



Project CORPI

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FINAL ACTIVITY REPORT

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Project CORPI
[Final Activity Report](#)

— Mercedes García-Arenal, Teresa Madrid Álvarez-Piñer – 2019—

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PARTICIPANTS

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This report summarizes the scientific production of the CORPI Project, “Conversion, Overlapping Religiosities, Polemics and Interaction. Early Modern Iberia and Beyond.” Funded by FP7-IDEAS-ERC —European Research Council under the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme— ERC Advanced Grant 2013 (grant agreement n° 323316). Its Principal Investigator was Mercedes García-Arenal, and it was executed between 2013-04-01 and 2019-03-31.

The project’s host institution was ILC-CSIC (Madrid). It was the venue of numerous seminars and scientific meetings that brought together leading academics, as well as young researchers and scholars from other disciplines. In addition, the members of CORPI participated in international meetings, and established collaborations with related projects in the field.

CORPI explored the following lines of research: Religious Polemics; Doubt and Unbelief; Prophecy and Millenarianism; and Race. The outcomes of these lines of inquiries — publications, seminars and conferences, as well as Knowledge and technology transfer — are listed in this report.

MEMBERS:

- Mercedes García-Arenal (Research Professor at ILC-CCHS, CSIC Madrid)
- Fernando Rodríguez Mediano (Research Scientist / Investigador Científico)
- Carlos Cañete (Post doctoral researcher)
- Katarzyna K. Starczewska (Post doctoral researcher)
- Teresa Soto González (Early Stage Researcher)
- Eduardo Fernández Guerrero (Early Stage Researcher)
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EXTERNAL PARTICIPANTS:

- Jessica Fowler (Post doctoral external researcher)
- Davide Scotto (Post doctoral external researcher)
- Mònica Colominas Aparicio (Post doctoral external researcher)
- Fatma Sinem Eryilmaz (Post doctoral external researcher)
- Manuel Montoza Coca (Post doctoral external researcher)
- Yonatan Glazer-Eytan (external researcher)
- Gloria Vezzosi (external researcher)
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ADVISORS:

- Gerard Wiegers: Professor of Religious Studies. University of Amsterdam, Faculty of Humanities
- David Nirenberg: Deborah R. and Edgar D. Jannotta Professor of Medieval History and Social Thought at the University of Chicago, and the director of the university's Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society.
- Pier Mattia Tommasino: Assistant professor of Italian and Mediterranean Studies at Columbia University of New York City.
- Stefania Pastore: Associate Professor of early modern History and European Renaissance History. Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa.
- Felipe Pereda: Fernando Zóbel de Ayala Professor of Spanish Art, Department of History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University.
- Fernando Bouza: Full Professor –Chair–, Department of [Early] Modern History. Universidad Complutense de Madrid.
- Esperanza Alfonso Carro: Científica titular, Instituto de Lenguas y Culturas del Mediterráneo y Oriente Próximo - CCHS, CSIC.



SUMMARY REPORT

CORPI has been dedicated to studying early modern Iberia's singular social and religious trajectory, focusing in particular on the far-reaching effects of the mass forced conversions of Jews and Muslims that had taken place since the end of the 14th century and culminated a century later with the forced conversion and expulsion of Jews (1492) and of Muslims (1502). During this crucial period, Iberia was transformed from the religiously plural society that it had been during the Middle Ages into a mono-confessional one.

The consequences of forced conversion, including the establishment of the Inquisition, have been reconsidered in this Advanced Grant around four axes: religious polemics, doubt and unbelief, prophecy and millenarianism, and race. An international conference was organized for each of the four axes, and each has been the subject of at least one monograph published in an important peer-reviewed academic press. The members of the team, which included postgraduate students as well as seasoned researchers, have participated in the conferences, published in the volumes, and have made presentations (often subsequently published) in the monthly seminars we have been conducting at CORPI. Each of these books has been edited by the PI Mercedes García-Arenal along with one of the external Professors of CORPI. All were subjected to internal review and discussion and form coherent volumes. The quality of the publishing houses and of the reviews that have been received attest to their quality, innovation and originality.

RELIGIOUS POLEMICS

- Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard A. Wiegers (eds). *Polemical Encounters: Polemics between Christians, Jews and Muslims in Iberia and beyond*. University Park: Penn State University Press, 2019.
- Mercedes García-Arenal, Gerard Wiegers and Ryan Szpiech (eds). *Interreligious Encounters in Polemics between Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Iberia and Beyond*. Leiden: Brill, 2019 [originally published as vol. 24, no. 1–3 (2018) of Brill's journal *Medieval Encounters*]

- Mònica Colominas Aparicio. *The Religious Polemics of the Muslims of Late Medieval Christian Iberia*. The Medieval and Early Modern Iberian World, 64. Leiden: Brill, 2018.
- Ibn Zikri, *Rashf al-Darab fi fadl Bani Isra'il wa-l-Arab*. Edited with introduction and notes by Paul Fenton. Madrid: CSIC, 2016.
- Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld, Qasim al-Samarrai, and Gerard Wiegers. *Kitab Nasir al-Din ala 'l-qawm al-kafirin = The supporter of religion against the infidels*. General introduction, critical edition and annotated translation, re-edited, revised, and updated in the light of recent publications and the primitive version found in the hitherto unknown manuscript preserved in al-Azhar, by P. S. van Koningsveld, Q. al-Samarrai, and G. Wiegers. Madrid: CSIC, 2015.

This area about Polemics has revealed to be the most productive and a polemical attitude pervades all the other areas considered in this project. We dedicated a whole book to the 15th century and to the moment, previous to the establishment of the Inquisition, in which converts thought they could be Christians keeping parts of their old religion, in which the boundaries between religions were not clearly defined. We have shown how polemics is the privileged mean of tracing group and religious boundaries, and disputations against Islam or Judaism the way of defining how to be a Catholic. We have also seen how Protestantism is present in this polemical milieu forming a sort of heterology with Judaism and Islam.

DOUBT AND UNBELIEF

- Mercedes García-Arenal and Stefania Pastore (eds). *From Doubt to Unbelief: Forms of Scepticism in the Iberian World*. Oxford: Legenda, 2019.
- Mercedes García-Arenal and Barbara Fuchs (eds). *The Quest for Certainty in Early Modern Europe: From Inquisition to Inquiry, 1550–1700* (Iberian Series, University of Toronto, 2019).
- Felipe Pereda. *Crimen e ilusión. El arte de la verdad en el Siglo de Oro*. Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2017. Translated into English, *Crime and Illusion. The Art of Truth in the Spanish Golden Age*, Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 2018.



We have argued that forced conversion produced comparativism between religions and that enforced indoctrination and public disputation produced doubt, unbelief and even “popular skepticism”. To doubt and to the search for certainty we have dedicated two innovative books.

Our interest in the themes of lack of certainty, and also, as discussed by Pereda in his book, of truth, witnessing and testimony, led us to study Inquisition documentation and to organize with Giovanna Fiume a conference in Palermo, from which two publications have resulted.

- A monographic issue of the journal *Quaderni storici*: “Graffiti: New Perspectives from the Inquisitorial Prison in Palermo.” *Quaderni Storici* 157, no. 1 (2018).

And a collective volume in Italian:

- Giovanna Fiume and M. García-Arenal (eds). *Parole Prigioniere. I graffiti delle carceri del Santo Uffizio di Palermo*. Palermo: Istituto poligrafico europeo, 2018.

It also led us to explore authority and subjectivity, as dealt with in:

- Fernando Rodríguez Mediano and Carlos Cañete (eds). Monographic issue on “Interiority, Subject, Authority: Conversions and Counter-Reformation in the Construction of the Modern Subject (16th-17th Centuries).” *Culture & History* 6, n. 2 (2017).

PROPHECY AND MILLENARIANISM

We have demonstrated the “messianic contagion” of the three religions and how prophecies and messianism become a polemical subject. Most specially, how messianism and prophecy become legitimizing devices of the decrees of forced conversion. This subject has been further explored in the book *Coercion and Faith in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, to be mentioned later.

- Stefania Pastore and Mercedes García-Arenal (eds). *Visiones imperiales y profecía. Roma, España, Nuevo Mundo*. Madrid: Abada, 2018.

RACE

We have demonstrated how blood becomes a marker in Iberia for belonging to the community of Catholics. Forced conversion and the failure of evangelization created the notion of “Old Christian” in front of those large communities of “New Christians” giving new meanings to genealogy. The “blood purity statutes” associated blood with the transmission of true beliefs and produced extremely important religious and social consequences. Many theologians opposed to those consequences and to the idea of blood purity proposed means of attenuating it by defending and impulsing mixed marriages, all of which we explore in those two last and uncoming publications.

- Mercedes García-Arenal and Yonatan Glazer-Eytan (eds). “Mixed Marriages, Conversion, and the Family: Norms and Realities in Pre-modern Iberia and the Wider Mediterranean.” Monographic issue for *Mediterranean Historical Review* (2019).
- *De sangre y leche. Raza y religión en el Mundo Ibérico*, a volume to be published following the last conference of CORPI, which took place in February 2019, and still in progress, edited by García-Arenal and Felipe Pereda.

Other publications and contributions include the following:

We have also published two volumes providing general overviews of the project:

- Mercedes García-Arenal (ed). *After Conversion: Iberia and the Emergence of Modernity*. Leiden: Brill, 2016.
- Mercedes García-Arenal and Yonatan Glazer-Eytan (eds). *Coercion and Faith in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam: Forced Conversion in Premodern Iberia and Beyond*. Leiden: Brill [forthcoming 2019].

All of the above publications, although in principle categorized according to the axes from which they proceed, in fact are intertwined, continuing a dialogue among all of them and a progress in terms of ideas and the refining of arguments.



In between the monthly seminar and the large conferences we have also organized one-day workshops with around 6 participants, such as: “Regarding Tejada’s *Carrascón*” (an important Protestant work) and “Testimony and Truth in Early Modern Spain”.

We had not proposed a specific area on the translation of religious texts, but it has been an important theme throughout the project, and looms especially large in the output of Polemics. We started to get interested first in translations of the Qur’an and its place in religious polemics, but also the Qur’ans translated by the Iberian Muslims who had lost the mastering of Arabic.

- The first product of this train of research was a monographic issue of the journal *Al-Qantara* under the title “The Qur’an in Early Modern Iberia and Beyond,” edited by Pier Mattia Tommasino. *Al-Qantara* 35, no. 2 (2014).
- A conference on “Translating Sacred Texts” produced a series of important essays which have been submitted for publication in the journal *Medieval Encounters* (now under review).
- Katarzyna K. Starczewska. *Latin Translation of the Qur’an (1518/1621) Commissioned by Egidio da Viterbo. Critical Edition and Case Study*. Diskurse der Arabistik 24. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018.
- García-Arenal and Starczewska have collaborated in recent special issues of the *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* and the *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies* on Spanish translations of the Qur’an within polemical works.

Our work on the translation of sacred scriptures has been conducive to another issue of particular importance and this is the relations between shifts of language use and religious identity. To this end we organized a course on “Aljamía” (sixteenth-century Spanish written in Arabic characters), and have also explored this theme through research on translators and Arabic letters between Spain and North Africa.

The ideas explored in this line of research have served as the base for the recently funded ERC Synergy project “The European Qur’an” of which Mercedes García-Arenal is the principal coordinator.

It is novel the fact that we have been studying together Judaism, Christianity and Islam not from a comparative point of view but from the aspects of their interaction and coproduction of a new religious and social situation. It is also novel in our methodology the fact that we have been doing so from a multidisciplinary point of view. It is also a novel methodology to have considered Iberian phenomena in a wider European context.

We have systematically pursued dialogue among different disciplines (and different academic traditions within disciplines) such as social history, history of art, intellectual history, theology, law, Arabic and Islamic studies, and Jewish studies, among others. We have also brought together well-established international scholars in the wide range of fields specified above with early stage researchers. We have made a strong effort to create our particular brand of cultural and religious history, deeply rooted in social history but open to the methodologies of philology.

This effort also marked the courses we have organized, in part to train our own early stage researchers:

- “Theoretical Basis for a Cultural History” (2014, 2015)
- “Reading Texts, Reading Objects (Study of Intercultural Contacts Through Primary Sources)” (2017, 2018)
- “From *Aljamía* to the Archive: Introduction to Reading *Aljamiado* Texts” (2018).

The PhD students of the CORPI Project participated in the Semana de la Ciencia (Week of Science CCHS-CSIC) with a workshop “One God, Three Laws: Christianity, Islam and Judaism,” addressed to 14-18 years add scholar community. The sessions were focused on the theme of the three monotheistic religions, scriptures and precepts. And as outcome of the activity the materials have been made available to high school teachers as open educational resources.



Finally, CORPI members have also participated in the Master Estudios Árabes e Islámicos Contemporáneos de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (2016–17, 2017-18) provided by the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, and in the Round Tables and discussions at Casa Árabe, Madrid (2016).

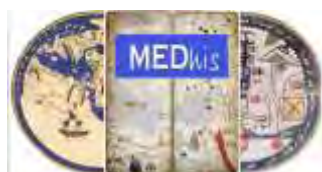
Both the seminars and the courses have enormously enhanced the research environment. The same can be said of the short as well as long-term visits of scholars who have spent time with us at the CSIC and became involved with early stage researchers and PhD students as well as in the seminars and discussions of CORPI. Among them and most notably, Miriam Bodian of the University of Texas (Austin) spent a full semester with us. We have also benefitted from the ongoing participation of and collaboration with James Amelang (UAM) and Fernando Bouza (UCM). Davide Scotto (University of Tübingen) and Jessica Fowler (University of California-Davis) have also spent time with us and their participation, together with that of Yonatan Glazer-Eytan, Johns Hopkins University, have been of capital importance. We have also hosted the stays of PhD students not funded by the project but who wrote their PhD dissertations under its auspices such as Marco Volpato (SNS), Manuel Montoza (UAB), Gloria Vezzosi (SNS), Tugba Otguz (Ankara University), Mónica Colominas (University of Amsterdam) and Jaime Cárdenas Isasi (University of Goettingen). All, in all the years of CORPI at the CSIC, have constituted a vibrant, energetic, and energizing intellectual environment.

The research group has been able to constitute a constructive environment from which many scholars have benefited (see for example the list of PhD thesis pursued under its auspices). One of the indicators of success is that a clear majority of CORPI members have been able to launch their careers by finding other positions and scholarships. Among them are:

- Pier Mattia Tommasino (post-doc) is now an Associate Professor at Columbia University, New York.
- Katarzyna K. Starczewska (post-doc), has obtained the very competitive “Juan de la Cierva- Incorporación”, a post-doctoral position funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Universities (2018-21).

- Carlos Cañete (post-doc) has won both a RETO grant funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science (2019-2022, total budget 134.000€) with a project on Spanish Orientalism and Africanism in Context (16th-21st centuries) and the Edward Said Fellowship (2019). He is currently teaching at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.
- Teresa Soto (2017) and Javier Albarrán (2016) have been awarded a four year FPU scholarships funded by the Ministry of Education at the University of Salamanca and the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid respectively, where they are teaching and are close to finishing their PhD.
- Jessica Fowler has a tenure track position at IE University, Segovia, Spain (2018).
- Eduardo Fernández Guerrero has won a Fellowship at the European University Institute in Florence (2017-2021).
- Mònica Colominas Aparicio was been appointed Researcher at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin. Project ‘Convivencia: Iberian to Global Dynamics, 500-1750’ within the Project ‘The Formation of Epistemic Networks and Centers of Knowledge in the Mediterranean, 5th to 16th Centuries’ (2016-2020).

CORPI has also collaborated with other projects at the CSIC from which its PhD students have also benefited. Above all, we have created a research platform or research cluster at the CSIC together with other groups on the Medieval History and Cultural History of the Mediterranean, named [MedHis](#)





IN CONCLUSION

CORPI has addressed a wide range of questions regarding the social, religious and cultural consequences of the forced conversions that took place in Iberia in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Through a series of royal decrees, Iberia was dramatically transformed from the religiously plural society that it had been during the Middle Ages into a mono-confessional one. Judaism and Islam were forbidden, as were their sacred texts. This transformation of a religiously plural society into a mono-confessional one was of tremendous consequence and took place in conjunction with the establishment of the Inquisition and with the crisis produced by the Protestant Reformation, both of which brought into question the sources of religious authority. Public indoctrination, evangelization, religious polemics—including attacks on Judaism and Islam as well as refutation of the arguments of Judaism and Islam against Catholicism—all became part of everyday life for the inhabitants of Iberia. The forced conversions made necessary a degree of disputation and evangelization that led to many of the conflicts this project has analyzed. We have demonstrated that widespread forced conversion created knowledge of, and even familiarity with, the religions of the former minorities. A paradox was that out of the circumstances forced conversion created there emerged a multiplicity of religious options, as a result of the contact with religious faiths that had previously been encapsulated within their own communities. Contact among the three religions thus affected the development of each of them in new and often unforeseeable ways. Iberia became a polemical arena and polemical social, cultural and political fields became factors in the way the three religious communities interacted in the diverse regions of the peninsula and overseas in their empires. Polemics was partly a theological discourse, but it was also a form of social practice that carried with it real consequences in the field of interreligious encounters. These included not just the changing relations among different communities of faith but also the internal apologetics of each.

We have also shown that the Christian polemical tradition's confrontational method of comparison effectively if unintentionally placed the idea of truth within a context that invited vacillation, doubt, and unbelief. We began by exploring religious polemics as a way of tracing the boundaries of Spanish Catholicism and more specifically the emergence within and around it of doubt, scepticism, and unbelief. The crisis of

identity produced by forced mass conversions touched off inner crises about the nature of Truth. Insistent and widespread efforts by both religious and civil authorities to attempt to regulate religious practices and beliefs inadvertently gave rise to anxiety, doubt, and indeterminacy over the essence of these beliefs and practices, and even over the very essence of religion itself. After forced conversion, dissimulation became the all-pervading ingredient in the cultural and religious life of early modern Spain to an unprecedented extent. The relation between dissimulation and scepticism has required a reconsideration of the broader cultural history of the Hispanic World that the project has been unraveling.

Finally, we have shown that forced conversion changed not only the idea of belief, but also that of conversion itself. Since from the outset forced converts were not expected to be good Christians (a presupposition that clearly undermined belief in the transforming capacities of Baptism) and after creating the separate social and religious category of “Old Christians” the Spanish Catholic community saw itself as a community of blood in which the notions of religion and race were increasingly intertwined.

The project has devoted considerable effort to elucidating the ideas through which forced conversion was legitimized and has explored its importance in the sphere of politics, both national and international. Thus political prophecy and especially the propagandistic self-presentation by Ferdinand and Isabella and Charles V as the Last World Emperors whose destiny was to unite the whole of humanity under the same religion, have been closely studied, among many other themes. All these aspects are novel and go beyond the state of the art. Finally, we have begun to identify and trace the development of similar ideas and processes in other areas of European, especially Italy and France. Our aim here has been to explore a new historiographical point of view which reveals the many and unexpected ways in which Catholic Europe contributed to the European “crisis of knowledge” along with other processes that have been considered as marking the way to Modernity.