jewish blood, as opposed to Jewish beliefs and rituals (judaizing), being held against Christian conversos in Spain. The underlying issue seems to have been fears on the part of the "old Christian" ruling class in Toledo that their power was threatened by the rise of the "new Christians," the descendants of Jewish converts to Christianity who, for the most part, had been forcibly baptized during the infamous pogroms of 1391.

We, Pedro Sarmiento, head *repostero* (1) of our lord the king (2)...and head mayor of the very noble and loyal city of Toledo, along with the mayors, constables, knights, squires, citizens and common people of the said city of Toledo, proclaim and declare that, in as much as it is well known through civil and canon law that *conversos* (3) of Jewish lineage, being suspect in the faith of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, frequently belittle it by judaizing, they shall not be allowed to hold office or benefices public or private through which they might cause harm, aggravation, or bad treatment to good old Christians (*Christianos viejos lindos*), nor shall they be able to act as witnesses against them.... In as much as it has been shown that a large portion of the city's *conversos* descending from the Jewish line are persons very suspect in the holy Catholic faith; that they hold and believe great errors against the articles of the holy Catholic faith; that they keep the rites and ceremonies of the old law; that they say and affirm that our Savior and Redeemer Jesus Christ was man of their lineage who was killed and whom the Christians worship as God; that they say that there is both a god and a goddess (4) in heaven; and in as much as, on holy Thursday (5)--while the holy oil and chrism is being consecrated in the church of Toledo and the body of our Redeemer is being placed on the altar--the said *conversos* slaughter lambs and eat them and make other kinds of holocausts and sacrifices, thus judaizing...;

And in as much as the said *conversos* live and act without fear of God and have shown and still show themselves to be enemies of the said city and of the old Christians living in it; and in as much as at their solicitation a royal tax was placed on the said city by the constable don Alvaro de Luna (6) and his followers and allies--our enemies--who waged cruel war armed with blood and fire, inflicting slaughter, damage, and theft on us, as if they were Moors, enemies of the Christian faith; wars, damages and evils which the Jews, enemies of our holy Catholic faith from the time of the passion of our Savior Jesus Christ have always caused; which, according to the old chronicles--when this city was surrounded by our enemies the Moors under Tariq (7) their leader, after the death of King Roderic (8)--the Jews who lived in Toledo at the time also did, making a treaty and selling the said city and its Christians and letting the Moors enter, after which 306 Old Christians of the city were put to the sword and more than 106, men and women, young and old, who were taken from the cathedral and from the church of the Santa Leocadia, and carried off into captivity as prisoners;

And because the said *conversos* descended from Jews have through great deceit taken and robbed great and innumerable quantities of *maravedis* and silver from our lord the king and from his rents and rights and taxes, and have destroyed and ruined many noble ladies, knights and *hidalgos*; and because they have oppressed, destroyed and robbed all the most ancient houses of the "Old Christians" of this city and of all the realms of Castile, as is well known; and in as much as during the time

that they held public offices in this city and its environs, the greater part of the city was depopulated and destroyed and the land and places of the city lost and alienated, since they took all the maravedis in the form of rent and interest, to such an extent that all the goods and honors of the countryside were consumed and destroyed, becoming lords to destroy the holy Catholic faith and the Old believing Christians in it; and in confirmation of this it is known that the said *conversos* of this city a short time ago rose up and armed themselves and set out to destroy all the "Old Christians" and me, the said Pedro Sarmiento, throwing us out of the city and handing it over to our enemies....; (9)

Therefore we find that we ought to declare and do declare that all the said *conversos* descended from the perverse line of the Jews, in whatever situation they may be..., be held as incapable and unworthy to hold public or private office in the said city of Toledo and in its lands, by means of which they would be able to hold lordship over Old Christians believing in the holy Catholic faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ and cause damage, injury, and to be incapable and unworthy of giving testimony and faith as public notaries or as witnesses...

Notes

1 The *repostero*, in any noble household, was traditionally the one responsible for the dining implements. Here we can assume that it was a largely honorific title.

2 Juan II (1406-54).

3 *Converso* is the usual Castilian term for a Jewish convert to Christianity.

4. A concept connected to the cabalist movement within medieval Iberian Judaism. The idea of a female counterpart to God—known as Shekhina—may have been influenced by Latin Christian devotion of Mary which intensified in the twelfth century.

5 The Thursday before Easter, a day of fasting for Christians.

6 The royal favorite for most of Juan's reign, Alvaro de Luna essentially ruled Castile with only minor interruptions from 1420 until his execution in 1453. Faced with heavy opposition from Aragon, Alvaro visited Toledo in January, 1449, and imposed a tax on the citizens to support his war effort. A *converso* merchant named Alonso Cota worked with him to secure the funding, thus becoming the focus of "Old Christian" hostility.

7 Tariq ibn Ziyad, the first of the Muslim invaders of Spain in 711.

8 The last of the Visigothic Christian kings of Spain, apparently killed in the pivotal battle against Tariq near Arcos de la Frontera.

9 A reference to the struggles within Toledo, with the "Old Christians" generally opposing Alvaro de Luna and the *conversos* supporting him. Once the constable had withdrawn from the city, the "Old Christians" acted quickly to restrict converso access to power in the city government.