Towards the mid-seventeenth century, after seventy years of repression, the Holy Office established in the New World had managed to destroy the main centers of crypto-Jewish activity. A comparative study of more than six hundred cases judged by the three courts in the Americas (Mexico City, Lima, Cartagena) reveals the specific nature of Marrano religious practices in each of the major jurisdictions as well as the diversity of inquisitorial strategies. The overlap of inquisitorial archives in the Americas with those of the Spanish and Portuguese homelands also permits the larger Judaizer family genealogies to be reconstructed and provides proof of their Portuguese origin. Finally, our inquiry reconstructs commercial channels out of Cartagena put in place by the neo-Christian merchants—acting in a quasi-monopoly—for the delivery and distribution of African slaves in the Americas.

Our study aims to present the first multidimensional typology of Ibero-American Marranism, taking into account the religious roots of this phenomenon; its cultural, economic, and social dimensions; the ways and means by which the communities which settled in Spanish America interacted with each other; and the ways

1. PhD Thesis in History, under the direction of Charles Amiel, presented at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) November 9, 2005 (two volumes, 498 pages). Members of the jury: Professors Charles Amiel (EHESS), Jonathan Israel (Institute for Advanced Studies, Princeton), Bernard Lavallé (University of Paris III-Sorbonne Nouvelle), and Rodolfo de Roux (University of Toulouse-Le Mirail). The thesis was awarded summa cum laude by the jury.
their family, religious, and trade networks were articulated with the homeland, with Africa, and with European Jewish communities.

The spatial and temporal context chosen covers the territories under the jurisdiction of the three courts of the Inquisition in Spanish America (Lima, Mexico City, and Cartagena) during the period 1569–1649. The first date is that of the foundation of the Court of Lima and thus the beginnings of the Holy Office of the Inquisition in the New World, even if repression of Marrano communities is only recorded after 1590. The second date (1649) is also somewhat arbitrary, being the date of the famous April 1649 auto-da-fé in Mexico marking the end of the inquisitorial offensive against what were known as the “Great Complicities” of Latin America, although we have progressed further into the century in order to observe the progressive slowing of inquisitorial activity.

We are aware that districts and times are labile and uncertain, that interference and transfers are multiple and complex, and that to fix Marranism within national boundaries or inquisitorial districts risks oversimplifying a phenomenon that occurred on a worldwide scale. The changes produced by the expulsions from Spain in 1492 had given birth to a new situation. The legal emancipation of neo-Christians and the settlement of Jewish communities in the eastern Mediterranean allowed these new actors to participate in the three trade routes between Spain, the Ottoman Empire, and Portugal, around which mercantilism became reorganized at the dawn of the sixteenth century. From then on, Jews and neo-Christians—from the Iberian world, and often their parents or relatives—found themselves in a position to participate in long-distance trade.

Pioneers of trade bringing in goods from around the world, these men were tireless travelers. Appearing on one date as traders in the suburbs of Manila, they would turn up a few months later in Cuzco, in Lisbon, or in Acapulco. Another, a slave trader between Cartagena and the mouth of the Niger, was convicted by the court in Lima before becoming a successful trader in Rouen. The nomadic lifestyle of these merchants, immersed as they were in transoceanic trade, would eventually lead them to lose their social bonds with the Judaizer communities. Their adventurous lives therefore render them rather too unstable for study to the historian of religious phenomena.
For this reason, we focus on observations of more or less well-organized familial migrations that allowed Marrano traditions to be preserved. From among the hundreds of cases tried in America, we have endeavored to generate a model representative of the diaspora, consistent with its origin and the stable practice of Marranism. Examining the 617 cases of Judaizers condemned by the Inquisition in the Americas between 1569 and 1669 has allowed us to identify a control group originating in communities of the district of Castelo Branco in Portuguese Beira Baixa. This area, which shares a frontier with Spain, was home to a community of men and women related by endogamous marriage practices and the practice of Judaism, which had endured since the Middle Ages. With the prohibition of the Jewish religion and the creation of the Portuguese Inquisition, a large section of the neo-Christian community of this region continued its traditional practices, albeit henceforth in secret.

These established Castelo Branco crypto-Jewish communities would become the principal origin of Marranism in the Americas. They illustrate well the repeated migratory waves caused by the hardening of inquisitorial policy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The offensive launched in the 1580s triggered an exodus to Spain. Later, in the 1620s, when the Lisbon court stepped up the rate of repression, the rush of new Christians was such that the region’s towns and villages saw a marked depopulation.

Close examination of American inquisitorial documentation for the last decades of the sixteenth century has allowed us to bring to light this migration, vital to the history of Marranism as it became established in the Americas. Backed into a corner by inquisitorial persecution, several neo-Christian families crossed the Spanish border to settle in Seville. This exodus to the Andalusian port should not, however, be considered as a dislocation or a scattering. On the contrary, urban life facilitated religious and social contacts between Judaizers from the four corners of the Lusitanian kingdom. Collective practices found a new vigor and marriages between Judaizing families multiplied. The promulgation of the Papal Edict of Pardon in 1605 provided the respite necessary for Portuguese Marranism to take root in in Seville, from where it would radiate throughout the Ibero-American diaspora. This period made Seville the second source of American Marranism and its second memory.
A true scattering would not come about until the New World was reached, on a continent with almost infinite spaces where geographical separation would inevitably produce an explosion of different practices. Nonetheless, these two roots in Portugal and Seville remained etched into the memory of the Judaizers who left to build a new life overseas. For more than half a century, the Inquisition in the Americas dusted off old evidence of heresy such as initiations into the law of Moses in the olive groves of Castelo Branco, fasting celebrations in the backrooms of the Calle de la Sierpe, or awaiting the glittering star on the Guadalquivir, announcing the end of Yom Kippur.

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We now turn to look more closely at the main features of religious practices. The study we have conducted on the American Marrano phenomenon confirms the need to compare and contrast the multiple variables that promoted or hindered its development. First, the reproduction of a family model attached to the transmission of religious legacy in the New World. The vast majority of crypto-Jews in the New World were of Portuguese origin, and the creation of a family community differentiates their practices. Since the prohibition of Judaism, the family had become the privileged arena for such transmission, the fortress of memory. Despite their geographical proximity, the communities that settled in the New World developed in different ways. In New Spain, the Mosaic community managed to reproduce the family model, allowing the traditional practice of Marranism to generate a dynamic oriented toward population growth and the spread of these religious practices.

This is the major cleavage between the practices of Marranos in Spanish America since, even though some couples settled in Peru and the New Kingdom of Granada, only the Mexican community succeeded in creating a true family-based settlement. The Judaizer woman, the traditional conduit of Iberian Marranism, is almost impossible to find in the south of Spanish America, while she was ubiquitous in Mexico. She would make herself responsible for the protection of traditional collective practices—sometimes against the will of the men—and ensured the generational survival of Marranism. As long as the family unit was able to reproduce, Marranism lasted.
The continuity of endogamous marriages in Mexico served to bond the collective and provided a foundation conducive to the transmission of religious heritage. It may be difficult for a child growing up in a Judaizing lineage such as that originating in Castelo Branco to break with what becomes the norm. The strength of a homogeneous community succeeds in inverting values. In this familial microcosm, Judaism is the norm and Christianity the anomaly.

A second, much more complex variable is the social environment that surrounded the Marrano communities and the degree of isolation that followed from it. As an illegal practice of Judaism, Marranism remained a global phenomenon. Nonetheless we believe we can identify two epochs. When the Iberian strain of Marranism, cut off for a century from Jewish literature and contact with the rabbinical authorities, began to show signs of weakening, contacts with European Jewry revitalized practices. The first families to arrive in Mexico were still practicing the Judaism inherited from their ancestors by 1580, but the knowledge carried by travelers from European Jewish communities brought the community a second wind in the years that followed.

The practices of crypto-Jews settled in Spanish America were far from fixed. Although they retained a foundational Iberian component, they were enriched by contacts, albeit sporadic, with European Jewries and European Marrano communities. It is evident that the religious matter of Judaizers in the Americas was often the product of several Marrano origins—Iberian and French—that complemented each other or were juxtaposed. We also note the arrival in the New World of travelers from Italy and Holland involved in the development of religious practices. We are thus faced with a relatively diverse doctrinal corpus that combines the Marrano tradition with normative Judaism. Mexican inquisitors themselves noted the arrival of Jews from the European “synagogues” and the favorable welcome granted to them by fervent Judaizers. The influence of Marranos from France is just as important and constant. Diego Pérez de Albuquerque and Jacinto Jorge Bazán, arrested in Mexico, grew up in France, where they had been circumcised. Leonor Núñez was indoctrinated with normative Judaism in Bordeaux and Saint-Jean-de-Luz for ten years before embarking for Mexico.
Thus, because of its familial configuration, Mexican Marranism is almost a carbon copy of the Iberian version. But what can we say about southern Spanish America? It appears that development is not the same for structured groups (as in the Mexican example) as it is for societies consisting largely of single men like those of the New Kingdom of Granada and Peru. If travelers from European Jewish communities in Mexico were organized and eager for knowledge, then those (far fewer in number) arriving in the Spanish territories in the south of the continent did not seem to affect the evolution of religious practices. Baltasar Araújo Coronel, circumcised in Venice and raised a Jew in Istanbul, sought only anonymity when he settled in the New Kingdom of Granada’s hinterland.

One can also detect tragic diversions, such as the peculiar vocation to martyrdom, the origins of which remain unclear, shown by a handful of Judaizers arrested in the south of Spanish America in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. At that time, the contrast between American Marrano communities was already very marked. While these people wandered between the Pacific coast and the Andean highlands, Mexican Marranos were practicing crypto-Jewish rites collectively. Despite the harassment of the Inquisition, family life began to establish a level of normality, and celebrations and moments of happiness are recorded. Men, women, and children gathered to engage in rituals and celebrations, while the harp of Manuel Lucena accompanied the reading of the Psalms. Even when the death of a fellow Judaizer plunged the Mexican community into bitterness, they would find comfort through open and collective consolation. Some of them, such as Ruy Díaz Nieto, imported additional knowledge from Italian Jewish communities, along with hope for a Judaism freed from the inquisitorial yoke.

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Thanks to extensive global trade networks, neo-Christian and Jewish merchants would contribute to the emergence of early economic modernity in the West, a globalization ahead of time. A modernity of contrasts in the American case, however, where the progress of the mercantile system masks forms of exploitation tied to the past, notably the reinvention of the slavery of Antiquity. The African slave trade to the Americas, one of the few activities that
provided social promotion for the Portuguese after the union of the Iberian crowns, became the preserve of neo-Christians. The *asiento*, a contract awarded by the Crown to introduce a number of slaves into the New World and enjoyed by the Portuguese between 1595 and 1640, was a business controlled from one end of the chain to the other by neo-Christians. Although the Portuguese secession temporarily distanced them from the Hispano-American market, the rise of the Amsterdam Jewish community and the taking of Curaçao would eventually allow them a path back into the Caribbean.

The enormous economic power that the neo-Christian slave traders acquired during the Portuguese *asiento* derived from the effectiveness of a trade network spread on both sides of the Atlantic, the hinge of which was Cartagena. In this peripheral space, traditions were quick to diverge. Travel within the African continent or during long transoceanic crossings would prevent contact not only with the rabbinical authorities but also—a fact essential for the preservation of Marranism—with Judaizer women. Essentially an underworld, the slave trade was a male-dominated practice. The Judaizer men, at large in the African-American world related to the slave trade, took black and mulatto women as concubines, with whom they produced mulatto children, breaking with the endogamous practices characteristic of medieval Judaism, a feature which was duplicated on both sides of the Atlantic.

The participation of the neo-Christians in the different commercial domains of the slave trade would lead to racial mixing, and brought about many conversions to Judaism in Africa and in the Caribbean area. The few cases of slaves converted to Judaism listed by the Inquisition in the Americas are only the tip of the iceberg. The disquiet of the Cartagena inquisitors in the face of so many slaves “recklessly” embracing the faith of their masters suggests that proselytizing by the slave traders was far from being a marginal phenomenon. Mixing of races by the Portuguese *lancados* had begun early on the West African slave coasts, which are so often the mirror of the Caribbean world.

The profusion of contacts with the African population would also leave its mark on the mores of Marrano communities from Castelo Branco, an evolution that is all the more interesting in that this was a community from a rural environment, far from the cosmopolitanism
that surrounds the neo-Christians of Lisbon or Porto. Already, in Seville, the first contacts with the African population, although they were still limited at this time, would disrupt traditions and generate previously unseen relationships. Far from the Lusitanian province which had facilitated the creation of an exclusively neo-Christian community, Marranism adapted and opened up timidly to new ideas. Henceforth, under certain conditions, exogenous ideas were admitted. Transmission by blood, the pillar of the exclusion policy conducted by the monarchy, permeated the Marrano imagination, but this time the myth of blood created openings. Thus, children born of relations between a Jew and a slave may have been converted to Judaism because, as the “dogmatist” Blanca Enríquez often repeats, “tienen sangre nuestra.” One family line, the mixed-race issue of Isabelle, a slave girl from Guinea, and a neo-Christian man, became one of the most well known in the Americas. The daughter, Esperanza Rodríguez, a mulatto, adopted the Jewish religion from her earliest childhood, as did the granddaughters, Juana, born in Cartagena and Maria, born in Acapulco, all three of whom were convicted by the Holy Office.

Developing a profile of the Marrano phenomenon in the Americas seems impossible, so variable are the practices from one jurisdiction to another and from one situation to another. However, the inquisitorial documentation allows us to sketch some general features of the Marrano communities established in the New World. Firstly, with regard to their structure, they did not form a unified set. The Mexican family model led to the emergence of a generation of Marranos born on American soil. Among the Judaizers tried in Spanish America during the first half of the seventeenth century, forty-four were born in New Spain.

Only nine came into the world in Peru (of which half actually grew up in Mexico) and barely two were born in the New Kingdom of Granada.

One of the important moments in the history of American Marranism, the repressive wave of 1635–1649, allows us to identify a little better the geographical distribution of Marrano communities. The absence of denunciations against Mexican Judaizers among the hundreds extracted during the Peruvian “Great Complicity” of 1635–1639, shows a rather distinct separation between the Mexican
and Peruvian communities. On the other hand, the relationship between Lima and Cartagena is very tight, such that one can speak of a single community united by ties of trade and kinship. Nineteen witness statements extracted in Lima against the Judaizers of Cartagena were presented at the New Granada court, and a similar number were made in New Granada against the Judaizers of Lima. The Mexican repression actually had more impact on the Judaizers of Seville, so strong and abiding were the trade and family links between the Andalusian and Mexican communities. The communities of Lima and Cartagena also naturally looked to Seville but also had a close relationship with the Portuguese enclaves in Africa. A large number of those accused and arrested in the south of the continent arrived from Angola, Guinea, and Sao Tome, where in many cases they had engaged in Jewish practices.

The number of trials before the Inquisition of the Americas gives us an immediate idea of the hierarchy of the courts. Between 1570 and 1700 the court of Mexico heard 1,933 cases, the court of Lima 1,176, and that of Cartagena (for the 1610–1700 period) 731. Our statistics regarding the cases heard against Judaizers confirm this proportion: the court of Mexico delivered 379 judgments, the court of Lima 223, and the court of Cartagena eighty-one.

Repression of the Judaizers was only a small percentage of the overall activity of the Inquisition of the Americas: 18% in Lima, 12% in Cartagena, and close to 10% in Mexico. However, these figures are misleading because the action of the Inquisition predominately targeted the neo-Christian community, upon which the full force of punishment fell. Death sentences represented only 1.7% of those imposed by the Mexican court—a small percentage which overlaps those of other metropolitan courts. But the raw numbers do not make sense if they are not correlated with the type of crime involved, as is argued well by Charles Amiel in his works, particularly on the subject of Goa. Consider, for example, the offenses for which those who suffered death were convicted. Of forty condemnations to the stake handed down to living people by the Mexican court between 1569 and 1669, the Judaizers represent 75%, 12.5% are Protestants, and the remaining 12.5% are unspecified heretics, with one “false priest” among them. A total of 103 individuals were relaxed in effigy, of which 99% were Judaizers. The state of research
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is currently not advanced enough to see clearly, particularly with regard to a systematic study of sentences, but it appears that the Judaizers also constitute a large majority of those condemned to the galleys, to life imprisonment, and to banishment.

Sentences of the Lima court confirm the Mexican trends. Between the foundation of the court in 1569 and 1664, thirty-one condemnations to the stake were pronounced against living people: 71% were Judaizers, 19% Protestant, 6% accused of (heretical) “propositions,” and 3% were accused of belonging to the alumbrado sect. All of those sentenced to death in absentia were Judaizers, a sentence that was far from symbolic, for it allowed the court to take possession of the deceased or convicted fugitive’s wealth while his descendants would be marked with the seal of ignominy. The conclusions we can draw from the court of Cartagena are very limited since, during the seventeenth century, only two death sentences were pronounced against living people: one against a Judaizer and one against a Protestant. The two effigies burned during this period both represented Judaizers.

According to our statistics, between 1569 and 1669 the Inquisition of the Americas burned in the flesh fifty-four people accused of Judaism (7.9% of the number of sentences pronounced against Judaizers), while 116 were burned in effigy (16.9%). It is clear that the majority of the accused were reconciled, absolved, or pardoned. Although severe punishment was applied to cases of recidivism, the Holy Office reinstated into the bosom of the Church those who showed signs of repentance. Often those who were reconciled regained their former prestige once their sentences were served and they went on to become trusted men of the Spanish Court.

The numbers cited must nevertheless be treated with caution. Although the Inquisition was a monolithic and vertically-organized institution governed by a legal framework, the far-distant situation of the American courts meant that the inquisitors enjoyed a certain measure of autonomy. Furthermore, it is important to take in to consideration the environment surrounding each one of the courts. The Holy Offices acting in Lima and Mexico, two poles of American colonization with universities and colonial capitals, were not the same as that implemented in Cartagena, immersed as it was in in a world of brigands, where 1,200 Europeans cohabited with twelve
thousand African slaves, and where agents of the New Granada court often succumbed to the worst abuses.

The particular nature of the court of Cartagena comes to light in reports by inspector Pedro Medina Rico in the mid-seventeenth century. It was an institution mired in corruption, amid a city that seemed lost in time. Pedro Medina Rico himself concluded one of his letters with a complaint, trivial but very telling of the pitiful state in which the land found itself because of the designs of the monarchy:

In Cartagena no clock is to be found, only soldiers of the garrison, a bell in hand, being responsible for sounding the hour whenever they see fit. The moments are few and far between that the men of the Office are all present. Ministers and officials are reluctant to arrive on time, some through laziness, others so as not to have to wait for their colleagues and they are impatient, all, when finally assembled, to hear the arbitrary bell that sounds the end of the day.

Our study thus leads to a number of conclusions, and we summarize below the most important of them:

– There is a distinct difference in style between the three American territorial units placed under the supervision of the Holy Office, both for religious practice and for the forms of expression of neo-Christian communities. To the familial model developed in Mexico, ensuring the generational continuation of the community and the encouragement of collective practices, is contrasted those of the Caribbean and Spanish South America, which consisted almost exclusively of men.

– Through careful genealogical study, we have demonstrated the Portuguese predominance in the geographical origin of crypto-Jews in the Americas as well as the importance of the Castelo Branco district, the birthplace of some of the main Marrano family lines.

– At the end of the sixteenth century these families, from a rural environment, began a migratory movement punctuated by the Portuguese Inquisition’s offensives. In short order, Seville became consolidated as one of the strongholds of Iberian Marranism and ultimately became its exit door to the New World.

– Distribution of inquisitorial and administrative funds allows us to deduce that during the asiento granted by the Spanish Crown to the Portuguese between 1595 and 1640, the neo-Christians had a virtual monopoly on the slave trade. This proximity led to the
breeding of neo-Christian merchants with black women, marking a break with the typical endogamous marriage patterns of Iberian Marranism.

– Although Marrano practices retained a founding Iberian component, religious material was enriched by contacts with European Jewish communities from the Netherlands, Italy, and the tolerated Marrano communities of France that came from Rouen and the Southwest. Therefore, we are faced with a doctrinal corpus combining Marrano traditions and normative Judaism.

– The inquisitorial movement in the Americas presents a narrative arc common to the three courts (two periods of severe repression separated by a brief respite due to the papal brief of 1605) although the application of inquisitorial policy shows significant variations (as noted above) across the territory.

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After leaving the back country and hinterland of the Portuguese provinces, Marrano communities found themselves facing a new world.

A century after the ban on Judaism, they continued to be attached to their ancestral religion, a religion that time and the risk of persecution threatened to condemn to oblivion with each passing day. Overseas, the People of the Book became a people of memory. The Castelo Branco community is but a sample of the Marrano world, but one which illustrates the range of destinies that forged the Americas. Within the same lineage, the martyr and the renegade walked side by side, the man of influence and the seamstress, the slave and the physician. At the opposite ends of this spectrum are found two iconic characters of the tension between the two religions, the clash between assimilation and continuation: the informant and the “dogmatist.” Colonial America exhibited no lack of paradoxes. Sometimes the persecuted lived upon the misery of slaves, fervent Judaizers engaged in libertine loves while bishops and inquisitors were treated by the magic of known witches. An exuberant continent where the frontiers declared in the distant metropolis become blurred. In this New World, under construction, the fate of Judaizers and inquisitors was irretrievably intertwined. The antagonists were bound together by a dialectic that ceaselessly placed them in
opposition but often drew them together. The most severe inquisitors in Cartagena often became faithful friends and dedicated partners of former convicts. In Mexico, committed Judaizers over time became zealous employees of the Holy Office, crypto-Christians among the crypto-Jews. This game of mirrors was a disturbing one: while Judaizer family lines perpetuated Jewish traditions, the Inquisition also availed itself of families dedicated to the fight against heresy, such as the Mañozca family, which handed over eighteen of its own children to troops of the Office. Finally, as an example of high irony, the memory of Marranism would be saved by the funds of the Holy Office, an institution created with the sole purpose of eliminating it.  

2. This thesis has since been published: Ricardo Escobar Quevedo, *Inquisición y judaizantes en América española (siglos XVI-XVII)* (Bogotá: Universidad del Rosario, 2008). The author is currently chargé de conférences (convener) at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Sciences religieuses), Paris.