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Eighteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro

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Abstract

This working paper is a study of a black woman from Angola named Mariana Pequena who was exported to Rio de Janeiro in the late seventeenth century. After obtaining her freedom in Brazil, she began a relationship with a white Portuguese New Christian. In 1711, she was accused of Judaism and condemned by the Inquisition of Lisbon for her religious beliefs. Her arrest was part of a crackdown on Rio's New Christian community in the early eighteenth century. Exploring a little known aspect of Africans' religious experience in the Portuguese colonial world, this paper seeks to answer why and how Mariana Pequena chose to convert to Judaism. In her confession, she revealed the full extent of her personal network, which included many fellow believers. Albeit a rare case, Mariana was not the only black African to become a Jew in the early modern world. In this paper, Mariana's case is contextualized in the wider Black Atlantic world. It shows that Africans in the Diaspora did not necessarily have to adhere to their ancestral religious traditions or to their masters' Christian religion but could make other choices based on their personal circumstances.

Keywords

Colonial Brazil, New Christians, Portuguese Inquisition, Judaism, slavery

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The Inquisition of Lisbon cracked down hard on the New Christian community of Rio de Janeiro in the first four decades of the eighteenth century, imprisoning 325 people accused of the heresy of Judaism. A slight majority (167) of the prisoners were women, some of them representing long-established families present in Rio de Janeiro since the early seventeenth century.¹ While the majority of the accused women were clearly *crístãs-novas*, or New Christians with Jewish ancestry, born in Rio de Janeiro, one of the imprisoned stands out. This was Mariana Pequena, a freed black who came from Angola. Mariana was denounced by 12 accused New Christians, four men and eight women, who were interrogated during the spring and summer of 1711. Following the prisoners' confessions, orders were sent to Rio de Janeiro to arrest Mariana Pequena. In October 1712, the Inquisitors received her in Lisbon and her trial commenced. This paper concentrates on Mariana's trial proceedings, but also points to other similar cases that can offer valuable information on the religious choices of Africans and their descendants in the Portuguese colonial world. As Carlo Ginzburg, Luiz Mott and James Sweet have shown, individual Inquisition proceedings are extremely important sources for understanding how early modern men and women conceptualized their material and spiritual world.²

Following the expulsion of Jews from Spain, and their forced conversion to Catholicism in Portugal in the late fifteenth century, the Iberian Atlantic witnessed the rapid dispersal of Judeoconvertos to Africa and the Americas.³ People of Jewish descent played central roles in the development of Atlantic commerce. Through their personal networks, Jewish traders connected Europe and the western coast of Africa, and helped initiate the Atlantic slave trade in the sixteenth century, although their involvement in later centuries was extremely limited.⁴ Despite the prominent role of Jews and New Christians in the development of the Atlantic world, the relationship between Judeoconvertos and blacks in the early modern world has been modestly explored in the historiography, with the majority of the work concentrating on the North Atlantic.⁵ While the role of

¹ These numbers are based on Lina Gorenstein, *A inquisição contra as mulheres: Rio de Janeiro, séculos XVII e XVIII* (São Paulo: Associação Editorial Humanitas & Fapesp, 2005), pp. 72-74. For a list of all prisoners captured by the Inquisition in Brazil, see Anita Novinsky, *Inquisição: prisioneiros do Brasil – séculos XVI-XIX* (Rio de Janeiro: Expressão e Cultura, 2002).

² Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village, 1294-1324* (London: Scolar, 1978); Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Luiz Mott, *Rosa Egípcia, uma santa africana no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Bertrand Brasil, 1993); James Sweet, *Domíngos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

³ On the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, see Joseph Pérez, *History of a Tragedy: The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Haim Beinart, *The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001); Moshe Lazar & Stephen Haliczer, eds., *The Jews of Spain and the Expulsion of 1492* (Lancaster, CA: Labyrinthos, 1997); Norman Roth, *Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995). On the forced conversion of Jews in Portugal in 1497, see François Soyer, *The Persecution of the Jews and Muslims of Portugal: King Manuel I and the End of Religious Tolerance (1496-7)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

⁴ Toby Green, *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300-1589* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Peter Mark & José da Silva Horta, *The Forgotten Diaspora: Jewish Communities in West Africa and the Making of the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Jonathan Israel, *Diasporas within a Diaspora: Jews, Crypto-Jews and the World Maritime Empires (1540-1740)* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Seymour Drescher, "Jews and New Christians in the Atlantic Slave Trade," in Paolo Bernardini & Norman Fiering, eds., *The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West 1450-1800*, pp. 439-470 (New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2001).

⁵ Robert Cohen, *Jews in Another Environment: Surinam in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1991); Eli Faber, *Jews, Slaves, and the Slave Trade: Setting the Records Straight* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998); Saul S. Friedman, *Jews and the American Slave Trade* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998); Maurianne Adams & John Brace, eds., *Strangers & Neighbors: Relations between Blacks & Jews in the United States* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999); Mordehay Arbell, *The Jewish Nation of the Caribbean: The*

conversos and their descendants in the southern Atlantic world, especially in Brazil, was very important, most of the work done on New Christians in the Portuguese colonial sphere concentrates on their persecution with very little attention paid to their race relations with African slaves.⁶ This question has only recently been explored in a comparative Iberian Atlantic framework by Jonathan Schorsch.⁷

Although Mariana Pequena was the only African-born individual imprisoned in Rio de Janeiro for Judaism, there were eight descendants of Africans among the accused. One of them, Mariana de Andrade, was imprisoned at the same time as in Mariana Pequena, while the rest were taken to Lisbon between 1714 and 1716. Five of them were men. Some of these individuals were slaves or freed slaves (*forros/as*) like Mariana Pequena but at least one of the men was educated as a medical doctor (*médico*). One of the women, Inês de Paredes, was married to a sugar plantation owner named João Afonso de Oliveira. Indeed, the only thing they seem to have had in common was that their mothers were black slaves and that they had been conceived outside of marriage. At least two of them – Gabriel de Paredes and Leonor Mendes – had the same father, Rodrigo Mendes de Paredes, but different mothers.⁸ In addition to those arrested in Rio de Janeiro, a tentative search of Inquisition trials in Lisbon revealed two other African women and six descendants of Africans accused of Judaism, raising the total number of cases to 17. It is therefore clear that conversion to Judaism was not a common spiritual path to Africans and their descendants in Portugal and Brazil. It was mostly limited to individuals with New Christian fathers.

These cases are important because they provide evidence with which to examine the trajectories of individuals with enslaved African mothers in the Portuguese Atlantic world. They also offer the possibility to reevaluate several overriding contentions in the historiography of Jews and blacks in the early modern world as well as of the Inquisition. Because the studies of relationships between Jews and blacks have for the most part concentrated on Europe and on the Northern Atlantic, an important segment of this interaction in the southern Atlantic has been overlooked. Although Mariana's inclusion in the New Christian spiritual community in Rio de Janeiro is an important indicator of racial attitudes in the Portuguese colonial world, there are no indications of mass conversions of Africans to Judaism in Brazil, and it is questionable whether the New Christians operating in the Portuguese colonial world in the southern Atlantic demonstrated a greater degree of racial flexibility than Jews residing in the Dutch and British northern Atlantic.⁹ Portuguese society of the time certainly cannot be characterized as more tolerant, as the persecution of the New Christians by the tribunals of the Inquisition makes evident, although tolerance was an important part of popular

(Contd.)

Spanish-Portuguese Jewish Settlements in the Caribbean and the Guianas (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2002); Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Aviva Ben-Ur, "A Matriarchal Matter: Slavery, Conversion, and Upward Mobility in Suriname's Jewish Community," in Richard L. Kagan & Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500-1800*, pp. 152-169 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

⁶ Sonia A. Siqueira, *A Inquisição Portuguesa e a Sociedade Colonial* (São Paulo: Ática, 1978); Bruno Feitler, *Inquisition, juifs et nouveaux-chrétiens au Brésil* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003); idem., *Nas malhas da consciência: Igreja e Inquisição no Brasil – Nordeste 1640-1750* (São Paulo: Phoebus/Alameda, 2007); Ronaldo Vainfas, Bruno Feitler & Lana Lage da Gama Lima, eds., *A Inquisição em xeque: temas, controvérsias, estudos de caso* (Rio de Janeiro: EdUERJ, 2006).

⁷ Jonathan Schorsch, *Swimming the Christian Atlantic: Judeoconversos, Afroiberians and Amerindians in the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). See also Pollyana Vieira Lopes, "Escravidão e práticas judaizantes no Rio de Janeiro do século XVIII," a paper presented at the Simpósio Internacional de Estudos Inquisitoriais, Salvador, Brazil, August 2011.

⁸ Filipe de Mendonça, 60 years old and born in São Paulo, named Luís Paredes like his father, and Inês de Paredes, 40 years old and born in Rio de Janeiro, named Luís de Paredes like her father, but it remains to be confirmed if this was the same Luís.

⁹ The concept of "social and ethnic democracy" in Brazilian history was formulated by Gilberto Freyre in *Casa Grande e Senzala* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Oficial, 1933) and *Sobrados e Mucambos* (Rio de Janeiro, 1936). Treatment of slaves in Protestant North America and Catholic Latin America was treated comparatively in Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen* (New York: A.A.Knopf, 1947). Freyre's and Tannenbaum's ideas have been criticized by anglophone historians such as David Brion Davis and Charles Boxer, and Brazilian social scientists of subsequent generations, starting with Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Octávio Ianni and Emilia Viotti da Costa in the 1960s.

culture in the Iberian Atlantic.¹⁰ Another contested argument concerns the economic motives behind the Inquisition trials against alleged Jews. A significant interpretation in the historiography of the Inquisition held that the institution attacked New Christians because these were wealthy merchants and that by confiscating their wealth, the Church was able to enrich its coffers.¹¹ This was clearly not the case with Mariana Pequena and many others, who were poor and without prospects in colonial society.

As is often the case in Inquisition documentation, Mariana Pequena's trial is methodologically problematic. Although 12 *fluminense* New Christians denounced Mariana, their depositions differed substantially from Mariana's confession. While the witnesses stressed the role of Mariana's former owner, Maria de Andrade, in her conversion, she herself laid the emphasis on her lover's role in her initiation into Jewish religious life. However, there is very little information on Mariana's possible additional motivations for her conversion to Judaism and it is very hard to evaluate whether her choices were spiritual (sincere affection for her adopted religion) or pragmatic (a felt need to be assimilated into a foreign community, a convenient means of gaining liberty), or a combination of factors. Furthermore, the highly formulaic nature of Inquisition depositions makes it difficult to decipher how deep the relationships cultivated by Mariana and her New Christian coreligionists were. However, the documentation is valuable in revealing new paths for the study of African slaves' interaction with their New Christian masters, and eventually, coreligionists.

Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern Atlantic World

In theory, the owning of slaves by Jews was regulated by *halakha*, the field of Jewish legal reasoning and rulings. The common understanding was that slaves were to be converted because it was believed that Judaism was better for them. The circumcision of male slaves was the major prerequisite for the slaves of Jews, although over time *halakha* made allowances for Jews who wished to earn a living through the trading of slaves. Early *halakha* also stated that both male and female slaves, who were purchased, needed to be ritually immersed in order to become slaves in a Jewish household. Manumitted slaves required a second ritual immersion in order to meet the requirements for full conversion, and to ensure the distinction between fully Jewish free persons and slaves. Ritual immersion did not mean that slaves were fully integrated into the Jewish community, but instead were introduced to a liminal and quasi-Jewish status. Therefore, it was forbidden for free Jews to have sexual relations with, or marry, their slaves. In practice, however, there were countervailing pressures against the conversion of slaves. Related to the ritual factors peculiar to Jewish law, many Jewish households maintained a non-Jewish servant who could perform tasks on the Sabbath that were forbidden to Jews. The complexities of *halakha* also played a role in the non-inclusion of slaves from a religious perspective, and many Jewish communities failed to observe precepts pertaining to slaves.¹²

Schorsch has argued that the conditions and obligations of black slaves in Mediterranean or European Jewish households differed hardly at all from those of slaves in non-Jewish homes. Black slaves under Jewish ownership served primarily in domestic functions and, less frequently, as commercial appointees in the Muslim eastern Mediterranean. While there were instances of Jewish masters who concerned themselves with, and observed, the Jewish law covering the owning of slaves, differences of opinion reigned in the Sephardic communities over whether or not the laws regarding non-Jewish slaves continued to be in force. The choices of early modern Jewish slave owners depended on the rabbis they followed, with many arguing that slaves need not be converted or circumcised.¹³

¹⁰ Stuart Schwartz, *All Can Be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009).

¹¹ Antonio José Saraiva, *The Marrano Factory: The Portuguese Inquisition and Its New Christians 1536-1765* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

¹² Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks*, pp. 75-78.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-74, 79.

The rise of the Atlantic slave trade and racial slavery in the Americas led to much harder attitudes towards the conversion of blacks. Schorsch has noted that very little is known about the religious life of slaves belonging to Dutch and British Jews in South America and the Caribbean. It is unlikely that circumcision was practised by the Jews of Curaçao and Surinam, or in the English territories, and certainly the majority of slaves belonging to Jews remained unconverted. In these colonies, some slaves and freed slaves participated in community religious rituals and life-cycle events of their masters but their position was peripheral. Only in Curaçao and Surinam did slaves participate in limited ways in the ritual life of their owners. They were also allowed to rest on the Sabbath and on festival days. However, anti-black sentiments and the social exclusion of non-Whites meant that slaves were kept at a distance from the religion of their Sephardim masters.¹⁴ In the Iberian Atlantic world, it is difficult to prove that crypto-Jewish masters “converted” their slaves. According to Schorsch, it is more likely that slaves who participated in crypto-Jewish customs did so unaware of their significance.¹⁵

In Europe, the relationships between Jews and blacks also changed over time. As Dienke Hondius has demonstrated, evidence from the Netherlands shows that the position of Black Africans, and especially their right to burial, was contested within the Jewish community of Amsterdam. The Portuguese Jews established a cemetery called Beth Haim in Ouderkerk aan de Amstel, near Amsterdam, in 1614. In theory, the Jews could not refuse the burial of anyone from their community, but within the limited space of the cemetery, people were buried within the fence, against the fence, or just outside the fence. An ordinance from 1627 stated that blacks and mulattoes were to be buried outside the fence, but this rule was reversed in 1647, when blacks and mulattoes were given a specific, separate place within the cemetery. Marriages between black and white Jews were allowed and the offspring of these unions as well as blacks who were born Jewish could now be buried in a regular row of the cemetery. However, around the mid-seventeenth century the participation of black Jews in ritual life of the community was restricted in other ways. In 1644, it was decreed forbidden for black Jews to be called for the Torah, or to carry out any other ceremonial acts in the synagogue. A ruling made in 1650 stated that only persons of Portuguese and Spanish origin may be circumcised, or allowed to enter the ritual bath, explicitly excluding blacks and mulattoes.¹⁶

Around the same time as the Portuguese Jewish community in Amsterdam was becoming more organized, Portuguese New Christians were actively building a trading community in Senegambia. These diaspora communities were in close connection and the Portuguese Sephardic community in the Netherlands played a key role in the establishment of Jewish communities in Upper Guinea in the early seventeenth century. Peter Mark and José da Silva Horta have recently argued that identity in Senegambia at this time was remarkably fluid, with individuals often holding multiple identities. To be considered “Portuguese” in this region was to be a long-distance trader, to be Christian, to speak Portuguese or Portuguese Crioulo, to wear European clothing and to live in so-called Portuguese style houses. Hence, membership in the “Portuguese” community was not determined by an individual’s skin colour. Jewish traders living in Senegambia converted their African household servants to Judaism without any apparent concern about their skin colour. They exhibited openness to mixing, and incorporated both African and Eurafrikan members into their ranks.¹⁷

Traditional Jewish law, and reigning secular law in the Christian world, strongly forbade a sexual relationship between Jews and gentiles. *Halakha* also forbade sex between masters and their maidservants, meaning that sex with gentile maidservants was doubly prohibited. Yet many masters believed that they could do as they pleased with their female slaves; after all, slaves were their bought property. Many cases concerning sexual relations between masters and slaves were brought to the attention of various rabbis because children resulting from such unions complicated issues of marriage

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 217-253.

¹⁵ Scorsch, *Swimming the Christian Atlantic*, p. 232.

¹⁶ Dienke Hondius, “Black Africans in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam.” *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* 31:2 (2008), pp. 87-105.

¹⁷ Mark & Horta, *The Forgotten Diaspora*, pp. 32-41, 52-61.

and inheritance. The religiosity of the slave depended on the knowledge or ignorance, and spirituality or indifference of her owner. According to Schorsch, some slaves clearly participated, to differing degrees, in the Judaism of their masters, for example in public communal functions that did not require a high degree of ritual knowledge. In the household, slaves often learned enough about dietary laws to maintain or serve in a Jewish kitchen.¹⁸

After manumission, many former maidservants married into the Jewish community. Although this was rarely the case with black slaves who had gained their freedom, many former slaves continued to affiliate with the Jewish community once in liberty, at least in Europe. In the Americas, however, it was rare that slaves were manumitted in the first place, and when they were, rates of manumission by Jews did not differ significantly from those of non-Jews.¹⁹ In this sense, Mariana Pequena was an exception. She not only gained her freedom but also continued to socialize with her former master's family, being an accepted member of the New Christian community in Rio de Janeiro.

Mariana Pequena and the New Christian Community of Rio de Janeiro

All prisoners of the Inquisition were routinely questioned about their familial background (*genealogia*) in an early state of their imprisonment. Mariana Pequena was between 40 and 50 years old when she was arrested and brought to Lisbon in October 1712, meaning that she had been born between 1660 and 1670.²⁰ She told her interrogators that she was a freed black (*preta forra*) and had been born in Angola. She did not remember the names of her parents or any other relatives, which suggests that she had been enslaved as a child.²¹ During the second half of the seventeenth century, Rio de Janeiro's slave imports were completely dominated by West Central Africans, who embarked on the middle passage in Luanda. According to the estimates in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, approximately 137,500 slaves arrived in Rio in this period.²²

After her enslavement, and before being exported to Brazil, Mariana had been baptized at the principal church of "the city of Angola," or Luanda. She reported that her godfather had been a black man named Pedro, probably also a slave. Her confirmation, officiated by Bishop Dom José Barros d'Alarcão, had taken place in Rio de Janeiro, with Maria Mulata serving as her godmother. The Bishopric of Rio de Janeiro had been created in 1676, with d'Alarcão serving as the second bishop from 1682 (nominated 1680) until his death in 1700.²³ Confirmation usually took place when the person was 15-years old or more. Mariana said that she had never been married but did have a 20-year old son named José, a shoemaker, whose father had been a carpenter named Antonio Soares.²⁴ In her confession, Mariana said that she had been converted to Judaism 20 years earlier, in Rio de Janeiro, by a Portuguese man named Antonio da Costa, with whom she had an "illicit relationship" (*trato ilícito*).²⁵ She had thus arrived in Rio de Janeiro at least by 1690 but probably a lot earlier, given that she could have lived there several years before her confirmation.

¹⁸ Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks*, pp. 80-84.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

²⁰ In the *Confissão* dated November 23, 1712, Mariana declared to be 50 years old, but in her *Genealogia* recorded on December 15, 1712, she claimed to be 40 years old.

²¹ Although describing a later period, Karasch has argued that most African females in Rio de Janeiro were young girls or teenagers, with almost two-thirds being between ten and nineteen when they arrived. Mary Karasch, "Anastácia and the Slave Women of Rio de Janeiro," in Paul E. Lovejoy, ed., *Africans in Bondage: Studies in Slavery and the Slave Trade* (Madison: African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin, 1986), pp. 80-81.

²² <http://slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/estimates.faces> [accessed 12 December 2012]. According to the Voyages Database, there are only 11 documented voyages in this period, accounting for 2,205 slaves arriving in Rio de Janeiro. <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces> [accessed 12 December 2012].

²³ J. C. R. Milliet de Saint-Adolphe, *Diccionario geographico, historico e descriptivo, do imperio do Brazil, Volume 2* (Paris: J.P. Aillaud, 1845).

²⁴ Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Inquisição de Lisboa (hereafter ANTT, IL), processo 11786, ff. 36v-37r.

²⁵ ANTT, IL, proc. 11786, f. 29v.

During her more than 20 years of residence in Rio, Mariana had clearly established a network among the town's New Christians. Altogether 12 people, 8 women and 4 men, denounced her to the Inquisition between October 1710 and June 1711. This was a fairly common number. Gorenstein, who has calculated data on 160 prisoners, found that over a half of them (87) were denounced by less than 30 people, with 45 being denounced by less than 10 people. One denunciation was enough for imprisonment, but 10 prisoners were denounced by more than 90 people.²⁶ It is obvious that the Inquisition of Lisbon was after New Christians accused of Judaism. Of the 778 men imprisoned in Brazil, 373 (47.94%) were New Christians, whereas their proportion among the women was even higher, numbering 231 (77.51%) of 298 prisoners. Almost the same proportions – 41.39% of the men and 74.50% of the women – were accused of Judaism. The persecution of Brazilian New Christians peaked in the first half of the eighteenth century, when 268 men and 202 women were imprisoned.²⁷ According to Gorenstein, there were at least 1,118 New Christian in Rio de Janeiro the early eighteenth century, constituting 6% of the total population, and perhaps as much as 24% of the white population, in Rio de Janeiro.²⁸

All those who denounced Mariana Pequena were New Christians, who were arrested in Rio and brought to Lisbon in 1710. Most of them were linked to each other through family relationships (Figure 1). The two families to which Mariana was connected were Vale and Rodrigues Andrade. Half of the witnesses were the children of only two women: Helena do Vale and Ana do Vale. Helena do Vale's two daughters were married to their cousins, who were Ana do Vale's sons. As Gorenstein has shown, endogamy was a defining feature of Rio's New Christian community in this period.²⁹ Mariana's former mistress, Maria de Andrade, was Ana do Vale's sister-in-law. In fact, only one of the witnesses, Isabel Cardoso, was not connected to the families of Vale or Rodrigues de Andrade.

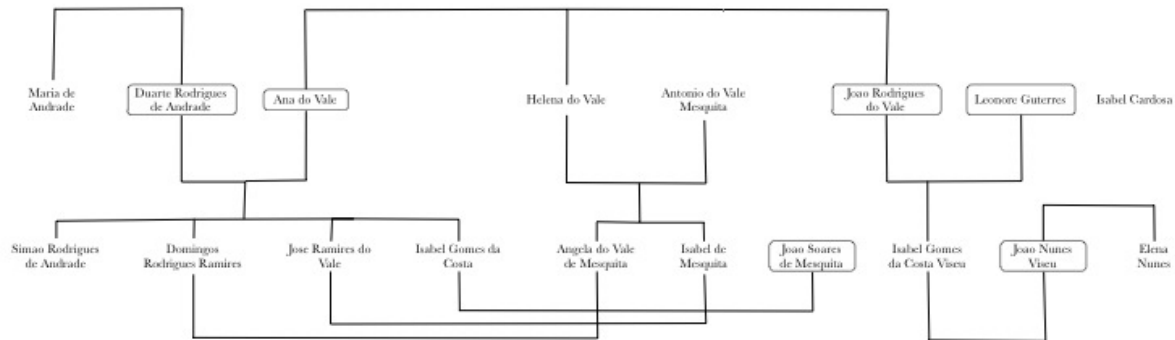


Figure 1: New Christians who denounced Mariana Pequena, showing the family relations of witnesses

Interestingly, the witnesses had a somewhat different view of Mariana's past than she herself set forth. Antonio do Vale de Mesquita, a 55-year old merchant born in Rio de Janeiro, was the first to denounce Mariana. It seems that he understood well the functioning of the Inquisition, asking for an audience and volunteering to confess soon after his arrival in Lisbon. Vale de Mesquita related that he had first come into contact with Mariana Pequena 10 years earlier in the household of Diogo Bernal and his wife Maria de Andrade. At the time, she was a slave of the named couple, although they had subsequently freed her. Bernal and Andrade had told him that Mariana "lived in the law of Moses, because they had taught her." Four years after this initial encounter, Mariana had visited Vale de Mesquita's home and together they had declared that they "lived in the law of Moses." Mariana had

²⁶ Gorenstein, *A inquisição contra as mulheres*, p. 126.

²⁷ Novinsky, *Inquisição: prisioneiros*, pp. 33-39.

²⁸ Gorenstein, *A inquisição contra as mulheres*, p. 113.

²⁹ Gorenstein, *A inquisição contra as mulheres*, p. 79.

also confided that she fasted according to the Jewish tradition.³⁰ In contrast to Vale de Mesquita, Mariana's former mistress, Maria de Andrade, was not reluctant to reveal information about her former slave. She claimed that she had once, four years before her arrest, talked with Mariana about her Jewish faith, and that together "they prayed Our Father without saying Jesus at the end."³¹ Clearly, Maria de Andrade tried to argue that she had nothing to do with Mariana's conversion. This was in line with Mariana's confession.

It is unclear when Mariana gained her freedom and where she resided after that. The testimonies of Andrade siblings were all contradictory. Simão Rodrigues de Andrade said that his meeting with Mariana had taken place five years earlier in Mariana's house, yet his brother José Ramires do Vale claimed to have met her seven years earlier in Maria de Andrade's home, where she continued to live after gaining her freedom. The third brother, Domingos Rodrigues Ramires, claimed to have met Mariana six years earlier in her house in Rio de Janeiro, where they declared their faith in the law of Moses. In contrast, their sister, Isabel Gomes da Costa, said that Mariana and her son José lived in the *fazenda* of their mother, Ana do Vale.³² These depositions suggest that, after having been granted her manumission, Mariana stayed for a while with at the household of her former mistress before moving to her own apartment, or to the *fazenda* of Duarte Rodrigues de Andrade and Ana do Vale.

Isabel Gomes da Costa claimed that Mariana resided with her son, José, and this was also confirmed in Mariana's own testimony. José was definitely the son of a white man, as Mariana was identified as a *mulato* by Isabel Gomes da Costa.³³ According to Mariana, José's father had been Antonio Soares, but Mariana also claimed to have had a relationship with Antonio da Costa at the time of José's birth 20 years earlier. The Costa were a well-known New Christian family in Rio de Janeiro in the seventeenth century.³⁴ Helena do Vale, who at 70 years was the oldest witness against Mariana, added further confusion to Mariana's past by claiming that, before becoming Maria de Andrade's slave, Mariana had belonged to a man named Simão Rodrigues de Andrade.³⁵ It is possible that all three men had in fact been part of Mariana's life in Rio de Janeiro, but her own explanation of José's father raises a suspicion that she was distorting her story in order not to draw the Inquisitors' attention to her son. As the *mulato* son of a Portuguese New Christian and an African who had converted to Judaism, José would have been exposed to his parents' forbidden religion since infancy.

Indeed, several men and women with New Christian fathers and black slave mothers were imprisoned by the Inquisition in Rio de Janeiro because they had been denounced as Judaizers. One of them deserves special attention. Mariana de Andrade, who was arrested at the same time as Mariana Pequena, was the daughter of a slave named Catarina, who had also been owned by Simão Rodrigues de Andrade. She was uncertain if Simão Rodrigues was her father because, according to her testimony, her mother had been "dishonest" with several men. Mariana de Andrade testified that she had been converted to Judaism by a man named Bento Henriques da Paz. After her conversion, she was sold to Simão's brother, Domingos Rodrigues Ramires, with whom she had two children, named Antonio Rodrigues Ramires and Maria da Costa. According to Mariana, the status of New Christian and Jewish religions was passed to both son and daughter. Because they were both dead by Mariana's arrest, she did not have anything to lose in denouncing them.³⁶

After having arrived in Lisbon on October 11, 1712, Mariana Pequena began to confess her involvement with Rio's New Christians on November 23, 1712. She demonstrated knowledge of the

³⁰ ANTT, IL, proc. 11786, ff. 7r-8r. On Digo Bernal's trial, see Bartolomé Bennassar, "Une fidélité difficile : les nouveaux chrétiens de Bahia et de Rio de Janeiro aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles." *Histoire, économie et société*, 7:2 (1988), pp. 209-220.

³¹ ANTT, IL, proc. 11786, ff. 9r.

³² *Ibid.*, ff. 10v, 14v, 15v-17v.

³³ *Ibid.*, f. 16r.

³⁴ Gorenstein, *A inquisição contra as mulheres*, pp. 78-79.

³⁵ ANTT, IL, proc. 11786, f. 24v.

³⁶ ANTT, IL, proc. 11784.

Inquisition procedure, offering information that the Inquisitors were after. In her first confession, Mariana denounced 14 persons, nine of whom had also denounced Mariana. The first person she named was Antonio da Costa who, in Mariana's words, had taught her the main tenets of Judaism. Among the people she had known for a long time were also Antonio do Vale de Mesquita and her former mistress, Maria de Andrade. Mariana said that they had declared their Jewish faith together 10 years earlier, not five, as claimed by Maria de Andrade. However, Mariana did not refer to her as her former owner. Among her older friends and coreligionists Mariana also named Gracia Duarte, who was already dead, and her widower, João da Fonseca Bernal.³⁷

Although Mariana willingly confessed her involvement in Rio de Janeiro's New Christian community, there was clearly a pattern to Mariana's denunciations that must have disappointed her interrogators. She only referred to people who had already been arrested by the Inquisition or to people who were deceased. All of the nine people who had denounced Mariana, and who she in turn denounced, had already received their sentences before Mariana arrived in Lisbon. It is unclear whether she was aware of this, but at least she knew that they had all been imprisoned and that her confession probably could not hurt them anymore. This same strategy continued in her second confession in mid-December, with the difference that she named one dead person and four people who had been arrested in Rio and possibly arrived in Lisbon at the same time as she did.³⁸ This raised the number of the people Mariana denounced to 19 but, in essence, she did not reveal anything that the Inquisitors had not heard already.

The New Christians of Rio were mostly wealthy estate owners in the area, with substantial numbers of slaves. The average number of slaves among Rio's New Christian sugar and cassava planters was 15. Ana do Vale's family owned 123 slaves.³⁹ Mariana's former mistress, Maria de Andrade, had six household slaves and 12 working on her farm when she was arrested by the Inquisition.⁴⁰ As slave owners, New Christians treated their slaves like any other masters did in Rio. Slaves were considered chattel. They were freed if the slave or another interested party was willing to pay for that freedom. At least one of Rio's New Christians, José de Barros, paid for the liberty of a slave named Ursula, with whom he had children.⁴¹ However, neither Mariana Pequena nor Mariana de Andrade was freed, though they had relationships with New Christian men and bore their children.

Although slaves were to be converted to Judaism according to *halakha*, there are no indications that this ever took place to a large extent in colonial Brazil. I suspect that the main reason for this was the Inquisition. Exposing slaves to Judaism would have been a great risk in a society where New Christians were persecuted, because slaves could have denounced their owners to Inquisition commissioners. As Saunders has shown, blacks appeared frequently as witnesses before the Inquisition tribunals in Portugal, and unlike secular courts, the Inquisition accepted the testimony of a slave.⁴² In the Iberian Atlantic world, black and mulatto slaves often turned to the Inquisitions for leverage or revenge against their masters. According to Schorsch, the Iberian Inquisitions inclined to use and accept the testimony of servants and slaves against their mistresses. Some Converso families tried to avoid being denounced by being cautious concerning the loyalties of the servants they hired. But ironically, not owning a slave could also raise a suspicion that a family was Jewish.⁴³

³⁷ ANTT, IL, proc. 11786, ff. 29v-33v.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 35r-36v.

³⁹ Gorenstein, *A inquisição contra as mulheres*, pp. 183-185.

⁴⁰ Household slaves: Josepha Cabra, *costureira*, 25 years, and her daughter Anna Maria, *rendeira*, 9 years; Victoria crioula, *rendeira*, 20 years.; Paschoa moleca, *cozinheira*, 14 or 15 years old; Izabel, *negra velha*; Miguel crioulo, 18 years. Farm slaves: Manoel, João Barbeiro, Antonio, Ventura, Thomas, Francisco, Salvador, Joseph moleque do cavallo, Luzia casada com Manoel, Branca casada com João, Gracia solteira, Maria solteira. ANTT, IL, proc. 9149 (Processo de Maria de Andrade), ff. 40r-40v.

⁴¹ Gorenstein, *A inquisição contra as mulheres*, p. 200.

⁴² A. C. de C. M. Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal 1441-1555* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 159.

⁴³ Scorsch, *Swimming the Christian Atlantic*, pp. 178-188.

Mariana Pequena was an exception because she was exposed to Judaism by her lover Antonio da Costa, who clearly was trying to follow *halakha* by converting Mariana. After that, it was difficult to exclude her from the community. It is important to note that Mariana and her former owner Maria de Andrade said very little about each other in their interrogations. It is possible that this was because they did not get along, but it is just as likely that there was more to their relationship than they wanted to reveal. Although Mariana and her former owner did not say it in their confessions, it is likely that in Maria de Andrade's home she became a trusted household servant who participated in the ritual life of her owners. This would certainly have been the kind of information that prisoners did not want to reveal to the Inquisitors.

Mariana Pequena's "Faith" and Identity

Historians are acutely aware of the difficulty of defining precisely and unambiguously whether and in what sense a given individual is to be regarded as a Jew. The question is a decisive one in the case of Spanish and Portuguese "New Christians", who could not retain their Jewish faith openly from the end of the fifteenth to the end of the eighteenth century. Clandestine Jews were persecuted by the Inquisition, and almost all evidence concerning them was produced and preserved by the Inquisitors. As Robert Rowland has argued,

[t]he persistence of Judaism among Iberian New Christians, as recounted in Inquisitorial records, cannot thus be taken at face value. There can be no doubt that many succeeded in maintaining a form of clandestine religious practice, but we can be equally sure that not all New Christians did in fact remain secretly faithful to Judaism, and that the generalized suspicion against them on grounds of their Jewish descent was often quite unfounded.⁴⁴

The practices of those accused of "Judaism" by the Portuguese Inquisition had been described in a document published in 1536. The *Monitório do inquisidor geral*, as it was known, was a compilation of earlier Spanish Inquisitorial documents. According to Rowland, these signs of "Judaism" were: observing the Sabbath by doing no work and putting on clean clothes or jewels on Saturdays; cleaning the house on Fridays; preparing food on Fridays for the day after; slaughtering animals in the Jewish manner; not eating bacon or other forbidden food; practicing the Great Fast of September, that of Queen Esther and certain other fasts; celebrating the Easter of the Jews; practicing certain funerary rites; practicing circumcision; blessing their children without making the sign of the cross. The general accusation against Jews was that they were "seeking the salvation of their souls in the Law of Moses." Over time, Judaism, instead of being simply a tradition transmitted from generation to generation within the family, became a cultural representation held up to New Christian by the Inquisition and by the rest of the society. Inquisition records thus provide very little objective information regarding the Judaism of Portuguese New Christians.⁴⁵

Scholars who have studied the Inquisition have been divided on the issue of how best to approach the mass of documentation. Many Iberian and Jewish historians – such as Yitzhak Baer, Cecil Roth, Israel Salvador Révah, and Haim Beinart – have argued that the population of Judeoconvertos contained many individuals who tried to maintain their Jewish religiosity. On the contrary, skeptics – such as Ellis Rivkin, Benzion Netanyahu, Herman P. Salomon, Norman Roth, and Antonio José Saraiva – doubt that crypto-Judaism was widespread, and see it rather as an invention of the Inquisitors. Saraiva has forcefully argued that the Portuguese Inquisition's persecution of New Christians accused of judaizing was a cover for a socio-economic war that sought to keep the wealthy New Christian merchants from intruding on the turf of the nobility. According to him, it was the Inquisition's trial procedure which created Judaizers out of good or indifferent New Christians.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Robert Rowland, "New Christian, Marrano, Jew," in Bernardini & Fiering, eds., *The Jews and the Expansion of Europe*, p. 126.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 136-137.

⁴⁶ Saraiva, *The Marrano Factory*, passim.

In her study concentrating on New Christian women imprisoned by the Inquisition in Rio de Janeiro, Gorenstein has argued along the same lines as Saraiva. According to her, the Jewish identity of these women was questionable. Some of the New Christians shunned Judaism altogether by refusing to marry other New Christians or by breaking ties with their families. Because of the environment in which they grew up, they had all received a Christian education. Moreover, some of them had been baptized and confirmed in the chapels that their families had erected on their farms. A few of them were also members of Catholic lay brotherhoods and invoked Catholic saints. In their interrogations, they revealed a vague, imprecise and confused knowledge of Judaism. At least outwardly almost all of them were respectable Catholics but, according to the logic of the Inquisition, New Christians could never be good Catholics at heart. The goal of the Inquisition trials was only to get the accused to confess their guilt in Judaism and to denounce others with whom they had judaized.⁴⁷

The case of Mariana Pequena, however, allows us to examine the question of religious identities from a different perspective. Mariana differed from other suspected Judaizers; she was not born to a New Christian family but was brought from Angola to Rio de Janeiro. Like most slaves imported to Brazil from Angola, she had been baptized before the Middle Passage. In Rio, she had received further instruction in Catholicism. She was first exposed to Judaic practices as an adult because of her relationship with a New Christian man, Antonio da Costa. While the purpose of the first confession was only to get Mariana to denounce all the persons she had Judaized with, she volunteered to recount her initiation into Judaism. Antonio da Costa had once told her that if she wanted to save her soul, she had to believe in the “law of Moses.” In order to observe this law, it was necessary to practice the Great Fast and another fast, not to eat pork or hare meat, to keep the Sabbath as holy time, and to pray Our Father without saying Jesus at the end. Mariana began to follow these practices, saying that at that point she had received enough instruction in the “law of Christ.” After having observed these ritual practices for a while, she became known as a believer in, and follower of, Judaism.⁴⁸

Having confessed her initiation into Judaism and denounced her coreligionists, Mariana had given the Inquisitors all they wanted. However, one more interrogation awaited her. The Inquisition still wanted to question her about her beliefs. This took place on January 11, 1713. She repeated her earlier story by saying that Antonio da Costa had converted her to Judaism 20 years earlier. After that, she had believed in “God in Heaven” and had prayed “Our Father” without saying Jesus at the end. She did not believe in the Holy Trinity, nor in Christ as the “true God.” She continued attending Mass at Church but did not believe in the sacraments as necessary for the salvation of her soul, nor did she consider her adopted religious practice as sinful. Therefore, she did not confess them to her confessor in Rio. She was also well aware that the laws of Moses and the Catholic Church were different from each other. Mariana concluded her confession by claiming that, after her imprisonment by the Inquisition, she had understood the error of her ways, and now believed in Christ.⁴⁹

The Inquisitors were not completely satisfied with Mariana because she still omitted the names of three persons who had denounced her, and they did not believe that she truly regretted her errors. However, in reviewing her case at the end of March, 1713, they thought that she had confirmed the evidence there was against other New Christians and denounced enough of her coreligionists. Mariana received a fairly typical sentence of imprisonment, and the wearing of a penitential garb until ruled otherwise by the Inquisitors (*hábito penitencial a arbítrio dos inquisidores*). Her possessions were also to be confiscated, although she owned nothing but her clothes.⁵⁰ In Rio de Janeiro, she had made her living by selling lace and buttons on the streets.⁵¹ At least in Mariana’s case Saraiva’s

⁴⁷ Gorenstein, *A inquisição contra as mulheres*, pp. 287-299, 334-360.

⁴⁸ ANTT, IL, proc. 11786, ff. 29v-30r.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, ff. 39r-40v.

⁵⁰ On the sentences of Rio’s New Christians, see Gorenstein, *A inquisição contra as mulheres*, p. 152.

⁵¹ ANTT, IL, proc. 11786, f. 24v (testimony of Elena do Vale). On the occupations of female slaves in Rio, see Karasch, “Anastácia and the slave women,” pp. 87-90.

argument that the Inquisition targeted the wealthy merchant class does not hold. Clearly, the Inquisitors' intent was to destroy the alleged Jewish community of Rio de Janeiro, including all its members, no matter their standing in the community.

One thing that was never mentioned during Mariana's trial was ritual immersion. As Schorsch has pointed out, according to Jewish law, only slaves ritually immersed in water became obliged to follow certain minimum biblical commandments. Immersion in order to become a slave in a Jewish household, which took place at the acquisition of a slave, bore many similarities to immersion for the sake of conversion, and it constituted a partial step toward full conversion to Judaism. Jewish law also mandated for ritual immersion at a slave's manumission. According to Schorsch, however, ritual immersion is not once mentioned in the course of the Inquisition trials in the Iberian Atlantic he has studied, even if there are repeated mentions of slaves performing certain ritual commandments.⁵²

Another thing that did not really come up in the proceedings was the role of Mariana's African background in the choices that she made. West Central Africa in the seventeenth century has been characterized as an Atlantic Creole society, in which European and African cultural heritage mixed.⁵³ Angola also became a place of exile for banished Jews. Many New Christians testifying to the inquisitional authorities in the Americas cited Angola as a place where they were introduced to judaizing practices.⁵⁴ Circumcision was an important tradition shared by Jews and Central Africans. An early eighteenth-century Capuchin missionary reported to the Inquisition of Lisbon that both white and black boys were circumcised in a synagogue in Luanda.⁵⁵ However, Mariana had been enslaved as a child and probably had no experience of judeoconvertos in Angola. What is more relevant, however, is that Rio de Janeiro's population at this time was dominated by West Central Africans, and it would perhaps have been more natural for Mariana to participate in rituals organized by her countrymen.⁵⁶ At the time of her arrest, Mariana had spent at least half of her life in Brazil, and seems to have been far removed from her African background. Working as a street vendor she must have met other blacks constantly, but at least according to her Inquisition trial, she socialized mostly with Portuguese New Christians.

Mariana Pequena was condemned as a secret Jew by the Inquisition. Following historiographical tendencies, it would be possible to argue that she was not a Jew. It is a fact that, during her interrogations, Mariana demonstrated knowledge of what it meant to be an observing Jew, and she did this without being steered by the Inquisitors. She also seems to have understood perfectly what was expected of her at the trial. After all, she had been arrested about two years after many of her friends were apprehended, and would have had ample time to rehearse her story. Mariana was clearly connected to major New Christian families in Rio de Janeiro, as is shown by their mutual denunciations. However, she claimed that they were not the origin of her conversion. Unless this was a lie and a story made up by Mariana to please the Inquisition, it must be concluded that Mariana identified as a Jew. In her own words, she was convinced that this was the path to save her soul. Her knowledge of Judaism might have been far from perfect, but this is only understandable in an environment where Judaism had to be observed secretly.

Conclusion

This working paper is an attempt to deepen the discussion, initiated by Schorsch, on the relationships between Jews and blacks in the Iberian Atlantic world, in this case in colonial Brazil. Rio de Janeiro's

⁵² Schorsch, *Swimming the Christian Atlantic*, p. 226.

⁵³ Linda M. Heywood and John K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁵⁴ Schorsch, *Swimming the Christian Atlantic*, pp. 149-150; Toby Green, "The Role of the Portuguese Trading Posts in Guinea and Angola in the 'Aspostasy' of Crypto-Jews in the 17th Century," in Philip J. Havik and Malyn Newitt, eds., *Creole Societies in the Portuguese Colonial Empire* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2007), pp. 25-40.

⁵⁵ ANTT, IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 86, f. 39.

⁵⁶ On African religious practices in eighteenth-century Rio de Janeiro, see James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

New Christian community was significantly affected by the inquisitional persecution that hit the city in the early eighteenth century. Convinced that these people were threatening the Catholic order of the colony, they were arrested and brought to trial by the Inquisition of Lisbon. Many of the New Christians were wealthy plantation owners and merchants, and economic motives have been cited as one of the reasons for their condemnation. They were also slave owners, and indeed, few former slaves were also arrested. It can be concluded, however, that New Christians did not engage their slaves in their religious practices, fearing that slaves would witness against them. Several of the imprisoned had New Christian fathers and black enslaved mothers, and they inherited the New Christian status of their fathers.

Among the arrested was Mariana Pequena, a former slave whose life began in Angola, who claimed that she had been converted to Judaism by her former lover, a Portuguese New Christian named Antonio da Costa. Mariana adapted to slavery by establishing close relations with two well-known New Christian families, the Vale and the Rodrigues Andrade. Having been enslaved as young girl, she seems to have held no special connection to her original homeland, though she acknowledged her origin when questioned about it. There were no racial barriers between her and the New Christians, who accepted her as part of their community along with coloured descendants of New Christian men and African women, such as Mariana de Andrade. However, relationships with New Christian men, and bearing their children, did not mean that these women would have automatically gained their freedom. Mariana de Andrade was still a slave when she was imprisoned, although she was also a slave owner. Mariana Pequena had gained her freedom only a few years before her arrest. Altogether, conversions of Africans to Judaism were extremely rare in Portugal and Brazil, but at least fifteen descendants of African slave women were accused of Judaism by the Inquisition of Lisbon. Exploring their understanding of Judaism, their social status and personal relations would bring new light to the choices faced by mixed-race descendants of Africans in the Portuguese colonial world.

