

SCRIPTOR NOSTER ARABICUS ET TURSIMANY

A Jewish Culture Mediator in the Thirteenth-Century Crown of Aragón.

by

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ABSTRACT

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Scriptor Noster Arabicus et Tursimany: A Jewish Culture Mediator in the Thirteenth-Century
Crown of Aragón

A thesis directed by Professor Brian A. Catlos

This thesis examines the role of intermediaries and cultural mediators in shaping the relations between the thirteenth-century Crown of Aragón and the Muslim Mediterranean. Exemplified by the life of Abraham Abenamies, these agents crossed with ease between the cultures, languages, religions, and political environments of the Western Mediterranean. In his role as agent of the Crown, fluidity was an asset for Abenamies and his royal patrons. Fluidity, however, also introduces an impediment for the modern researcher as identity boundaries seem to shift with movement and personal loyalties appear temporary. Because of the dynamic nature of my subject, I rely on the *Mediterranean Perspective* in order to properly disentangle the webs of actions, loyalties, and responsibilities that enfolded Abenamies. The *Mediterranean Perspective* provides me with the necessary tools to analyze Abenamies in his proper context as an intermediary and ask questions that highlight the centrality of cultural mediation in the thirteenth-century.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACA= Archivo de la Corona de Aragón

HJCS Vol. 1= Baer, Yitzhak. *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain: From the Age of Reconquest to the Fourteenth Century*. Vol. I. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961.

HJCS Vol. 2= Baer, Yitzhak. *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain: From the Fourteenth Century to the Expulsion*. Vol. II. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961.

TCJ Doc. = Grayzel, Solomon. *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century: A Study of Their Relations During the Years 1198-1254, Based on the Papal Letters and the Conciliar Decrees of the Period*. New York: Hermon Press, 1966.

LHA= Romano, David. "Los hermanos Abenmenassé al servicio del Pedro el Grande de Aragón." *Homenaje a Millás-Villicrosa* 2, (1956): 243-292.

LFJ= Romano, David. "Los funcionarios de judíos de Pedro el Grande de Aragón." *Boletín de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelo* 33, (1970): 5-41.

JET= Romano, David. "Judíos escribanos y trujamanes de arabe en la Corona de Aragón (Reinados De Jaime I a Jaime II)." *Sefarad* 38, (1978): 71-105.

Régné Doc. = Régné, Jean. *History of the Jews in Aragon: Regesta and Documents 1213-1327*. ed. Yom Tov Assis and Adam Gruzman. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1978.

DJC= Assis, Yom Tov. "Diplomàtics jueus de la Corona catalanoaragonesa en terres musulmanes (1213-1327)." *Societat Catalana d'Estudis Hebraics* 1, (1997): 7-38.

Prologue

Since we are sending Abraham Abenamies of our house to the illustrious king of Granada for certain negotiations of ours, we order you [to safeguard] the same Abraham, his family, and the Christians, Jews, and Muslims that he must take with him.¹

Abraham Abenamies, a Jew from the Kingdom of Valencia, and newly appointed diplomat of the Crown of Aragón, oversaw a motley entourage of envoys, soldiers, captives, and scribes, Christians, Muslims, and Jews, as they set out together for the sultanate of Granada.² Abenamies headed the 1290 diplomatic mission to the Naşrid court in order to negotiate on behalf of the count-king of the Crown of Aragón.³ The count-king in question, Alfons II (r. 1285-1291) acted in accordance with the well-established precedent to seek aid from the Muslim principality to combat the aggression of the Christian Kingdoms of Castilla and France.⁴ Alfons instructed Abenamies to secure a guarantee of peace and non-aggression, an alliance, a loan of four or five hundred light mounted soldiers, and, if nothing else, permission to recruit the soldierly talents of the Sultan Muhammad II's (r. 1273-1302) rebellious nobles. The brief lines in Abenamies's credentialing document give us a glimpse of the multifaceted relationships and social dynamics at play between the Crown of Aragón, its Jewish minority population, and the Naşrid Sultanate. Abenamies, a member of a religious minority, a constituent of the royal *domus*,⁵ and a royal administrator, held a position of

¹ ACA, C., reg. 84, f.10v. trans. Hussein Fancy, "Mercenary Logic: Muslim Soldiers in the

² Ibid.

³ The term Crown of Aragón refers to the dynastic power that ruled over Aragón, Catalonia, Valencia, the Balearic Islands, and territories that now constitutes Southern France.

Throughout this essay I refer to the Crown as a substitute for the Crown of Aragón.

⁴ To mitigate confusion with regard to the aragano-catalan count-kings I rely on the modern Catalan naming convention. Therefore, I have rendered James the Conqueror Jaume I not Jaime I, Peter the Great as Pere II rather than Pedro III etc.

⁵ The royal household. Consider that "power was measured by proximity to the body of the king." Holding a place within the royal *domus* signified an individual's power and prestige.

authority over his fellow travelers and the responsibility for the success of the negotiations. Abenamies's mission south offers historians a fascinating latticework of tensions, pressures, and unexpected commitments, which shows that high level exchange flowed through third party mediators with intimate knowledge of both Latinate and Islamic culture.

In his spotlight role in the Crown's negotiations with the Naşrid principality, Abenamies is a character who seems to exist in defiance of what we might expect in a history of modern Europe. What follows is a study of the key role of intermediaries, Abenamies in particular, and the socio-cultural, religious, and legal frictions that gave shape to his experience and the agendas of his patrons. The episode of Abenamies's mission to Granada raises questions that cut to the heart of reality in a communally diverse medieval society: how does the experience of Abenamies reflect or run contrary to expectations of religious interaction and communal identity? What does the narrative reveal about the Mediterranean world in which he operated? Is Abenamies's involvement in high-level diplomacy representative of a broader Jewish experience or unique in time and place? Answering these questions requires a discussion of the position of Jews in thirteenth-century society, an understanding of geo-political relations in the contemporary Western Mediterranean, and a view of the internal workings of the Crown's administrative apparatus. Abenamies's story thus provides an excellent starting point considering topics central to understanding the role of Jewish diplomats during a period of self-realization and socio-political negotiation in the Crown of Aragón.

Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 55.

Introduction

Given the general religio-social environment in Latin Christendom during the thirteenth and fourteenth-centuries, Jewish communities under Christian rule should, at best, have had only modest expectations for social success. In the Crown of Aragón, however, members of the Jewish communities leveraged their disadvantaged position in society to achieve success beyond such expectations and for that reason this community deserves renewed attention. My focus in this thesis falls on this elite stratum of the Crown of Aragón's Jewish community and the significant role its members played in the Crown's diplomatic engagements as it expanded ever further into the Western Mediterranean. The linguistic and cultural fluidity exhibited by the elite strata of the Arago-Catalan Jewry enabled individuals to easily traverse the linguistic and cultural boundaries between the Christian Crown of Aragón and the Muslim Mediterranean. The Crown of Aragón employed members of its multilingual Jewish population as scribes, translators, diplomats and agents to facilitate political exchange across religious and linguistic lines. Considering their position of weakness, members of Jewish minority of the Crown of Aragón played an out-size role in shaping the Crown's policy both internally toward its minority populations, as well as towards its geographical neighbors and political rivals.

The thirteenth-century offers an excellent opportunity to study the subject of Aragono-Catalan Jews in the royal administrative apparatus. This period witnessed the impressive territorial expansion of the Christian kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula, and the corresponding diminishment of the Muslim principalities of al-Andalus. By the end of the thirteenth century, the once-marginalized Christian rump kingdoms had come to dominate nearly the whole of the Iberian Peninsula except for the Naşrid Sultanate of Granada, squeezed into the southeastern tip of the peninsula. In the wake of the military success, territorial and political expansion, the

Christian principalities as the now dominant religio-political entities on the Peninsula faced new challenges of territorial governance, *re población*.⁶ This political moment, provided the count-kings of the Crown of Aragón an opportunity to experiment with expressions of sovereignty, exemplified by the efforts to disentangle royal authority from the influence of the nobility. Following in the footsteps of his father, Pere II, known as “the Great” (r. 1276-1285) pursued an administrative program aimed at disempowering his nobles by aiming removing them from hereditary positions of power, curtailing their political influence, and untethering himself from his customary obligations to them. As a vehicle for accomplishing his refashioned monarchical structure, Pere II looked to minority populations for support.

I contend that Jews such as Abraham Abenamies played a significant role in determining the shape of the Crown of Aragón’s during the thirteenth-century. To support my position I examine Abenamies, and similarly situated coreligionists, as their actions shaped the structure and politics of the Crown’s *aljama* and the domestic and regional ambitions of the Crown.⁷

⁶ For examples of the task of *re población* and *repartimiento* see, *HJCS* Vol. I, 138: *The Book of Deeds of James I of Aragon: A Translation of the Medieval Catalan Llibre Dels Fets*, ed. Damian J. Smith, and Helena Buffery, (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2003), 230-1ch284-6.

⁷ Throughout this paper I refer to the Crown’s *aljama* or the *aljama* to indicate the entire Jewish minority population. However, the *aljama* was the Jewish legal corporation which usually represented the entire Jewish population of a municipality or city. To reduce confusion I provide municipal tags in cases when a specific regional or local community is in question. See Yom Tov Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry: Community and Society in the Crown of Aragon, 1213-1327*, (London: Littman Library Of Jewish Civilization, 1997), 70; Salvador Aldana, *Los judíos de Valencia: Un mundo desvanecido*, (Valencia: Carena Editors, 2007), 219.

Literature review

I begin by acknowledging the histories written about the world in which Abraham Abenamies lived and the socio-cultural forces that shaped it. Only by exploring the milieu of the thirteenth-century Western Mediterranean, governed by forces at work throughout the Mediterranean basin, can we begin to understand Abenamies's role in diplomacy.⁸ Accordingly, there are three concepts that must be considered in order to accomplish our goal of contextualization and analysis: the traditionally held vision of geo-political and ethno-religious makeup of the Iberian Peninsula, Iberia from a *Mediterranean Perspective*, and the role of minorities as intermediaries between the Peninsula's various polities.⁹

Medieval Iberia receives a considerable amount of scrutiny for its ethnic, political, and religious diversity. Much of the attention paid to the Iberian Peninsula falls under two broad historiographical categories, the "Clash of Civilizations" and "*convivencia*" (coexistence).¹⁰ Such a binary insists that the ethno-religious communities lived either in near-constant conflict, in which periods of peace were exceptional, or that these diverse communities lived in harmony, punctuated by spasmodic violence. Neither model seems an appropriate fit for the political,

⁸ Brian A. Catlos, "Muhammad Abenadalill: A Muslim Knight in the Service of the Kings of Aragon (1290-1291)," in *Jews, Muslims and Christians in and Around the Medieval Crown of Aragon: Studies in Honour of Professor Elena Lourie*, ed. Harvey Hames, (Leiden: Brill, 2004), Brian A. Catlos, *The Victors and the Vanquished: Christians and Muslims of Catalonia and Aragon, 1050-1300*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Hussein Fancy, "Theologies of Violence: The Recruitment of Muslim Solders By the Crown of Aragon," *Past and Present* 221, (2013): 39-73, Elena Lourie, *Crusade and Colonisation: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Medieval Aragon*, (Aldershot: Variorum, 1990).

⁹ Brian A. Catlos, "Christian-Muslim-Jewish Relations, Medieval 'Spain' and the Mediterranean: An Historiographical Op-Ed," in *In and of the Mediterranean: Medieval and Early Modern Iberian Studies*, ed. N. Silleras-Fernández and M. Hamilton, 1-16, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015).

¹⁰ Notably Américo Castro, *España en su historia: cristianos, moros y judíos*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1948), and Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, *España, un enigma histórico*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1956).

religious, and linguistic fluidity that characterize the region. As such, a third wave approach that stresses “*convivencia*” (convenience) has gained prevalence over the past decade.¹¹

Convivencia first appeared in the work of the Spanish philologist Américo Castro as a means of describing the socio-cultural crucible that forged his contemporary Spaniard.¹²

Convivencia gained authority as one of the most important organizing theories for the study of medieval Iberian society. The source of its longevity in historiography was its capacity to encapsulate the problem of cohabitation between Christians, Muslims, and Jews in al-Andalus and Christian Iberia, and the social tensions between and within each religious community.¹³

The Clash of Civilizations stands in contrast to *convivencia's* vision of history. It records the epic narrative of conquest and reconquest, crusade and *jihād*, and the schisms formed at ecumenical boundaries. The Clash of Civilization perspective presents the Muslim conquests of Iberia in the eighth-century as a great loss for the whole of Christendom and praises the Christian *reconquesta* of eleventh and twelfth-century as a great Christian victory over the foreign infidels.¹⁴ Macro-narratives, such as the *reconquista*, stand on notions of conflict based on ideological/religious difference. However, such narratives are not representative of the

¹¹ See Catlos, “Christian-Muslim-Jewish Relations.”

¹² Castro, *España en su historia*.

¹³ *Convivencia* “was coined by the philologist Américo Castro in his discussion of the effects upon Spanish culture of the coexistence of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Iberian Peninsula. Though there is no reason why *convivencia* need designate only harmonious coexistence, it has in fact acquired this meaning among certain historians who have romanticized the concept.” David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 8.

¹⁴ Joseph F. O’Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain*, (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1975); Joseph F. O’Callaghan, *The Latin Chronicle of the Kings of Castile*, (Tucson: Arizona State University Press, 2002). Implicit in the rhetoric of *reconquista* are value judgments about the interactions between Christian and Muslim actors. Current scholarship prefers to qualify the term *reconquista* with “so-called.” The addition of “so-called” as a qualifier acknowledges the function of the term *reconquista* in previous literature but also casts doubts on its appropriateness in recounting Iberian history.

historical record. The high levels of positive interaction across faith boundaries runs contrary to the grand narrative of a conflict between Iberia's Christians and Muslims.

A minority of scholars has come together to take a different approach to the Mediterranean and its history/historiography. Drawing on their diverse academic backgrounds these scholars have produced a framework for examining and discussing the common currents that run through the Mediterranean basin.¹⁵ This *Mediterranean Perspective* enables scholars to examine their Mediterranean subjects in a field of common themes and forces rather than against those imposed by the existing sub-disciplines and area studies. One casualty of this move toward Mediterranean-centric history is the notion that Iberia presented historians an anomaly of interfaith and socio-cultural relations.¹⁶ Taking a *Mediterranean Perspective* with an eye for *conveniencia* the Iberian Peninsula appears as one of many micro-regions that make up the Mediterranean basin. In this the Peninsula no longer exists as a distinct micro-region within the Mediterranean, but is itself a composite of micro-regions which act in much the same way as Horden and Purcell describe the Mediterranean on the whole.¹⁷ The same operative forces bring the regions of the Iberian Peninsula into contact with each in a world of acculturation and syncretism. In this world it behooved the ruling elite to embrace both majority and minority groups and to bring the region's diverse ethnic and religious populations into constructive contact with each other in a relationship of *conveniencia*.¹⁸

¹⁵ For an example of a similar endeavor in the literary sphere see Sharon Kinoshita, "Deprovincializing the Middle Ages," *The Worlding Project: Doing Cultural Studies in the Era of Globalization* (2007): 61.

¹⁶ Castro *España en su historia*, and Sánchez-Albornoz, *España, un enigma*; Catlos, "Christian-Muslim-Jewish Relations."

¹⁷ Described below; Also see Catlos, "Christian-Muslim-Jewish Relations," 4.

¹⁸ "Whether as a result of cost-benefit analysis or stimulus response, elements within the majority, and especially elites, were not likely to undertake repressive policies if they themselves would suffer negative consequences as a result of the repression of a minority community...[however] almost inevitably the wealthiest and most powerful (and most visible)

As much as my subject is situated in the Mediterranean and responds to forces of the Mediterranean, the historiographical sphere of Jewish history enfolds my examination of Abenamies. Two of the most influential scholars of medieval Hispano-Jewish history hailed from the competing schools of thought which colored the study of Jewish history. Yitzhak Baer and his 1929 publication, *Die Juden im christlichen Spanien*, translated in 1961 as *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*,¹⁹ put forth a vision of Jewish history marked by teleology.²⁰ A product of his own historical time, Baer's assessment of Jewish Christian relations offered a view of history marked by ever mounting calamity which traces his contemporary experience.²¹ In contrast to Baer, the scholarship of Salo W. Baron in *A Social and Religious History of The Jews Vol. IV: Meeting of East and West*²² offered an alternative and sharply divergent reading of Hispano-Jewish history. Baron, approaching the same subject, illuminated the methodological problems presented in Baer's work. Baron endeavored to provide a temporally and geographically succinct evaluation of the Iberia's Jewish communities. The conclusions Baron drew from his methodological discipline resulted in a critical departure from Baer.²³ The fact

members of the religious minority had a greater status than the poor majority of the dominant group. Thus, an element of instability was built into these relationships, with the inherently chauvinistic discourse of religious doctrine providing a rationale and language for sectarian oppression and even violence, when members of the majority group felt threatened by, or indifferent to, the fate of the minority communities, or were in the grips of general social or religious anxiety." Brain A. Catlos, "Ethno-Religious Minorities," in *A Companion to Mediterranean History*, ed. P. Horden and S. Kinoshita, 361-377, (London: Wiley-Blackwell), 374.

¹⁹ *HJCS* Vol. 1 & *HJCS* Vol. 2.

²⁰ "The internal conflicts and the external pressures, engendered by these conditions, are akin to the trials which beset our people today (1945)" *HJCS* Vol. 1, 3.

²¹ It hardly need be pointed out, but there is truth in the "dictum that that present shapes the past," and nowhere is this truth more apparent than in the "effects of World War II on historical writing about European minorities." Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 3.

²² Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, Vol. IV, (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1937).

²³ It is important to note that the scholarship in question appears in volume IV of the XVIII opus magnum that Baron composed between 1952 and 1983.

that the Baron exposed Baer's conclusions as problematic does not discount the value of Baer's research subject. In the course of his work Baer uncovered valuable evidence and engaged with critical source materials. Therefore as problematic as Baer's analysis and conclusions are to current scholarship on Jewish history on the Iberian Peninsula, his research materials and source signposts should not be ignored.

The Iberian Peninsula in and of the Mediterranean

In an attempt to answer the seemingly simple question “What is the Mediterranean?” Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell advanced two strands of thought around which scholars have generated possible answers.²⁴ The first places primacy on “how the Mediterranean Sea has been envisaged, beginning with the earliest traceable origins of the notion that its waters constitute a single entity.”²⁵ The second approaches the Mediterranean’s physical geography, and described the Mediterranean as “a region as well as a sea.”²⁶ Horden and Purcell have sparked in scholars two strands of thought aimed at characterizing Mediterranean unity: the ‘interactionist’ approach and the ‘ecologizing’ approach. Horden and Purcell have moved past the binary approach, and suggest that in fact the two approaches are not mutually exclusive. The duo combined the interactionist and ecologizing schools “under the signs of the microecology.”²⁷ In this new-look Braudelian model the microclimates of the Mediterranean basin mingle and mesh, where the abundance of one resource comes at the cost of another, and where social forces co-mingle to balance singularity with continuity. Their work dispelled notions of geographical rigidity and firm boundaries between regions. It also helped diminish the value of historiographical boundaries that partition North Africa from Iberia, and Muslim from Christian.

Taking up this thread, Catlos proposed a new perspective on scholarship of and in the Mediterranean. He calls on scholars of the Mediterranean to take a “Mediterranean perspective” on the region, which “recognizes certain common patterns, dynamics, and structures relating to

²⁴ Peregrine Horden, and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

the culture, social, political, and economic competition, conflict, integration, and interdependence that developed among the array of ethno-religious communities that inhabited the region.”²⁸ Employing the notions developed by Horden and Purcell, regarding the Mediterranean as “a fragmented aggregate of compact, highly-varied micro-regions, each embodying a variety of specialized and specific productive potentials,” and the continuity made necessary by trade, migration, and exchange, Catlos asserted that similar forces acted upon the peoples living within the Mediterranean region.²⁹ The common experiences helped to establish a pattern of religion, culture, society, and governance across the region’s diverse demography. Because of the milieu of microclimates and necessity of exchange, the peoples of the Mediterranean were accustomed to and operated under common forces that facilitated a high level of mutual intelligibility/continuity in the face of ideological, linguistic, and religious divides.³⁰ Catlos devises a three-part system for understanding the forces governing the peoples living in the Mediterranean region: macro (of the ideological and ecumenical levels), meso (of the corporate level), and micro (of the individual experience). Engaging this tripartite model of Mediterranean society provides a method for understanding the diverse force acting upon and structuring the interactions among and relationships between institutions, patrimonies/polity (medieval equivalent of the modern State), and individuals. Employing the *Mediterranean Perspective* and the macro/meso/micro scale enables a more comprehensive unpacking of the

²⁸ Catlos, “Christian-Muslim-Jewish Relations,” 9.

²⁹ “Thanks to the character and disposition of the land and seascape, these micro-regions have been profoundly linked by transport, migration and trade... enabling their productive capacities to be exploited and giving rise to a regional economy consisting of a web of small intimately-linked, and mutually-dependent unites.” Catlos, “Ethno-Religious Minorities,” 362.

³⁰ “Successive phases of region-wide hegemonic domination, under the Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, and finally, Muslims engendered a loose region-wide cultural homogeneity at the top...this grew out of a common cultural orientation (Roman, Helleno- Persian, Hebrew), and among elite groups across the region.” Ibid., 373.

threads of information that connect Abraham Abenamies to his contemporaries in the Jewish community of the Crown, his political rivals, and his patrons.

The emergence of the *Mediterranean Perspective* as an approach for organizing scholarship in and of the Mediterranean has significantly nuanced the essentializing twentieth-century approaches to Iberian history espoused by Américo Castro and Claudio Sánchez-Albernoz.³¹ Moving away from the methods of Castro and Sánchez-Albernoz, which sought to explain Spanish history as the unique result of particular forces, the *Mediterranean Perspective* applied to Iberian history aims at situating the Peninsula and its people in the wider geographic context of the Mediterranean.³² This organizing approach requires scholars to account for more than the immediate context of their subject. My examination of a late thirteenth-century Jewish diplomat who interacted on a daily basis with the interest of his own community, his patron, and his negotiating partners, benefits from the approach that goes beyond social or cultural history.

³¹ Castro, *España en su historia*, and Sánchez-Albernoz, *España*. For more on Castro and Sánchez-Albernoz see Literature Review section.

³² Catlos, "Christian-Muslim-Jewish Relations," 9.

What we Know about Abenamies

What we know about Abenamies comes from a little more than two dozen documentary mentions in the Archivo de la Corona de Aragón. In under ten years, 1283 to 1292, Abenamies moved from his position as a local tax collector in the Kingdom of Valencia to a speculative investor, from a scribe in the royal chancery to a diplomatic agent of the Crown of Aragón, from a redeemer of Muslim captives to the attaché of a Muslim nobleman, and from the service of his royal patrons of the Crown of Aragón to the service of the Naşrid court and back again. His vocational liveliness corresponded with expansive geographical movements. From Játiva to Valencia, Barcelona, Calatayud, the frontiers with Castilla, Majorca, and the Naşrid territory of Granada.

In January 1283, Abenamies made his first appearance as a tax collector in the Kingdom of Valencia.³³ Shortly thereafter, Abenamies's name appeared in a complaint sent by his cousin, Samuel Abenmenassé, to the Crown concerning the privilege of dress.³⁴ The time frame of his first appearance also corresponded with his role as loan guarantor for another of his cousins,³⁵ Jahudá Abenmenassé, however there is no specific date attached to the reference. Between 1283 and 1290 the trail goes cold.

Abenamies resurfaced in early 1290 at which time he received eleven mentions in the span of thirteen days. These mentions corresponded with his first royal appointment and with his vitally important negotiations with the Naşrid court. On 3 January 1290 the count-king

³³ ACA, C., reg. 60, f.19, cit. JET, 90n93, and DJC, 18n70.

³⁴ ACA, C., reg. 60, f. 25, ed. LHA, 288.

³⁵ David Romano, *Judíos al servicio de Pedro el Grande de Aragón (1276-1285)*, (Barcelona: Universidad de Barcelona Facultad de Filología, 1983), 140. ACA, C., Reg. 57, f. 211v, cit. LHA, 265n113.

Alfons ordered the release of a Muslim captive into Abenamies's care.³⁶ On 6 January, Alfons named Abenamies to a post in the *escribanía de cartas arábicas* as *scriptor arabicus* and "*missatge nostre*."³⁷ The following day Alfons extended Abenamies powers to negotiate and sign a peace agreement with the Sultan of Granada on behalf of the Crown of Aragón.³⁸ On 8 January 1290, Abenamies appeared in a general pronouncement to the confederated realms halting the trade of Muslim captives unless an *albaranum*, proof of origin and status at the time of capture, could be provided (*sine albarano*). Addendums to the 8 January general pronouncement contained specific commands to Petro de Libia, *Baile* of Majorca, to release two Muslim captives (*duos Sarracenos sunt capti in Regno Maiorice*) into Abenamies's custody (*et tradi incontinenti*), and for Raimundo Scorne to do the same in Valencia. It appears that Alfons intended these captives to aid Abenamies in his impending negotiations (*ex parte nostra...tradere dicto Regi Granate*).³⁹ Additionally, two references from the same undated document described the particularities of Alfons's negotiating aims.⁴⁰ 12 January, Alfons issued a *guidaticum*, a document of safe-conduct, for Abenamies and the retinue of aids and captives accompanying him on his journey.⁴¹ In the final preparatory act before Abenamies's departure, Alfons issued a pronouncement in the Kingdom of Valencia affirming an exemption for Abenamies and Abraham el Jenet, from adhering to Jewish sumptuary regulations as they

³⁶ ACA, C., reg. 81, f.10r, ed. Rafael Gallofre Guinovart, *Documentos del reinado de Alfonso III de Aragón, relativos al antiguo Reino de Valencia y contenidos en los registros de la Corona de Aragón*, (Valencia: Institución Alfonso el Magnánimo, 1968), Doc. 1448.

³⁷ ACA, C., reg. 81, f.10r, cit. Catlos, *The Victors and the Vanquished*, 245; ACA, C., reg. 73, f.71r cit. JET, 92.

³⁸ ACA, C., reg. 73, f.71r, cit. JET, 92.

³⁹ ACA, C., reg. 82, f.3v, cit. JET, 92n108; ed. Fancy, "Mercenary Logic," 103n69.

⁴⁰ ACA, C., reg. 73, f.70r-71r, cit. Faustino D. Gazulla, "Las compañías de zenetes en el Reino de Aragón (1284-1291)," *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 90, (1927): 174-196, 188 quotes the document but without proper reference; Fancy, *Mercenary Logic*, 104 n73.

⁴¹ ACA C., reg. 84, f.10v, trans. Fancy, "Mercenary Logic," 102n68.

traveled south through the Kingdom of Valencia.⁴² Given the distance separating the two patrimonies, and the negotiating process, the final undated document corresponding with this episode probably entered the Chancery records in February 1290. This document confirmed the success of the mission and detailed the concessions granted and received.⁴³

The next mention of Abenamies does not appear until the late summer of 1290, 2 August, at which time he appeared again in relation to Petro de Libia in Majorca and again in connection with two Muslim captives. This reference may be a repetition of the previously cited document from 8 January 1290. The involved parties and the similarities in content suggest as much.⁴⁴ Just over a month later, on 4 September 1290 Abenamies surfaced again, this time in Calatayud, and this time acting in the capacity as attaché. This reference provides a possible explanation for Abenamies's absence from the Crown's records between January and September. Following his trip to Granada in January, Abenamies became attached to Mohamet Abenadalill, a *jenete* captain, and spent the interim period aiding Abenadalill's military assignment on the frontiers with Castilla.⁴⁵ In late August or early September the duo traveled to Calatayud to accept the disbursement of Abenadalill's salary (900 *solidi*) from Arnau Sabastida, the royal treasurer.⁴⁶

The final mention of Abenamies in 1290 is from 26 November. Again Abenamies appeared in the role of redeemer of Granadan captives.⁴⁷ This document indicates that Abenamies had been tasked with negotiating the captives' repatriation with the Naşrid representatives. There is no indication of whether or not Abenamies accompanied the captives

⁴² ACA C., reg. 81, f.10r, ed. Régné, Doc. 2058; ed. Gallofre, *Documentos del reinado de Alfonso III*, Doc. 1449.

⁴³ ACA C., reg. 77, f 25v

⁴⁴ ACA C., Reg. 81 fol. 152

⁴⁵ Light cavalry prized for their mobility and later a mainstay of the Crown's mercenary forces.

⁴⁶ ACA C., reg. 82, f.164[167]v, cit. Catlos, "Mahomet Abenadalill," 265nn26, 27, 28.

⁴⁷ ACA, C., reg. 81, f.108v, cit. Catlos, *The Victors and The Vanquished*, 233.

to Granada to conduct prisoner exchange or if the transfer took place within the Crown's territories.

Abenamis does not reappear in the ACA's records until 12 August 1291. At that he appeared in the Crown of Aragón beside Abenadalill as an agent of Muhammad II (*ninciis vestris*). Muhammad had tasked the duo with delivering a message to the count-king.⁴⁸ This appearance came shortly after the death of Alfons II on 18 June and the coronation of his brother Jaume II (r. 1291-1327).

In early September Jaume once more appointed Abenamies to the post of *scriptor arabicus* as well as an official appointment as *tursimany* (translator).⁴⁹ Jaume II issued a *guidaticum* for Abenamies and Abenadalill who, having fulfilled their mission from Muhammad to Jaume II, returned to Granada (*mandamus... nullum impedimentum...de securo transitu et ducatu*).⁵⁰ The final two documents of that year come from mid-October. These two references appear to relate to Abenamies and Abenadalill's journey back to Granada by way of Majorca as they carried Jaume's affirmative response to Muhammad's message.⁵¹

The final mention of Abenamies dates to 22 July 1292. Like the vast majority of the previous mentions this document related to the Crown's affairs with Granada. Unlike the previous references, however, Abenamies was the subject of the correspondence. In it Jaume requested the return of the mortal remains and possessions of his *scriptor arabicus et tursimany*. It appears that Abenamies had died while serving abroad, "...*el fiel nuestr Habraham*

⁴⁸ ACA C., reg. 90, f. 18v-1, cit. JET, 94n117.

⁴⁹ ACA, C., reg. 90, f. 25v, ed. Régné doc. 2387.

⁵⁰ ACA, C., reg. 90, f. 22v. cit. JET & DJC; ed. Régné, Doc. 2386.

⁵¹ ACA C., reg. 55, f.49v, cit. JET, 94n118; ACA C., reg. 55, f.54-1, cit. JET, 94n118.

*Abenamias... sea muerto en aquella mandaría...por demandar e reçbir aquellos bienes
embemos allá el portador daquesta carta."*⁵²

⁵² ACA C., reg. 95, f.92-2 ed. DJC, 23n120, and JET, 95n122.

The Mission South

In 1286 the standing peace agreement between Granada and the Crown wore through. Fearing an alliance between Castilla and Granada, Alfons sought peace with Granada's natural enemy, the Marīnid sultanate in al-Maghreb. The following year, in early May 1287, a brief and largely inconsequential conflict broke out between the Crown of Aragón and Granada.⁵³ However, by November 1287 Granada and Aragón were in the incipient stages of reforming a peace agreement, and by the end of 1287 Alfons had established an agreement with Granada permitting the Crown to recruit contingents of *jenetes* to combat the revolting *Unión*.⁵⁴ It seems likely in this period of tepid relations Abenamies cut his teeth on international diplomacy. Abenamies's 1290 mission to Granada aimed at securing a tripartite alliance between Alfons, Muhammad II, and the 'Abu al-Wādid,⁵⁵ against the persistent threat of the Marīnids,⁵⁶ Castilla, France, and the *Unión*.⁵⁷

Alfons must have been very pleased with the outcome of Abenamies' mission to the Naşrid court. The investiture of power, and Abenamies' handsome endowment testifies to the confidence the Alfons had placed in Abenamies prior to departure.⁵⁸ And it appears that

⁵³ It appears that *jenetes* that Alfons had previously recruited from Granada remained in the service of the Crown and defended the Crown from Granada's attacks. See Gazulla, "Las compañías de zenetes," 185.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ The ruling dynasty the North African sultanate of Tlemcen (1235-1556).

⁵⁶ Alfons had proposed peace with Marīnids in 1286 so it appears that the Crown sought a passive role against the Marīnids.

⁵⁷ The Aragonese nobility bound themselves together "on oath" to form the *Unión*, a coherent political bloc that challenged royal authority and lobby for baronial interests. Donald J. Kagay, "Rebellion on Trial: The Aragonese Union and Its Uneasy Connection to Royal Law, 1265-1301," *The Journal of Legal History* 18, (1997): 30-43, 31.

⁵⁸ In 1290 Alfons elevated Abenamies to a position of prestige within the Crown's diplomatic services and engaged in further negotiations on behalf of the Crown's interests. ACA, C., reg. 81, f.10r, cit. Catlos, *The Victors and the Vanquished*, 245; ACA, C., reg. 73, f.71r cit. JET, 92. ; ACA, C., reg. 73, f.71r, cit. JET, 92.

Abenamies did not disappoint. Abenamies had achieved the primary goal of the mission, to negotiate a treaty of peace (*la amor... entre els*), and compact an alliance with Granada. As such, Abenamies ensured the security of the Crown's southern frontier and enabled Alfons II to focus his attentions more completely on the growing threat of a French invasion in the north. Abenamies also received commitments from his Naşrid counterparts to ally against King Sancho IV of Castilla. Such an alliance shifted some of the burden of Sancho IV aggression away from the over committed forces of Alfons. Moreover, Muhammad II agreed to send Alfons mercenary troops, sanctioning a company of some three hundred *jenetes* to enter into the Crown's service. These badly needed forces helped Alfons repel French crusaders (*Jenetes...contral Rey de França* and harry Castillian border towns (*meta en la guerra contra don Sancho CCC cavaler de Genetes*).⁵⁹ The advantageous terms of the newly committed alliance did not stop there. Abenamies secured the release of Arago-Catalan captives (*absolva les catius de la terra Rey d'Arago*) and, perhaps most significantly for Abenamies, he received permission and subsequently contracted the military service of three *jenete* captains.⁶⁰ Following on the heels of his diplomatic triumph Abenamies would personally attend one of the Naşrid sell-swords, Mahomet Abenadalill, acting as his translator, mediator, bank and guarantor.⁶¹

While the generous terms of the agreement stand out, the most surprising aspect of the agreement is the apparent one-sidedness of the exchange. As enumerated above Alfons received

⁵⁹ ACA, C., reg. 73, f.70r-71 ed. Fancy, "Mercenary Logic," 104n73; Catlos, *The Victors and the Vanquished*, 292; "Mahomet Abenadalill," 259. ACA, C., reg. 77, f 25v, ed. Fancy, "Mercenary Logic," 104n74.

⁶⁰ See Gazulla, "Las compañías de zenetes," Brian A. Catlos, "Muhammad Abenadalill,"; Hussein Fancy, "Theologies of Violence,"; *The Mercenary Mediterranean: Sovereignty, Religion, and Violence in the Medieval Crown of Aragon*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

⁶¹ ACA, C., reg. 82, f.164[167]v, cit. Catlos, "Muhammad Abenadalill," 265nn26, 27, 28.

all he had asked for. Abenamies secured from the Naşrid counterpart agreements for both his primary and secondary mission objectives. For his part Muhammad received peace, alliance and the release of a handful of Muslim prisoners.⁶² There are a few dynamics, however, that might help explain the disparity in exchange. Above all else, we only have evidence from the Crown's side of the negotiations. As such, the concessions may be misrepresented. However, relying on the available source materials and on previous scholarship describing the events, I believe it is possible to posit plausible reasons for Abenamies diplomatic coup. First, the basic tenets of the agreement rest on reciprocity, a one-for-one peace and alliance.⁶³ Second, the prisoner exchange, although it appears numerically lopsided, does not represent the relative importance of each hostage. Furthermore, while the text relates that Muhammad released imprisoned Catalans no specific number is attached to this assessment, so perhaps it was also a one-for-one exchange.⁶⁴ As for the three hundred fighting-men that entered Alfons's employ, the number was at least a quarter fewer than Alfons had requested. Moreover, by contracting the service of the *jenetes* Alfons took on the financial responsibility of the soldiers and their retinues, thus temporarily remitting Muhammad's financial obligations.⁶⁵ Additionally, Abenamies's

⁶² ACA, C., reg. 77, f. 25v, ed. Fancy, "Mercenary Logic," 104n74.

⁶³ Robert I. Burns, *Negotiating Cultures: Bilingual Surrender Treaties in Muslim-Crusader Spain Under James the Conqueror*, (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

⁶⁴ A text from 8 January 1290, prior to Abenamies adventure to Granada, indicates the release of two Muslim captives (*duos Sarracenos*) held by Petro de Libiano in Majorca. The following paragraph, addressed to a Raimundo of Valencia, contains a similar message. However, the text does not contain mention of how many captives Raimundo handed over to Abenamies. ACA, C., reg. 82, f.3v, ed. Fancy, "Mercenary Logic," 103n69.

⁶⁵ Fancy, *The Mercenary Mediterranean*, 99. The logistics of recruitment should not be overlooked. Much like our window into Abenamies' travels south, with a diverse retinue of assistants and companions, we can be certain that Abenamdalill's travels north correspondingly brought a host of persons into the territories of the Crown. As Fancy describes in his analysis of Muslim mercenary use in the Crown of Aragon, *jenetes* often traveled with their families, relocating them temporarily in the host community. As was the case of Muça Almentauri and Maymon Avenborayç who, along with three of their brothers—also *jenetes* serving the Crown—received *guardicum* for forty-seven members of their family.

recruitment of Mahomet Abenadalill and his companions was not a primary objective of the mission. The will of Abenadalill was not that of Muhammad II, so approval to seek out and recruit the additional *jenetes* would have counted as only a minor concession for Muhammad. However, viewed in the context of Naşrid politics, the recruitment was a boon for Muhammad II. Abenadalill had fallen out of favor with the Sultan and his absence from the territory would have been a welcome respite.⁶⁶ Finally, as an ally, Muhammad secured the Crown's support against Iberia's pro-Marīnid elements.⁶⁷

The exchange seems to be considerably more equal than the text might represent. In fact, an argument can be made that the Naşrids emerged from the exchange in a better long-term position than did Alfons. Not only had Muhammad's faction secured his political aims on the Peninsula, the agreement removed troublesome noblemen from the Naşrid territory. Additionally, these same individuals would gain access to the court of the count-kings of Aragón and, as prized soldiers, receive salary,⁶⁸ rights to captured booty and slaves,⁶⁹ and eventually return to Granada with the trust of the Crown.⁷⁰ With the *jenetes'* return to Granada, this material wealth and prestige would transfer from Christendom to *Dār al-Islām*. For his part, Alfons received the much-needed aid he had requested. His short-term goals were fulfilled.

⁶⁶ Gazulla, "Las compañías de zenetes," 174. A tradition of harboring marginalized Muslim nobles in the aragano-catalan court extends back at least to Jaume I.

⁶⁷ Fancy, *The Mercenary Mediterranean*, 29-38. The Naşrids were historically weary of the Marīnids dynastic aims in *al-Andalus*. This mutual animosity proved an important calculus in the strategic alliances which emerged in the period following the dismantling of Almohad power in the Western Mediterranean.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 105. Abenadalill and the *jenetes* in his services received a generous salary from Alfons.

⁶⁹ Alfons offered Abenadalill a "gift of one 'dobra dalmir' and a salary of eight *besants* per day—perhaps six times the going rate for a horseman...[Abenadalill] also received the right to collect the royal share of one-fifth of any booty (the *quinta*)." Catlos, "Mahomet Abenadalill," 262-263; Jaume II guaranteed his *jenetes* "the king's *quinta* from the spoils as well as what was owed to the Crown by any Christian soldiers who raided in their company." Fancy, *The Mercenary Mediterranean*, 131.

⁷⁰ ACA, C., reg. 55, f. 49v, cit. JET, 94n118; also see Catlos, "Mahomet Abenadalill," 267.

Alfons's promotion of Abenamies into the royal household demonstrates the anticipation of success from the negotiations.⁷¹ Personal prowess had helped Abenamies negotiate a near perfect agreement, one in which both sides benefited and both parties felt that they had come away with the upper hand. However, the outcome of the peace agreement was far from clear-cut. Even after the two parties had agreed to terms of the peace (*la amor*), negotiations continued as both parties exchanged captives.⁷² There is no indication of the origins of these captive in question so continued exchange raises questions about the immediate impact the agreement had on settling relations. When were these captives taken prisoner? Why were they held after the parties had reached an agreement? If they were captured following the peace were they captured as a result of piracy and raiding or outright conflict? Abenamies's nomination as redeemer of Muslim prisoners in November 1290 casts additional light onto the issue, and, more broadly, the perception of success of Abenamies's January mission.⁷³ Abenamies's continued role as redeemer speaks either to the fact that both sides continued to hold captives, or the agreement was far less sure than it was made out to be, or both.

How can we make sense of this conflicting information? The two sides agreed to favorable terms of peace and truce. Both Alfons and Muhammad seem to have achieved a win at the expense of their negotiating partner, and the relationship required continued maintenance. Even after the sovereigns ratified the terms of the peace and truce prisoner exchanges persisted; the work of diplomatic agents was far from over.

Alfons's continued reliance on Abenamies to facilitate affairs with Granada, the incentives the count-king offered his agent, and the elevated position Abenamies enjoyed,

⁷¹ ACA, C., reg. 83, f. 12-1 ed. JET, 103 Apéndice 4.

⁷² ACA, C., reg. 81, f.108v cit. Catlos, *The Victors and the Vanquished*; Reg. 81 f. 152, ed. Gallofre, *Documentos del reinado de Alfonso III*, Doc. 1.628.

⁷³ ACA, C., reg. 81, f.108v, cit. Catlos, *The Victors and The Vanquished*, 233.

provide critical information for our understanding of the event. The cultural confluences that marked Abenamies's immediate reality as well as the "common patters, dynamics and structures relating to the culture, social, political, and economic competition, conflict, integration, and interdependence" that flourished in the Western Mediterranean fostered an environment of mutual intelligibility and reciprocity within the region's diverse populations.⁷⁴ Leaving the value of language aside for the moment to focus on Abenamies as a frontiersman, the cultural exigencies that such an individual developed served him in good stead as he moved across religious lines. While it may be the case that the Mediterranean promoted cultural fluidity from his position between Latinate and Islamicate Iberia as well as the Judeo-Christian frontier, Abenamies appears to have acutely benefited from an intensified confluence of frontier pressures.⁷⁵ This context appears to have heightened Abenamies's capacity to communicate the needs of his patron across the religio-linguistic boundary of al-Andalus. The mutual intelligibility between Abenamies and the Naşrid helps explain the outcome of the mission south.

⁷⁴ Catlos, "Christian-Muslim-Jewish Relations," 9.

⁷⁵ See Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*."

Abenamies and Abenadalill

The tripartite analytical approach devised by Catlos helps navigate the dynamic interactions of individuals, patrimonies, and faith communities. It points to the multiplicity of tensions that existed in socio-political and religiously charged situations and offers a blueprint for untangling the various stresses at each level of interaction. The macro/meso/micro scale helps unravel the web of demands that, in part, dictated Abenamies's actions.

The macro/meso/micro scale proves a useful tool in an analysis of Abraham Abenamies's employment by Alfons as the personal attaché for the prominent Granadan mercenary, Mahomet Abenadalill.⁷⁶ The example of Alfons, Mahomet Abenadalill, and Abraham Abenamies presents a complex set of relations and power dynamics that span three faith groups. Considering here only the macro level (the realm of ecumenical communities and ideologies), the approach helps us distinguish the ideological pressures at work. For example, by hiring Abenadalill, a Muslim mercenary, to protect his territory from Castillian and French attack, and placing Abraham Abenamies in Abenadalill's service, Alfons II breached numerous prohibitions imposed by Canon law, including the prohibition of killing coreligionists and the prohibition of allowing Muslims and Jews to hold office.⁷⁷ Similar ideological obstacles

⁷⁶ For a more comprehensive discussion of Mahomet Abenadalill see Brian A. Catlos, "Muhammad Abenadalill."; Hussein Fancy, "Theologies of Violence," 39-73.

⁷⁷ Church anxiety over Christian-Jewish interaction arose from three sources: "1) that it is absurd for the Children of the Free Woman (the Church) to serve the Children of the Slave (the Synagogue), 2) that such proximity may lead to proselytization, 3) that this proximity may lead to immoral relations." *TCJ*, 25. This subject is treated more thoroughly in the section "Escribanía de cartas arábigos."

Instances of ecclesiastical anxiety are explicit in *Innocent III to the King of France, 16 January 1205*; *Innocent III to Raymond, Count of Toulouse, 29 May 1207*; *Honorius III to the Illustrious King of Aragon, 4 November 1220*; *Gregory IX to the Archbishop of Compostella and to his suffragans*. ed. *TCJ*, docs. 13, 22, 45 & 46, 71.

afflicted Abenadalill and Abraham Abenamies in turn.⁷⁸ Critically, although the macro, meso, and micro level forces are ever present, not all forces held equal weight in any given instance. In the case of Alfons II, Abenadalill, and Abenamies, the relative weight of the meso and micro forces (i.e. the immediate benefit for the Crown and for the Alfons) were greater than the macro level forces. Therefore, it is not surprising to see a Christian prince disregard papal authority and prohibitions to appoint both Muslims and Jews to offices in the royal administration. Unraveling the narrative further reveals that Abenamies and Abenadalill felt the immediacy of micro forces more than the tensions such actions caused at the meso and macro levels. Furthermore, in any given situation the macro, meso, and micro strata interact both horizontally, such as between meso forces (the competing interests of Crown of Aragon and Castilla), and vertically, such as between meso and micro forces (the Crown's employment of Mahomet Abenadalill and Abraham Abenamies).

This view helps explain a curiosity of Abenamies's employment history. During the summer of 1291, following the ascension of Jaume II to the throne, Abenamies appeared at the side of Mohamet Abenadalill as a messenger *from* the Naşrid court to the Crown of Aragón.⁷⁹ The reverse flow of Abenamies loyalties appears to be an attempt on the part of Muhammad II to preserve the peaceful relationship with the Crown of Aragón established by Alfons in 1290. Muhammad's anxiety about the direction of the Aragono-Catalan policy following the death of Alfons gestures toward the continued fluidity of the political alliance. Additionally, this occasion raises questions about Abenamies's loyalties. Should we understand Abenamies as an unwaveringly loyal subject of the Crown of Aragón? Or does his employment as a Naşrids

⁷⁸ Khaled Abou El Fadl, "Islamic Law and Muslims Minorities: The Juristic Discourse on Muslim Minorities From the Second/eighth to the Eleventh/seventeenth Centuries," *Islamic Law and Society* 1, (1994): 141-187.

⁷⁹ "Mahometus Abenadalill et Abraham Abennahamir, nunciis vestris." ACA, C., reg. 90, f. 18v-1, ed. JET, 94n117,

agent suggest that his loyalties had shifted during the interregnum? Furthermore, does this action represent a conflict of interests?

In early September Abenamies received a reappointment to the royal *domus* as *scritpor*. In addition to his previously held post Abenamies could now claim the title of *trusimany*.⁸⁰ This additional title officially recognized Abenamies as a secretary/scribe as well as an interpreter. Much as Abenamies's first office appears to have been a concession in recognition of services rendered to the Alfons, the expanded office provided by Jaume appears to recognize his position as attaché and translator of Abenadalill. Concretely, Jaume II's reappointment provides the necessary evidence that Abenamies had the full confidence of the count-king and that Jaume continued to have faith in Abenamies's commitments to the Crown's best interests. Shortly thereafter, Jaume issued a universal announcement providing the necessary safety measures for Abenamies and Abenadalill. This statement preempted Abenamies and Abenadalill's return to Granada. Thus Jaume's September *guardicum* confirms Abenamies's continued employment and suggests ongoing negotiations between Granada and the Crown of Aragón.⁸¹

Following so shortly on the heels of the assignment from Muhammad to Jaume, Abenamies and Abenadalill's return south seems to confirm the success of Muhammad's diplomatic initiative. It seems likely that the itinerant duo's relationship with Alfons, and Abenamies's previous work for the Crown played an important role in Jaume's endorsement of the 1290 peace agreement. Abenamies had unique insight into the particularities and obligations supporting the peace. Who better to explain the treaty that existed between Granada and the Crown than the architect of the treaty? Again, taking a *Mediterranean Perspective* on the subject suggests that Abenamies's employment with the Naṣrids would not have jeopardized his

⁸⁰ ACA, C., reg. 90, f. 25v, ed. Régné doc. 2387.

⁸¹ ACA, C., reg. 90, f. 22v. cit. JET; DJC.

position as a loyal subject of the Crown. The shared ethos between the Mediterranean's elites and the common set of cultural marks claimed across religio-political divides, served to bind individuals to a common set of cultural traits regardless of religious background.⁸² Abenamies' cultural fluidity in relation to Abenadalill points to this shared current running beneath the region's elite populations. Furthermore, just as Alfons had stated that by serving the Crown of Aragón Abenadalill served the king of Granada, by serving on behalf the Naşrid court Abenamies served the best interests of his patrons.⁸³ This diplomatic back-flow hints at the sustained contact that Abenamies had had with the Naşrid court throughout the interregnum and that his actions and engagements received the approval of the Naşrid ruler. In this light Abenamies acted as a steward of the Crown of Aragón's foreign policy. It seems likely that Abenamies' continued appointment under Jaume II stemmed from his unwavering loyalty and close ties to the Naşrid Court.⁸⁴

⁸² Catlos, "Christian-Muslim-Jewish Relations," 362.

⁸³ ACA, C., reg. 73, f. 77, cit. Gazulla, "Las compañías de zenetes," 174, 189.

⁸⁴ JET 91. Romano points out that Abenamies holds a curious position within the annals of Jewish employees to the Crown. Namely, Abenamies was the only person to hold the same title, or nearly the same title and mandate under two successive kings, first sworn to the office of *Escritania de árabe* by Alfons el Liberal on the 6 January 1290, and again by Jaume II on the 2 September 1291, following his ascension to the throne. JET, 91.

Consaguineis: Nepotism and Meritocracy

In what follows I establish an understanding of the early life of Abenamies from the snippets of primary documentation in which he is directly cited in order to develop a more complete picture of the man. This documentation appears in conjunction with the professional lives of his closest known kin. Through the actions of his kin, I introduce the dynamic operative in the administrative apparatus of the Crown to promote individuals to positions of administrative power from within a family unit, and I offer a possible explanation for this dynamic. Promotion from a single family was not limited to the Jewish experience. In fact, it appears in the incipient structural outlines of royal bureaucracy during the twelfth-century. As was the case in Alphonso the Battler's (r.1164-1198) administration, bureaucratic structure in the late thirteenth-century relied heavily on a highly literate minority, who gained "promotion through competence as well as fidelity."⁸⁵ From the episodes that follow it appears that fidelity and, as a marker of political value, and royal privilege were generationally-transferable through family lines.

I have limited the following discussion of family history to Abenamies's cousins, the brothers Samuel and Jahudá Abenmanessé. A discussion of Samuel and Jahudá, as they relate to Abraham Abenamies, is, I believe, sufficient to properly trace the undocumented portions of Abenamies's early professional life, and augment the paucity of documentation that plagues our vision of him until his death. The professional lives of Samuel and Jahudá provide ample data to

⁸⁵ "The work of power devolved upon the literate courtiers... these were clerics earning promotion through competence as well as fidelity, notably the Caldes brothers [Ramon de Caldes (d.1199) and Bernat de Caldes] in the cathedral chapter of Barcelona. As so often in the twelfth century, fidelity may have come first, for Ramon and Bernat were sons of Porcell, the comital balif of Caldes, as was another Porcell who may have taken over his father's bailiwick." Thomas N. Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century: Power, Lordship, and the Origins of European Government*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 351.

analyze the Crown's appointment tendencies and the transferable benefits, although many additional narratives could prove the same point.⁸⁶ Finally, in what follows I introduce the kinds of practical knowledge and skills required for administrative office holders and the kinds of tasks these men preformed.

The Abenmenassé

The Abenmenassé were a family of notable Jewish diplomats, administrators, courtiers, and physicians, who, in the course of the thirteenth-century served at the pleasure of count-kings Pere II, Alfons II, and Jaume II. Abenamies traced his relation to the Abenmenassé clan through his uncle Abraham Bonnemaiz (or Abmanaxim), the father of Samuel and Jahudá Abenmenassé.⁸⁷ Similarly situated within the *aljama*, and occupying the same administrative posts, the employment history of the brothers Abenmenassé provides context and examples to augment the scarce information concerning the early employment of Abenamies. Without the depth of source evidence for Abenamies, it is difficult to gather a sharp image of Abenamies's life prior to his appointment to the royal administrative system. From the sources available, and the arc of Abenamies's professional life, it seems appropriate to look to Samuel and Jahudá as models. Therefore, the Abenmenassé brothers provide an important framing narrative for

⁸⁶ “Me parece digno de consideración el hecho de que los nueve escribanos-trujamanes reales que tengo documentado sean miembros de tres únicas familias, que no me consta que estuvieran emparentadas: son los Abenmenassé, los Alconstantiní y la de Astruc Bonsenyor.” JET, 78; By the reign of Jaume I “the Jews in charge of this office [*escribanía del árabe*] were both translators and physicians (*alfaquines*), and were often members of certain families... [such as] the brothers Shemuel and Yehuda Abenmenassé under Pedro III.” Ana Echevarría, “Trujamanes and Scribes: Interpreting Mediation in Iberian Royal Courts,” in *Cultural Brokers At Mediterranean Courts in the Middle Ages*, ed. Nikolas Jaspert Marc von der Höh, and Jenny Rahel Oesterle, 73-92, (Munich: Ferdinand Schöningh GmbH & Co., 2013), 77-8.

⁸⁷ ACA, C., reg. 43, f. 129v; ACA C., reg. 45, f. 54r, cit. LHA, 284.

Abenamies. While Samuel is undoubtedly the more important personality, I believe that the life of Jahudá, his employment and regional actions, map more closely onto the life of Abenamies during the infancy stages of his professional life. As his career matured, Abenamies's relation to the Crown increasingly came to resemble that of Samuel, especially his diplomatic.

The Brothers Abenmenassé: Samuel

Samuel, as the most important member of the Abenmenassé clan, had a profound impact on the trajectory of his family's relationship with the royal household.⁸⁸ In Samuel's history the dynamic of shared benefit through family association is made most explicit. As will become apparent, Samuel's close association to his patron extended onto his kin.

There is little doubt that Samuel's fluency in Arabic helped him secure his position as *scriptor maior* in the Crown's chancery. Knowledge of Arabic made Samuel an indispensable asset for communicating and mediating royal policy with both foreign and domestic Muslim communities. As an extension of his role as head of the *escribanía de cartas arábigos*, Pere employed Samuel's mediation skills liberally, sending him on special assignments throughout the Kingdom of Valencia to negotiate with local *mudéjar* populations.⁸⁹

Samuel Abenmenassé received his first appointment to the royal administration on 13 February 1279, during the reign of Pere el Gran.⁹⁰ In actuality, Samuel received two appointments that day. Pere granted Samuel, son of Abraham Bonnemaiz, the position of

⁸⁸ LHA, 251.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 257. Romano notes that all of Samuel's domestic missions were contained within the territory of Valencia and never in Catalonia or Aragón. It strikes me as plausible that Samuel's actions in Valencia stem from the Crown's strained relationship with the Valencian *mudéjares*, a lingering product of the relatively recent *mudéjar* rebellion. The issue of the *mudéjar* rebellion in light of Jewish employment will be dealt with more completely in subsequent sections.

⁹⁰ ACA, C., reg. 43, f. 129, cit. LHA, 284.

alfaquimus as well as an appointment as the *scriptor maior*.⁹¹ Both positions were important to the functioning of the Crown's internal framework. Samuel's functions as *scriptor maior* correspond with the later actions of Abenamies. As *scriptor nostre maior de arabico*, Samuel oversaw, and directly intervened in processing and penning "*cartam*" and "*litteram sarracenicam*."⁹² This particular responsibility included far more than just working within the chancery. During his appointment Samuel directly intervened in extraterritorial mediations with Muslim interests: in 1280 and 1282 Samuel served as Pere's emissary to the Naşrid Court to negotiate peace between the kingdoms;⁹³ he was responsible for drafting the credentials for the Crown's ambassador to Tunis; and Pere sent Samuel, along with the royal scribe, Pere Marqués, to Montesa to take custody of and then sell a handful of Muslim captives. Additionally, in 1283, Samuel accompanied Pere to Sicily following the successful campaign of conquest.⁹⁴

Within the borders of the Crown's territory, Samuel's professional duties compelled him to cross the religio-cultural frontier that spanned the Crown and its *Mudéjar* subjects. In his capacity as envoy to the Muslim community of Valencia, Pere tasked Samuel with the recruitment of crossbowmen and lancers from the *morerías* of the Kingdom of Valencia to help repel a French invasion.⁹⁵ In 1279, Samuel drafted and issued a municipal charter to the

⁹¹ LHA, 252-52. The term *alfaquimus* relates most closely with physician.

⁹² ACA, C., reg. 41, f. 97; ACA, C reg., 44, f. 142; ACA, C reg., 48, f. 6, ed. LHA, 256.

⁹³ "tradidimus Samueli alphaquimo cartam pacis regis Granate latine et arabe scriptam." ACA, C., reg. 47, f. 41, ed. LHA, 255n50.

⁹⁴ See Chaytor, *A History of Aragon and Catalonia*, 97-108. In the opening third of the 1280s Pere II was embroiled in a land-war with the Anjou a cadet branch of the Capetian dynasty. Seeking to expand the Crown's Mediterranean holdings through his wife Constance's hereditary claim to the territory of Sicily, and taking advantage of on tensions between the local Sicilian population and the French overlords, Pere launched an amphibious assault on the island intent beginning the War of the Sicilian Vespers. Pere's actions resulted in a crusade against his land led by of the French king, Philippe III (1270-1285), and Pope Martin IV (1281-1285). As the conflict matured, Castilla and the *Unión* entered the fray against Pere.

⁹⁵ ACA, C., reg. 46, f. 100, ed. LHA, 258.

Muslim community of Cuarte guaranteeing a concession of rights and privileges.⁹⁶ These engagements make clear that the role of *scriptor maior* was not limited to the curia, but rather an appointment to a position with diverse elements aimed at facilitating the Crown's political goals.

Moreover, his regular contact with the Muslim populations of the Western Mediterranean makes it clear that Arabic was central to Samuel's service. The language contained in Samuel's various appointments and concessions highlight this point clear. In Samuel's appointment as *scriptor maior alfaquimus* Pere articulated the value of actionable skills and promotion from within a family line. Samuel's appointment as *scriptor maior* highlights his linguistic skill while his role as *alfaquimus*, royal physician, indicates his scientific erudition.

Samuel's professional success earned him social and material benefits. Curiously, these privileges appear partible, or transferable. The document's language suggests an explanation. Benefits transferred because of Samuel's faithful family lineage (*fideli...Samueli, filio Abraham Bonnemaiz*).⁹⁷ This same dynamic appears in Jahudá Abenmenassé's brief appointment as *scriptor nostro*. In the document the *infante* Alfons highlights Jahudá's familial relation to Samuel (*fratri nostri Samuelis*). The inclusion of Abraham Bonnemaiz, Samuel's father, or Jahudá, Samuel's brother, suggests demonstrates that royal patronage and the privileges and posts it brought could be shared between kin based on family loyalty to the Crown.

The transferability of benefit through blood relation is operative elsewhere in Samuel's story as well. On 1 February 1283, the *infante* issued a universal pronouncement that he had taken under his special protection (*nos recepisse sub nostra speciali protezione et comanda*)

⁹⁶ ACA, C., reg. 44, f. 129-150v, ed. LHA 257. Romano is unsure which Cuarte the document refers to as both Cuarte de Poblet and Cuarte de les Valls are in the territory of Valencia.

⁹⁷ ACA, C., reg. 43, f. 129v, ed. LHA, Apéndice 1.

the faithful Samuel, Jahudá (*fratrem eius*), as well as Samuel's family and goods.⁹⁸ The *infante*, Alfons's pronouncement came days after Samuel's departure with Pere, and Jahudá's temporary employment. The timing and scope of the *infante*'s pronouncement suggests that, in the event of Samuel's untimely demise, royal patronage would ensure the familial stability and security that Samuel's employment had maintained. In Samuel's absence, the extended Abenmenassé clan required a new source of security.

The dynamic appears again in a document dated 10 February 1283, in which the Crown weighed in on the internal affairs of Samuel's local *aljama* of Játiva. The injunction against the *aljama* enforced Samuel's exemption from adhering to the sumptuary laws concerning Jewish attire. The intrusion signaled to the *aljama*'s leadership that Samuel as well as David Allevi, Abraham Abenamies, and Jucefo Avengalell, the privilege to wear clothing of any color and fabric of their choice, and to adorn themselves as they desired. The three individuals included in the injunction shared in the exemption specifically because of their familial ties to Samuel (*consaguineis suis*).⁹⁹ The *infante* Alfons' February 10th pronouncement appears to be the conclusion for the aforementioned examples. Not only does it appear that the *infante*'s actions align with his previous guarantee to protect Samuel's family and interests, in this case against interests within the *aljama*, it highlights the partibility of benefit through kinship, and affirms that such benefits derive from fidelity and service to the Crown.

Such ties served to further the aims of the Crown's ambitions. It also entrenched the interpersonal relationships of the count-king with individual Jewish agents. This dynamic is again visible in the ignoble fate of Samuel in the wake of Pere II's death.¹⁰⁰ Though construed

⁹⁸ ACA, C., reg. 60, f. 20, ed. LHA, 288.

⁹⁹ ACA, C., reg. 60, f. 25, ed. LHA, 288.

¹⁰⁰ The messiness of Samuel's imprisonment is brought into stark relief when considering the fate of his brother after his conviction for abusing his power as *baile* of Játiva. Having

as retribution for Samuel's alleged malfeasance in conducting his duties as the royal *alfaquim*, Samuel's imprisonment and the confiscation of his wealth suggests an effort to disentangle the Abenmenassé interests from the royal household.

The Brothers Abenmenassé: Jahudá

From the structural outlines provide by Samuel's life, I move my discussion of Abenamies's family to the tumultuous career of Jahudá Abenmenassé. In 1282 Jahudá received an appointment to collect rents from the *mudéjar* populations of in the Kingdom of Valencia.¹⁰¹ In the credentialing document Jahudá obtained substantial legal powers to compel the *mudéjar* population to meet the financial obligations dictated by the Crown. Among Jahudá's administrative powers was the authority to pawn goods from *mudéjares* to make up for financial shortcomings.¹⁰² Furthermore, as tax collector Jahudá's obtained an additional authorization of power, in the form of a 1283 order, obliging the functionaries of the Kingdom of Valencia to provide Jahudá with any aid his duties might require.¹⁰³ The powers conferred on Jahudá by the Crown greatly aided his zealous collection efforts. However, in an apparent effort to curtail possible abuses, the 1282 credentials outlined the acceptable maximum tax obligations for the populations under Jahudá's tax purview. When Pere issued a charter to the *sarracenis in regno Valencie* informing them of Jahudá's position, the count-king stipulated an expected maximum tax rate of 20 *solidos* annually for individuals on royal lands, and 12 *solidos* for individuals on

acquired the position from Samuel, had Jahuda introduced innovative policies into the post? or had he followed the precedent of his brother? LHA, 79-81.

¹⁰¹ ACA, C., reg. 50, f. 231r, ed. LHA, 286, Apéndice 4.

¹⁰² ACA, C., reg. 50, f. 231r, LHA, 286, Apéndice 4; Yom Tov Assis, *Jewish Economy in the Medieval Crown of Aragon, 1213-1327*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 26. This power has precedent in Jaume I's reign. Jaume "published a list of movable assets that were permitted to be confiscated from bankrupt debtors. He also issued instructions in favor of Jewish pawnbrokers, and permitted Jews to sell the confiscated good of debtors in the marketplace."

¹⁰³ ACA, C., reg. 60, f. 19v. ed. LHA, 287-8, Apéndice 8.

privately held lands.¹⁰⁴ Pere also issued a moratorium on tax collections for specified durations and for specified populations or individuals.

If these acceptable rates were meant to prevent Jahudá from abusing his powers, it appears that they failed. During his tenure, Jahudá acted in a manner that resulted in a formal hearing with Conrado Lancia,¹⁰⁵ Pere's master of accounts (*maestre racional*), to recount his actions as tax collector. The 20 June 1283 summons requested Jahudá's immediate presence in Tarazona to testify to the allegations that he had abused his position by improperly wielding power. It appears that Jahudá had been collecting taxes at rates higher than those stipulated, had collected rents outside of his jurisdiction, and collected rents during periods of moratorium or from exempted individuals.¹⁰⁶

Concurrent to his employment as a tax collector for the realm, Jahudá sought greater personal enrichment by purchasing from his brother the rights to collect rents in Játiva.¹⁰⁷ By 1283 we see Jahudá performing the tasks customary of the *baile* in the region, though it is not clear whether he acted as an official appointee.¹⁰⁸ It appears that with financial backing of Abraham Abenamies, Davie Elleví and Mossé Amaterí, Jahudá had purchased the lease to local rents from the *baile*— the same lease of rents previously held by Samuel.¹⁰⁹ Looking to Jahudá's speculative investment in 1283 elucidates the extortion allegations that landed him in front of

¹⁰⁴ ACA, C., reg. 50, f. 231r, ed. LHA 286, Apéndice 4.

¹⁰⁵ Conrado Lancia was the grandson of Frederik II (1194-1250) and half-cousin of Pere's wife, the heir to the Throne of Sicily, Constanza.

¹⁰⁶ ACA, C., reg. 50, f. 231r, ed. LHA 286, Apéndice 4; Robert I. Burns, *Medieval Colonialism: Postcrusade Exploitation of Islamic Valencia* (Princeton University Press, 1975), 282n85.

¹⁰⁷ ACA, C., reg. 57, f. 211v, cit. LHA, 265n113.

¹⁰⁸ See J. Lee Shneidman, "Jews as Royal Bailiffs in Thirteenth Century Aragon," *Historia Judaica* 19, (1957): 55-66; "Jews in the Royal Administrations of 13th Century Aragón," *Historia Judaica* 21, (1959): 37-52; "The Bailiff and the Royal Fiscal Policy," in *The Rise of the Aragonese-Catalan Empire 1200-1350, Vol. 2*, 459-486, (New York: New York University Press, 1970).

¹⁰⁹ Romano, *Judíos al servicio de Pedro el Grande de Aragón*, 140.

the *maestre racional*. By taking over the rents, Jahudá and his investors became responsible for paying off the remaining balance of the original lease, all the while trying to recuperate their investment from tax revenue.¹¹⁰ However, unable to extract sufficient profit to cover his obligations to his creditors from neither the local population nor from the subleases he had taken on, by April of 1284 Jahudá had defaulted.¹¹¹

The essential difference between Jahudá's two positions as tax collector and rent farmer had been his obligation to collect taxes on behalf of the Crown and his right to collect rents for personal enrichment. Perhaps seeing the impending default on his investment, and recognizing the authority his official appointment conferred on him, Jahudá saw an opportunity to forestall or even avoid the financial problems that would have landed him in prison if it were not for Samuel's intervention.¹¹² Viewed as such, the complaints that landed him in front of the magistrate in Tarazona appear to be Jahudá's attempt to raise the required capital to meet his financial obligations by charging more than the acceptable rate of 12 or 20 *solidi* respectively. The nature of Jahudá's investment in Játiva pushed Jahudá to maximize his overall earning potential. As the timeline demonstrates, Jahudá's gamble did not pan out and nearly led to his

¹¹⁰ One way Jahudá may have sought to recuperate the capital of his investment was to loan the necessary capital to individuals under his purview who did not have access to necessary cash to meet the financial obligations. Loaning money at a rate of 20% a year, the legally stipulated rate, would allow Jahudá to make additional profit off of his initial investment. These stop-gap loans, however, raise questions about the stipulated annual tax rate discussed above, as well as the short term ability of Jahudá to meet his own financial obligations. Furthermore, in a bid to mitigate potential losses, Jahudá sublet portions of his lease to prospective investors. Consider the practice of issuing small loans to cover tax responsibilities at 20% interest, and the leaching of funds that this practice entails for the lender. If financial restitution came due prior to recuperating the loans with or without the 20% interest, a rate higher than the Crown had permitted, the system collapses. "The rate of interest that Jews charged Christians was regulated by civil law: the Cortes of 1228 and that of 1292 fixed the maximum charge as 4*d.* per *L* per month (20 per cent per year)." Shneidman, *The Rise of the Aragonese-Catalan Empire*, Vol. 2, 430-1, 443.

¹¹¹ Burns notes that Jahuáa's default came from the financial failures of his investors/ lessees rather than his own financial malfeasance. Burns, *Medieval Colonialism*, 283.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 283.

incarceration, his personal possessions in foreclosure.¹¹³ With the authority granted to Jahudá during his time as a tax collector in the Kingdom of Valencia, and with the financial burden placed on him by his investment, it is not surprising that he abused his authority to compel the citizens of the region to pay an unlawful tax rate.

In 1283, the *infante* Alfons appointed Jahudá Abenmenassé to the position of interim *scriptro noster maior de arabico* while Samuel and Pere traveled abroad.¹¹⁴ The timeline of Jahudá's employment indicates that Jahudá continued in his previous post as a tax collector in the Kingdom of Valencia throughout the duration of his brief tenure as *scriptor maior*. With Samuel's return in August of the same year Jahudá's appointment became redundant. Jahudá's demotion, however, did not signal the end of his administrative career, he still held his post collecting taxes.

The *scriptro maior* appointment demonstrates that Jahudá had the requisite skills required to fulfill the post's responsibilities. More importantly, however, the appointment came during Samuel's brief absence overseas with Pere, and indicates that while Samuel was temporarily indisposed, Jahudá's familial ties to Samuel ensure his suitability for the position.¹¹⁵ In the broader context of this section's efforts, Jahudá's appointment to his brother's post again suggests the propensity to promote from within both the existing administrative structures as well as within family lines.

Jahudá's employment narrative speaks to an important component of the Crown's Jewish work force. While the Crown employed the individuals under discussion at a kingdom wide level, the vast majority of the Jews employed by the Crown functioned at the local level as administrators, translators, and tax collectors. It was from this pool of local functionaries that

¹¹³ LHA, 273-4.

¹¹⁴ ACA, C., reg. 60, f. 19, ed. LHA, 287, Apéndice 7.

¹¹⁵ ACA, C., reg. 60, f. 19, ed. LHA, 287.

the Crown could and did draw its royal administration. The individuals who had demonstrable skills in local administration, and those who had a lineage of working in the royal administration were selected to work on a realm wide basis.

In Samuel's petition to Pere and in Jahudá's business venture we are given a glimpse of Abenamies's professional life. The passing reference to Abenamies as a named partner in Jahudá's acquisition tags the geographical sphere in which Abenamies operated, and hints at his socio-economic level in 1283. The 10 February 1283 petition is suggestive of his standing within his local community.

The documentation of the brothers Abenmenassé serves as a satisfactory model on which to construct an understanding of the early exploits of Abenamies, and to demonstrate a curiosity of the administrative apparatus. The texts highlight particularly interesting aspects of the personal relationships between the royal family and the Jewish officials: first, the reciprocity of benefit between the Crown and its Jewish employees, that is the granting of special privileges and status in return for loyal and diligent work; second, the interpersonal connection between the royal personalities and their subject Jewish population. The material generosity of the Crown, and the Crown's tendency to promote from within a single family or kinship unit attests to the strength of these bonds.

Abraham Abenamies

There is precious little information concerning the vast majority of the life of Abraham Abenamies as previously demonstrated. The bulk of information that we do have comes from a window of little more than three years during which Abenamies made his indelible mark on the historical records. While Abenamies appears most active from 1289 to the summer of 1292,

three earlier references to Abenamies's activities punctuate the documentary obscurity and provide us with a glimpse of his life prior to employment as *scriptor arabico* in the royal *domus*.

Abenamies makes his first appearance in the chancery records on the 30th of January 1283 as a tax collector in the Kingdom of Valencia.¹¹⁶ While fleeting, the reference provides important information concerning the development of Abenamies as a member of the local administrative system in region. The document provides a geographical marker for the early activities of Abenamies. More acutely, the reference suggests that by the early 1280s Abenamies occupied a position of relative power within the local administrative structure. In addition to his position as a tax collector, Abenamies already appeared as a guarantor of and investor in Jahudá Abenmenassé's aforementioned lease on the rents for the of *bailía* of Játiva.¹¹⁷ What does this say about Abraham Abenamies? Primarily, Abenamies's connection to Jahudá's bid suggests that by 1283 Abenamies had sufficient wealth to enter into a partnership with his cousin and purchase the rights to tax revenues from the *bailía* of Játiva. Additionally, as a tax collector, it seems likely that Abenamies acted in accord with Jahudá in the *bailía* of Játiva to recuperate his investment, though there is no record that Abenamies engaged in kind of malfeasance that landed his cousin in hot water.¹¹⁸ However, the nature of Jahudá's summons to Tarazona, brought by the *mudéjares* under Jahudá's purview, suggests that if Abenamies had been collecting taxes, as the 30 January 1283 document suggests, it is likely that he had a hand in collecting taxes from the Crown's Muslim populations.¹¹⁹ As such, it appears that prior to his

¹¹⁶ ACA, C., reg. 60, fol. 19r, cit. DJC, 18n70.

¹¹⁷ Romano, *Judíos al servicio de Pedro el Grande de Aragón*, 139-40.

¹¹⁸ ACA C., reg. 60, f. 19r, cit. DJC, 18n70.

¹¹⁹ LHA, 271.

royal appointments Abenamies engaged in the interfaith relations that would later define his term as *escribano domus nosteum*.

Samuel Abenmenassé's aforementioned correspondence with the *infante* Alfons offers an additional point of light into Abenamies's life prior to his royal appointment. As previously discussed, Samuel's named Abenamies as a beneficiary of royal exemption from sumptuary regulations. The mention of Abenamies in Samuel's message to Alfons tells us that by 1283 Abenamies had achieved a level of social privilege and political status that distinguished him from his contemporary coreligionists.

Sparse as it may be, the documentary mention of Abenamies prior to 1289 allows a rough but informative sketch of Abenamies's formative years, and provides context for his later employment. The examination of the brothers Abenmenassé and the early career of Abenamies shows that the Crown of Aragón rewarded competency and fidelity with promotion. The skills that Abenamies and his cousins possessed qualified them to serve the Crown. Within the royal administration, Abenamies played an integral role in facilitating exchange between the Crown and its Muslims population. The shared appointment to the *escribanía de cartas arábigos* demonstrates as much. Language and cultural fluency enabled Abenamies to transverse the inter-religious topographies of the thirteenth-century Crown of Aragón. His capacity to communicate the Crown's interests with the interests of the Muslim Mediterranean brought Abenamies to the fore.

Escribanía de Cartas Árabes: A Jewish Monopoly

The use of arabophone Jews as cultural mediators runs deep into the history of the Iberian Peninsula.¹²⁰ As far back as the reign of Count Ramon Berenguer III of Barcelona (r.1086-1131) "even the mere command of the intricate Arabic epistolary style and beautiful Arabic handwriting served these [Jewish] royal counselors in good stead."¹²¹ By the second half of the thirteenth-century, the Crown of Aragón had begun, in full, a program of Jewish integration into the diplomatic and administrative structures of the government.

The role of Jews in the administration, however, stood in direct contravention of ecclesiastical regulations. Lateran IV (1215) exclaimed that secular authorities should bar Jews from holding public office.¹²² The principle that underscored the ecclesiastical vision held that it

¹²⁰ The sixteenth-century North African chronicler provides insight into the consequences of failed diplomacy and the centrality of trustworthy intermediaries in his description of the relationship between Alfonso VI of Castile and Leon, and al-Mu'tamed, he *taifa* king of Savilla. Extensively quoting a contemporary source, al-Makkari suggests that the brunt of the mediation fell on the shoulders of an unnamed Jewish official. Al-Makkari, Ahmed Ibn Modhammad. *History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain*, Vol. 2, ed. Pascual de Gayangos (London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1843), 252-253.

¹²¹ Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 37.

¹²² Ecclesiastical indictments against Jewish office holder are a common feature of the medieval period. For instance *Innocent III to the King of France, 16 January 1205*: "Though it does not displease God, but is even acceptable to Him, that the Jewish Dispersion should live and serve under Catholic Kings and Christian princes until such time as their remnant shall be saved... nevertheless, such (Princes) are exceedingly offensive to the sight of the Divine Majesty who prefer the sons of the crucifiers... to the heirs of the Crucified Christ, and who prefer the Jewish slavery to the freedom of those who the Son freed, as though the son of a servant could and ought to be an heir along with the son of the free woman... Wherefore, lest through them the name of God be blasphemed, and Christian liberty become less than Jewish servitude, we warn, and, in the name of God, exhort... that you restrain the Jews from their presumption in these and similar matters..." ed. *TCJ*, Doc. 13; *Innocent III to Raymond, Count of Toulouse, 29 May 1207*: "... In blasphemy against the Christian Faith, you entrusted Jews with public office..." ed. *TCJ*, Doc. 22; *Honorius III to the Illustrious King of Aragon, 4 November 1220*: "Know that we have heard that much loss has come to Christians from the fact that whenever you have to send your messengers to the noble Miramoline or to his subjects, never, or rarely, do you send others than Jews, who expose to him the plans and the state of the Christians and reveal their secrets. Therefore we have thought that your caution ought to be aroused and

was "quite absurd that any who blaspheme against Christ should have power over Christians." Canon sixty-nine drew its authority from the precedent established by the Third Council of Toledo (589), restating one of the basic statutes therein, "we forbid that Jews be given preferment in public office since this offers them the pretext to vent their wrath against the Christians."¹²³ With Lateran IV the Church no longer equivocated its ideological position. The 'irreverent' Jewish official posed an immediate risk to the faithful.¹²⁴ The canons barring Jews from holding office also threatened excommunication for Christian authorities that failed to comply.¹²⁵

While the repetition of specific ecclesiastical legal positions or prohibitions does not necessarily signify active flouting of regulations, nor continued practice, the move toward concrete punishment for offending Christians does suggest that in some cases secular authorities failed to adhere to ecclesiastical regulations. The successful careers of Samuel, Jahudá, and Abenamies demonstrate that the count-kings of Crown of Aragón honored the Church's ideological position in the breach.

warned that when you have to send such messenger, you should rather send Christians, since you ought not to hope for faithfulness from the unfaithful. Nor does it seem plausible that those who impiously deny Christ Himself should be faithful to Christians." ed. *TCJ*, Doc. 45; *Gregory IX to the Archbishop of Compostella and to his suffragans, 18 May 1233*: "Yet, they, ungrateful for the kindness shown them, wickedly repay favors with insults and intimacy with contempt... And although it had been decreed in the Council of Toledo as well as renewed in the General Council, that Jews should not be placed in public office, since under such a pretext they are very dangerous to Christians, and since it is absurd that one who blasphemes against Christ should exercise power over Christians, nevertheless secular dignities and public offices are entrusted to them, by the use of which they rage against the Christians and cause some to observe their rites." ed. *TCJ*, Doc. 71.

¹²³ ed. *TCJ*, Doc. XI; Council of Toledo III (589). Amnon. *The Jews in the Legal Sources of the Early Middle Ages*, 485.

¹²⁴ ed. *TCJ*, 311.

¹²⁵ Pope Innocent III called on bishops and archbishops to "use the sentence of excommunication against those Christians who have commerce with Jews," as a means of extending the reach of ecclesiastical authority. John Tolan, "Of Milk and Blood: Innocent III and the Jews, Revisited." *RELMIN* (2012): 1-12, 5; Baron, *A Social And Religious History of The Jews Vol. IV*, 13.

The Crown's communal diversity helps explain this ideological inconsistency. Because of the demographic majority of Muslims in the Kingdom of Valencia arabophone Jews were well positioned to enter into the Kingdom's governing structure.¹²⁶ Already integrated into the administrative apparatuses of Aragon and Catalonia, arabophone Jews were a natural fit to mediate the Crown's affairs with its Muslim subjects.¹²⁷ In particular, the *escribanía del árabigo*, the section of the chancery dedicated to Arabic correspondence, became a stronghold of Jewish employment. In the thirteenth-century arabophone Jews had a near monopoly on the *escribanía de cartas árabigos*,¹²⁸ occupying the position of *scriptor maior* uninterrupted from the reign of Jaume I (r.1213-1276) to Jaume II.¹²⁹

The years following the conquest of Valencia provided an occasion for Jews to enter the intermediary role between the Catalan settlers and Muslim natives, "serving as secretaries or diplomats in Islamic affairs and looming prominently in revenue collection and finance."¹³⁰ Without the linguistic skills of its Jewish minority, the Crown would have been forced to rely on the *mudéjares* to fulfill the administrative positions tasked with communication with *dār al-Islām*.¹³¹ However, a string of rebellions made the count-king suspicious of local Muslims.¹³²

¹²⁶ Arabophone: individuals who lived in the Latin West whose livelihoods depended on linguistic knowledge, either as scribes, interpreters, or translators. In contrast, arabists were individuals whose knowledge of Arabic was instrumental to intellectually oriented endeavors. From, David Romano, "Hispanojudíos traductores del árabe," *Boletín de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona* 43, (1991): 211-232, 217.

¹²⁷ This is not to suggest that there were no Arabic speaking Christians or that the *mudéjares* could not speak the vernacular romance languages.

¹²⁸ "The *escribanía del árabigo* was always conferred on a Jew of this circle [of arabophone elites] during the thirteenth century." Echeverría, "Trujamanes and Scribes," 77.

¹²⁹ "La documentación conservada ha ofrecido pruebas inequívocas de que el cargo de escribano... fue ostentado ininterrumpidamente por judíos desde el reinado de Jaime I al de Jaime II, es decir, en la mayor parte del siglo XIII." ed. JET, 77.

¹³⁰ Burns, *Medieval Colonialism*, 16.

¹³¹ See Brian A. Catlos, *The Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom, c. 1050-1614*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 81. There are instances of Muslim go-betweens in regions following the Conquest of Valencia. However, following the *mudéjar*

Animosity persisted between the Crown and the Muslims kingdoms of the Western Mediterranean, and with the demographic disparity of Valencia the Crown feared a general uprising of the *mudéjares* supported by foreign interests.¹³³

The *mudéjares* were the economic engine for the regions.¹³⁴ These subject Muslims provided the Crown with economic stability and constituted the bulk of the work force in a

‘revolts’, the prospect of employing Muslims posed a problem, and fell out of favor with the Crown. "l'agitació en el si de la població sarraïna i la revolta van accentuar la necessitat que tenia la corona de funcionaris jueus fidels." Yom Tov Assis, “Jewish Diplomats From Aragon in Muslim Lands,” *Sefunot* 3, (1983): 11-34, 17.

¹³² While not continuous, Valencia experienced revolts in 1247-49, 1257-58, minor ‘disquiet’ in the 1260s, and a calamitous rebellion in 1275-77. Burns, *Medieval Colonialism*, 8; Catlos aptly describes the unrest as “the final phase in the process of Christian conquest,” rather than general rebellions. Catlos, *The Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom*, 69; The Crown’s continued anxieties about the *mudéjar* population are recorded in the dying words of Jaume I: "O! My well beloved son!... hold the land [of Valencia] in justice and in right and do all in thy power to *drive hence the Saracens from the Kingdom of Valencia*." Bernard Desclot, *Chronicle of the Reign of King Pedro III of Aragon*, trans. by F.L. Critchlow, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1928), Vol. II, 4; “We said to [Pere II]... that he should direct the war well and forcefully, and especially that he should expel all the Moors from the Kingdom of Valencia, as they were all traitors... they always looked to do harm to us and to trick us if they could.” *The Book of Deeds of James I of Aragon*, 379-80ch564.

¹³³ It is important to note that this unrest was specific to the southern regions of Valencia that had entered into the Crown’s authority through treaty. Furthermore, no analogue unrest took place in the “substantial, long-established *mudéjar* communities of Aragon and Navarre.” Catlos, *The Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom*, 69; The rebellious factions in Valencia succeeded in securing military support from the Nasrids and the principalities of *al-Maghreb* and *Ifriqiya*, “the Saracens who were in the kingdom of Valencia and who had concluded peace and truce with [the Crown], thought that, as the said Lord King was far away, they could recover many castles and many places before he could hurry back. Thinking thus, and with the aid and advice of the King of Murcia and of the King of Granada, they rose in the forts and in the castles which they were able to recapture, of which they took many before the Christians had perceived it. And they overran the whole of the country and took many Christians captive and did much damage.” Ramón Muntaner, *The Chronicle of Muntaner*, trans. by Lady Goodenough. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1920), 25-26. The foreign support came in the way of companies of *jenetes*. Jerónimo Zurita, *Anales de Aragón*, ed. Ángel Canellas López, (Zaragoza: Institución Fernando El Católico, 1967), Libro I, Capitulo C, 765.

¹³⁴ Valencia offered landholders a boon opportunity to produce cereal grains and other cash crops. In fact, market oriented agriculture was, for many landholders, the only realistic source of wealth. Therefore, in an effort to maximize land use, the Catalans brought large swaths of previously uncultivated land into the production cycle. Driven by economic needs, the Crown

region reliant on agricultural production.¹³⁵ The lopsided value of *mudérjar* economic contributions to the Kingdom of Valencia and the desire to limit the leading Muslim figures from the administrative structure further enmeshed Jewish officials in the affairs of the kingdom.¹³⁶

However, the administrative integration of Valencia cannot be explained wholly by the Crown's attitudes toward the *mudéjares*. In his effort to remove himself from under the thumb of the nobility, Jaume I constituted the conquered territory of Valencia as a kingdom independent of the customs of Aragon and Catalonia. By "promulgat[ing] a new territorial custom for Valencia," Jaume successfully limited the nobility's hereditary claims and influence in the region.¹³⁷ Additionally, by removing the baronial influence in the Kingdom of Valencia, the Crown buttressed its claims of sovereignty independent of feudal control. Already incorporated into the administrative structures in Aragon and Catalonia, Jewish officials lobbied for access in the Kingdom of Valencia, a request Jaume happily granted.¹³⁸ Appointing Jewish administrators offered the Crown an additional opportunity to exclude baronial influence in the region by depriving them of administrative positions. By appointing Jews to administrative

quickly began an extensive program of land management and alteration in order to bring as much of the region under agriculture as possible.

¹³⁵ "Despite the king's rhetoric of expulsion, the Muslim largely remained in place; indeed, barons and king alike, as well as churchmen, would have suffered heavy economic and especially tax losses by the removal of that work force." Burns, *Negotiating Cultures*, 108; also see Josep. A Torró, "Field and Canal-Building after the Conquest modifications to the Cultivated Ecosystem in the Kingdom of Valencia, ca. 1250-ca. 1350," *Worlds of History and Economics: Essays in Honour of Andrew M. Watson* (2009), 77-108.

¹³⁶ "Valencia, especially its Mudejar situation, had much to do with the expanded participation of Jews in royal and local government. It not only provided broad new fields of action in management... but presented a specialized area of problems and opportunities in the form of a prosperous, dissident majority locked into its Arabic culture and language." Burns, *Medieval Colonization*, 271.

¹³⁷ Thomas N. Bisson, *The Medieval Crown of Aragon: A Short History*, (Oxford University Press, 1991), 66.

¹³⁸ See Romano, *Judíos al servicio de Pedro el Grande de Aragón*, 219-21.

positions in place of the barons the Crown untethered itself from the nobility. By 1265, Jaume I had adopted a policy explicitly aimed at elevating Jews to positions of power. The *Corts*¹³⁹ of Exea marked the moment that the Crown consciously turned to his minority subjects for political support, a policy that would become a hallmark of the royal-noble relations for nearly half a century.¹⁴⁰

The count-kings' patronage of Jewish administrators met stiff resistance from the nobles this policy threatened.¹⁴¹ The 1283 *Privilegio General* formally put an end to Jews from holding public office.¹⁴² The legislation reiterated the minority-majority social anxieties expressed in ecclesiastical thought.¹⁴³ Not only did Jewish employment threaten the social standing of entrenched baronial powers, it upset the Augustinian social hierarchy.¹⁴⁴ However, the baronial

¹³⁹ From Catlos, *The Victors and The Vanquished*, xix. *Corts* (Cat.) or *Cortes* (Cast.): "The parliament in the Crown of Aragon; convened periodically, either kingdom by kingdom or all together."

¹⁴⁰ "Pedro tried to establish a centralized political system independent of the nobility. His choice [to employ Jews for this initiative] is not surprising... their loyalty to the king was total and their dependence on the Crown absolute." Assis, *Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry*, 13; Shneidman, *The Rise of the Aragonese-Catalan Empire*, Vol. 1, 222.

¹⁴¹ The *Usatges* make explicit reference to Jews in four discrete clauses. One in particular resonates with the subject at hand. Article forty-eight: "Let Jews swear to Christians but Christians never swear to [Jews]," recognizes the dominant view of both ecclesiastical and Roman Law that Jews should in no case hold a position of authority over a Christian. Donald J. Kagay, *The Usatges of Barcelona: The Fundamental Law of Catalonia*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 73. Clause forty-eight reaffirms ideas expressed in Augustinian and Roman law on social hierarchy reflects the majority culture's anxiety that the Crown's relationship with the *aljama* imperiled basic social tenets.

¹⁴² Assis, *Jewish Economy in the Medieval Crown of Aragon*, 17.

¹⁴³ "The idea of denying Jews the right to hold public office was based both on Roman law and on the Augustinian concept of the debased status of Jews." David Abulafia, "The Servitude of Jews and Muslims in the Medieval Mediterranean: Origins and Diffusion," *Mélanges de l'Ecole Française de Rome: Moyen Âge* 112, (2000): 687-714, 701.

¹⁴⁴ "Etsi Judeos, quos propria culpa submisit perpetue servituti," cit. *TCJ*, Doc. 18; Also see, John Tolan, "Of Milk and Blood," 1-12, 5; David Abulafia, "'Nam iudei servi regis sunt, et semper fisco regio deputati': The Jews in the Municipal Fuero of Teruel (1176-7)," in *Jews, Muslims and Christians in and Around the Crown of Aragon*, ed. Harvey Hames, 97-123, (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 107; William Chester Jordan, "Administering Expulsion in 1306,"

prohibition against Jewish office holders hinged on the exercise of illicit forms of royal authority.¹⁴⁵ To end the extra-constitutional practices that the Crown utilized to emancipate itself from baronial oversight, Pere agreed to dismiss Jewish office holders and respect the ordinance that prevented future appointments.¹⁴⁶ And yet, while formally barred from holding positions within the royal governing apparatus Jews continued to hold coveted positions as functionaries and courtiers.

Well-established in the administrative apparatus and possessing the requisite linguistic skills, arabophone Jews helped the Crown bring the Kingdom of Valencia and its *mudéjar* majority into the political fold without empowering potential conspirators, Muslim and Christian alike.¹⁴⁷ This process began with Jaume I and was wholly embraced by Pere and his

Jewish Studies Quarterly 15, (2008): 241-250, 241; Gavin Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 58.

¹⁴⁵ Joseph R. Strayer, *On the Origins of the Modern State*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); Extrapolating from the *Digest* of Emperor Justinian I (r. 527-565) came the dual concepts that “whatever pleases the Prince has the force of law” and “the Prince is free from the laws.” Fancy, *The Mercenary Mediterranean*, 69; also see Ewart Lewis, “King Above Law? ‘Quod Principi Placuit’ in Bracton,” *Speculum* 39, (1964): 240-269; Brian Tierney, “‘The Prince is Not Bound By the Law.’: Accursius and the Origins of the Modern State,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5, (1963): 378-400.

¹⁴⁶ The *Usateges of Barcelona*, “a disparate collection of feudal practice, peace and truce statutes, and excerpts from Roman and Visigothic law codes,” outlined the basic rights and obligations between the Crown of Aragón and the nobility. Kagay, *The Usatges of Barcelona*, 2; “Item: that... the... Richos Ombres... demand that... there be no Jewish Bailiffs.” As quoted in Shneidman, *The Rise of the Aragonese-Catalan Empire*. Vol. 1, 228.

¹⁴⁷ At various points during the thirteenth-century the *Unión* withheld desperately needed funds and forces from the Crown’s defense of the realm and even engaged in open revolt against the Crown. See Donald J. Kagay *War, Government, and Society in the Medieval Crown of Aragon*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); “Rebellion on Trial”; Abraham A. Neuman, *The Jews in Spain: Their Social, Political and Cultural Life During the Middle Ages*, Vol. II, (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), 234; Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry*, 3; *HJCS* Vol. I, 170. In his autobiography, Jaume I regarded the nobility as evil: “we considered that we must be dealing with evil people, because usually in the entire world there are no people so proud as are knights.” *The Book of Deeds of James I of Aragon*, 206ch237. Also see Donald J. Kaygay, “The National Defense Clause and the Emergence of the Catalan State: *Princeps Namque Revisited*,” in *Crusaders, Condottieri, and Cannon: Medieval Warfare in Societies Around the Mediterranean*, ed. Donald J. Kagay and L.J. Andrew Villalon, 57-97, (Leiden: Brill,

successors.¹⁴⁸ From the perspective of political rivalry between the Crown and the nobility baronial animosity toward the Crown's Jewish administrators demonstrates the nobility's anxiety about its diminished role. Temporarily stymied by royal initiative, the Aragonese nobility continued to pursue its aim to influence the politics of Valencia. In 1283, as part of Pere's submission baronial pressure, the Aragonese nobility demanded the recognition of Aragonese privileges and customs in Valencia.¹⁴⁹ Even after Pere's negotiations with the *Unión*, however, Jews freely held sway over numerous administrative offices. The *escribanía de cartas árabigos*—the chancery of Arabic documents—remained the purview of Jews well into the fourteenth-century.

In light of the *Privilegio General*, Abenamies's 1290 appointment as scribe demonstrates the Crown's continued commitment to minority administrators. Not only does the pronouncement allude to Abenamies's ongoing work for the Crown, it explicitly connects this appointment to the kingdoms of Aragón and Valencia where the *Unión* had explicitly prohibited such appointments.¹⁵⁰ Regardless of the nobility's stance vis-à-vis Jewish officials, at this moment the administrative necessity of Jewish agents appears inescapable. Notwithstanding the seven years between the 1283 pronouncements and Abenamies's 1290 appointment, the documentation demonstrates continuity in royal policy towards Jews. It seems more than likely that prior to the 1290 appointment, Abenamies continued to work in some capacity in the royal

2013), 66.

¹⁴⁸ Chaytor, *A History of Aragon and Catalonia*, 89; Romano, *Judíos al servicio de Pedro el Grande de Aragón*, chapter 4.

¹⁴⁹ Shneidman, *The Rise of the Aragonese-Catalan Empire*, Vol. 1, 36.

¹⁵⁰ "Die aagonischen Privilegien von 1283 und 1287," *Herrschaftsverträge des Spätmittelalters* (Bern, 1951), 18, as quoted in Shneidman, *The Rise of the Aragonese-Catalan Empire*. Vol. 1.

administration.¹⁵¹ Even after Pere's 1283 concession it appears that Abenamies, along with his cousins, held positions both in the regional administration of Valencia and in the royal household. Even if we concede that the *Privilegio General* succeeded in curtailing royal power while boosting the position of the barony, when confronted by the persistent documentation regarding Jewish employment, it is difficult to conclude that the Crown ever relinquished its reliance on Jewish administrators.

This tension begs the question: why did Jews persist as administrators in spite of stringent ecclesiastical and political prohibition? Aside from a shared ancestor, the brothers Abenmenassé and Abraham Abenamies shared an essential trait: All three men were arabophone. Above all else, their knowledge of Arabic and vernacular culture qualified these men to work in the Crown's bureaucracy.¹⁵² Knowledge of Arabic was key to mediate the interests of the Crown with the interests of Muslims. And as their employment history attests, they had sustained sufficient contact with *mudéjar* culture to communicate with linguistic and cultural fluency. The continued transmission of Arabic as a language of status within families suggests "a pattern that learned Jews adopted from earlier times."¹⁵³ This erudite class of Jewish elites possessed language skills and cultural knowledge that made their presence in the administration indispensable.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ "Similarly, Abraham Abenamies, a kinsman of the Abenmenassé, was named scriptor arabicus in 1290 after carrying out several successful diplomatic missions to Granada for Alfons II." Catlos, *The Victors and the Vanquished*, 245.

¹⁵² LHA, 250.

¹⁵³ Echevarría, "Trujamanes and Scribes," 76; Romano, "Hispanojudíos traductores del árabe," 212-13.

¹⁵⁴ "Even the mere command of the intricate Arabic epistolary style and beautiful Arabic handwriting served these [Jewish] royal counselors in good stead, as it did their counterparts at Muslim courts... 'by means of it [command of Arabic]... he [Sheshet Bar Solomon Perfet (Profet)] paid his debts, met all his large expenses, and made charitable gifts,'" as the *alfaquim* (defined by Baron's secretary-interpreter) of Count Ramon Berenger III of Barcelona. Salo W. Baron, *A Social And Religious History of The Jews Vol. IV: Meeting of East and West*, 37.

In the context of contact and conflict in the border regions, cultural mediators like Abenamies emerge.¹⁵⁵ There is, however, an additional border that must be considered in order to understand Abenamies. That is the frontier that existed within the territory of the Crown of Aragón between the minority communities and the majority. Echevarria's aforementioned claims about the multilingual tendencies of the Jewish communities within Ibero-Christian society, in conjunction with Salicrú's assertion that the "internal hinge [of any frontier situation]... generated transverse or even trans-frontier figures... who...though they may have come from, belonged to and even been active in one of the two realities... were nevertheless ambidextrous and... able to do well in both worlds," creates a context where the Jewish communities of Valencia develop acute skills of cultural mediation that propel them into administrative prominence.¹⁵⁶

This dynamic appears in the appointment of Abenamies in 1291. Jaume II's notice of appointment described that Abenamies would hold the position of *scriptor noster arabicus*, acknowledging his facility with written and literary sources, and as *tursimany*, an indication that Abenamies possessed the requisite vernacular language skills to pass in arabophone environments.¹⁵⁷ The linguistic dichotomy also appears in the professional lives of both Samuel and Jahudá whose activities, Romano points out, were restricted to policy (internal and external) as it related to Muslims.¹⁵⁸ As regional tax farmers and administrators, the brothers obtained the linguistic and cultural fluency that undergirded their role as cultural mediators. A similar conclusion can be made about Abenamies. All three men held local administrative positions in

¹⁵⁵ Roser Salicrú i Lluch, "Crossing Boundaries in Late Medieval Mediterranean Iberia: Historical Glimpses of Christian-Islamic Intercultural Dialogue," *International journal of euro-mediterranean studies* (2008): 33-51.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁵⁷ ACA, C., reg. 90, f. 25v-2, ed. in Régné Doc. 2387.

¹⁵⁸ Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry*, 15.

the Kingdom of Valencia that placed them in direct contact with *mudéjares*. Subsequently, all three men held positions in the *escribanía de cartas arábigos*. Arabophone Jewish elites possessed language skills and cultural knowledge that made their presence in the administration of Muslim affairs indispensable.

The *escribano de cartas árabes* served as the contact point between the Crown of Aragón and its *mudérjar* populations as well as the Muslim principalities of the Mediterranean region. In this capacity the office and its administrators dealt with internal communication. The functionaries employed in the *escribanía* as *escribanos* handled correspondence. Much of the work entailed the drafting documents for the *mudérjar* populations of the Crown, as well as receiving and translating documents sent from said communities to the Crown. A thirteenth-century Judeo-Arabic text and a reference to Jewish “*interpretes*” from Barcelona “*intelligent et loquebant idioma catalanorum et dictorum sarracenorum*” indicate that local Latin administrators called upon arabophone Jews to arbitrate the affairs of governing the *mudérjar* populations.¹⁵⁹ In this capacity, *escribanos de cartas árabes* acted as translators and transcribers, processing received communications and formulating outgoing messages.¹⁶⁰ It is likely that *escribanos* were fluent speakers of Arabic, evinced by the Crown’s apparent propensity to employ *trujamanes* from within the ranks of the *escribanía*. Like the *scriptor*, *trujamanes* were responsible for “writing communications to the Islamic kingdoms of the Peninsula and North Africa.”¹⁶¹ The title of *trujamanes*, however, indicates that individuals holding this post had more immediate contact with their subjects, as the role of oral translator

¹⁵⁹ See David Romano, “Un texto en aljamía hebraicoarabe,” *Sefarad* 29, (1969): 313-319; Romano, “Hispanojudíos traductores del árabe,” 220n37. Romano provides a paraphrased edition of this same text in JET, 99.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁶¹ Echevarría, “Trujamanes and Scribes,” 77, 80; Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry*, 15.

indicates. As such, these individuals accompanied emissaries and diplomats to help facilitate mediations, and on occasion, *trujamanes* served as *mandaderos*, carrying the messages themselves.¹⁶²

The most important role in the *escribanía de cartas arábigos* fell to the *scriptor maior*. The *scriptor maior* was responsible for directing the operations of the royal chancery of Arabic letters and translations.¹⁶³ Not only did the *scriptor maior* oversee the operation of the *escribanía* and manage the *escribanos* and *trujamanes*, the *scriptor maior* acted as the direct point of communication between the count-king and his Muslim subjects. The *scriptor maior* helped the count-king formulate correspondences in Arabic and informed the count-king of the meaning of letters received in Arabic. The nature and importance of the office of the *scriptor maior* reflected his close relationship with the count-king. Signing the document in draft form indicated the trust and dependence Pere placed on the office of the *scriptor maior*.¹⁶⁴ As Pere's 1280 correspondence suggests, Samuel, in his capacity as *scriptor maior*, drafted and edited communications on behalf of the count-king. Moreover, Romano suggests that Pere II signed letters that were still in the revision process trusting that Samuel, as the *scriptor maior*, would be faithful in his translations.¹⁶⁵

The orthography of earlier text in Samuel Abenmenassé's care gestures toward the central aspect of the office, to convey clear meaning across the linguistic barriers of *dār al-*

¹⁶² Echevarría, "Trujamanes and Scribes," 77.

¹⁶³ "Jefe de la sección árabe de la cancillería real aragonesa." JET, 77.

¹⁶⁴ ACA, C., reg. 41, f. 97, ed. LHA, 256n52.

¹⁶⁵ ACA, C., reg. 41, f. 97, ed. LHA, 256n52. The text indicates that the king was obliged to sign the document even though it was still in the process of being edited/ revised. Romano suggests that the king signed the document in draft form indicates the trust he placed on the office of the *escribano de cartas* for their knowledge of Arabic.

Islām and Latin Christendom.¹⁶⁶ The document does not make clear whether or not Samuel Abenmenassé had been in charge of writing the letter in both Arabic and Latin, but it seems clear from the text that the Samuel had knowledge of the language of the peace charter, and could accurately convey the meaning to the Sultan of Granada. The marginalia on the credentials of Ruy Ximenez de Luna, the count-king's ambassador to Tunis, suggest that Samuel may have had a direct hand in the formulation of the letter.¹⁶⁷ This dynamic appears again in the 1297 correspondence between Jaume II and Muhammad II. In a renewed commitment to peace, truce, and mutual assistance against enemies, Muhammad's closing lines address the critical role of the translator. Not only did Muhammad send Jaume II confirmation of the agreed upon terms in Arabic, he also included a faithful translation of the terms in the Christian language, Latin: "*Y para que todo sea firmey válido, escribimos el presente documento a Vos destinado, idéntico al que, con tal objeto, habéis escrito para Nos en caracteres cristianos.*"¹⁶⁸ Here then the contributions of the *scriptor maior*, the *esribano de cartas árabes*, and *trujamanes* to the Crown's interactions across linguistic barriers are made explicit.

It is hard to overstate the importance of language as an asset for the Crown. Preservation of Arabic language within the elite stratum of Iberian Jewry crystalized the elite social and economic position of arabophone Jews within the *aljama*. Subsequently, maintaining arabophone culture within the elite of the *aljama* preserved the place of the *aljama* in the political and social climate of majority society. The retention of Arabic within the Jewish administrative community moved Arabic from a position of *language of culture* to *language of*

¹⁶⁶ "Tradidimus Samueli alphaquimo cartam pacis regis Granate *latine et arabice scriptam*" ACA, C., reg, 47, f. 41, ed. ed. LHA, 255n50. My emphasis: Also in Gazulla, "Las compañías de zenetes," 176n3.

¹⁶⁷ LHA, 256.

¹⁶⁸ Maximiliano A. Alarcón y Satón, and Ramón García de Linares, *Los documentos árabes diplomáticos del Archivo de la Corona de Aragón*, (Madrid: Estanislao Maestre, 1940), 3.

administration, preserving and perpetuating the privileged role for arabophone administrators.

By advancing royal policy aims, this relationship proved to be a mutually beneficial to the count-kings, as they sought to consolidate the power of the monarchy, and the Jewish administrative elite. In turn, individuals and the wider Jewish community received social privileges that provided safety and preserved social standing in the greater society.

Benefits

Royal patronage gave Abenamies access to considerable material wealth. Aside from his promotion to scribe of Alfons's household (*scribanie domus nostre*), Alfons provided Abenamies with a steady salary commensurate with his appointment (*et recipias pro labore et salario dicti officii quitacionem*). As was customary for members of the court, Alfons also gifted Abenamies two animals (*duorum animalium*), presumably horses or jennies, a considerable value.¹⁶⁹ Looking to the experiences of other Jewish agents in the Crown's service provides an expanded picture of the material gains available to Abenamies. For example, the brothers Abenmenassé, Samuel and Jahudá, both held vast estates in Játiva. The revenues they generated from the Muslim and Christian tenants and laborers they retained tax-free.¹⁷⁰ Additionally, as Samuel's 1283 petition to the Crown suggests, the brothers Abenmenassé and Abenamies had access to fine cloth (or finer cloth than that of most of their coreligionists) and decorative ornamentation. These materials benefits set Abenamies as an agent of the Crown apart from his coreligionists. And in majority society it marked him as a beneficiary of royal patronage and indicated a breach in the social hierarchy of Christendom.

In addition to the material benefits, Abenamies gained access to social and communal privileges. A royal injunction against sartorial obstruction appeared again in 1290 in conjunction with the movements of Abenamies.¹⁷¹ In the pronouncement Alfons II reaffirmed to the judiciary of Valencia that his Jewish agents should be considered exempt from the regulations that obliged the Jews of Barcelona and Valencia to wear the "Jewish hat" [*Capas*

¹⁶⁹ Fancy writes that in 1289 the Alfons compensated a *jenete* soldier in his service 500 *solidi* for a horse that was lost in service. The Crown paid out *solidi* to the *jenete*, Maymon, to recover a horse he had pawned in Valencia. In contrast Jaume III paid 130 *solidi* in 1310 to compensate the loss of a mule. Fancy, *The Mercenary Mediterranean*, 60.

¹⁷⁰ See ACA, C., reg. 44, f. 245, ed. LHA, 290, Apéndice 13.

¹⁷¹ ACA, C., reg. 81, f. 10r, ed. Régné, Doc. 2058.

rotundas].¹⁷² Abenamies and his traveling partner, Abraham el Jenet, were beneficiaries this royal exemption because of their attachment to the royal household.¹⁷³ This mention indicates that by the start of 1290, Abenamies and Abraham el Jenet were attached to Alfons's *domus*, in connection with services rendered to the Crown and or in anticipation of future service. As the flurry of documents pertaining to Abenamies's January 1290 negotiations in the Naşrid Court suggest, this particular pronouncement anticipated Abenamies's diplomatic mission south. What is clear is that Abenamies, exempt from adhering to the communal attire requirements since 1283, now held the exemption in his own right.

Alfons's intervention acknowledged Abenamies's access to customs guided by the precedent set by his grandfather Jaume I in 1268 concerning the standard of dress for the Jewish *aljama* of Barcelona.¹⁷⁴ First, Jaume's ordinance removes the obligation set by Lateran IV and again by the Synods of Narbonne and Oxford requiring Jews to publicly demonstrate their religious affiliation by wearing a pronounced badge.¹⁷⁵ Instead, Jaume determined that a more inconspicuous round cap would suffice. Second, the Barcelona customs contained a provision exempting the Jewish courtiers in the employment of the monarchy from adhering even to this more lenient dress code.¹⁷⁶ In 1283 Pere expanded the reach of his father's ordinance to cover

¹⁷² For an extended discussion of required headdress for medieval Jews see Sara Lipton, *Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014).

¹⁷³ ACA, C., reg. 81, f. 10r, ed. Régné, Doc. 2058.

¹⁷⁴ Régné, Doc. 390.

¹⁷⁵ *The Council of Oxford, 17 April 1222*: "We decree by the authority of the present general council, that each and every Jew, whether male or female, shall wear clearly exposed on the outer garments, on the chest, a linen patch of a different color from that of his garment, so that each patch shall measure two fingers in width or four in length." ed. TCJ, XVI; *The Council of Province of Narbonne, March-April 1227*: "In order that Jews may be told apart from others, we decree... most emphatically, that in the center of the breast (of their garments) they shall wear an oval badge the width of which shall be of the measure of one finger and the height of half a palm." ed. TCJ, XVIII.

¹⁷⁶ ACA, C., reg. 15, f. 123, ed. Régné, Doc. 390.

the Jewish community of Valencia as well.¹⁷⁷ Alfons upheld the practices of his royal predecessors that Jewish agents might be exempt from the sartorial requirements based on their status vis-à-vis royal patronage.

The individual boon of royal patronage placed Abenamies in a delicate position among his coreligionists. The exemptions the Crown upheld in 1290, as well as the injunction on behalf of Samuel in 1283, ensured that neither the *aljama* of the kingdom of Valencia (1290) nor Játiva (1283) should impede Abenamies, and his family members, in their choice of dress. Therefore, as much as the exemption afforded Abenamies and his family the capacity to dress as they wished in Christian society, the Crown's intervention suggests that the most immediate pressure against breaking the dress code came from within the Jewish community.

This confrontational dynamic was heightened in the case of the financial benefits afforded Abenamies. In the Jewish community's stream of tax revenue the impecunious Crown found a panacea for its financial strains. Because minorities, and Jews in particular, were a traditional source of partible wealth, the count-kings turned to the Jewish communities under conservatorship for financial aid.¹⁷⁸ The transactional nature of this relationship meant that the fortunes of the Jewish community ebbed and flowed with that of the Crown, specifically with regard to its monetary needs. Thus, the relative health of the *aljama*'s economy had a hand in determining its political standing within the Crown of Aragón.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ ACA C., reg. 46, fol. 152v, ed. Régné, Doc. 1103.

¹⁷⁸ See Ramzi Rouighi, *The Making of a Mediterranean Emirate: Ifriqiya and Its Andalusis, 1200-1400*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), for a discussion on the utility of wealthy foreigners as potential reservoirs of wealth for the sovereign.

¹⁷⁹ See Gunnar Tilander, *Los fueros de Aragón: según el Manuscrito 458 de la Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid*, (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1937), 163ch274. The economic value of the Jewish presence in the Crown of Aragón was codified in the *fuero de Aragón* which stipulated that neither Jews nor Muslims could freely sell their properties to Christians without first receiving the consent of the count-king or his local representative. If approved, the Crown received one third of the proceeds. In essence, the royal third compensated the lost revenues

The Crown taxed its *aljamas* as a collective. By delegating to representatives of the various communities the responsibility of assessing the appropriate manner of collecting the total financial obligation owed the Crown, the count-kings stipulated that the Jewish communities should determine the individual tax rates of its constituents.¹⁸⁰ Sending local representatives to meet with representatives from the far-flung Jewish communities of the Crown of Aragón, the delegated decided among themselves the appropriate manner of collecting the total funds required by the Crown.¹⁸¹ While at once a privilege, assessing tax rates for individuals and communities proved onerous, especially when taking into account the tax privileges enjoyed by *'franchyos'* Jews and the communal support extended to the poorest members of the communities.¹⁸²

It comes as no surprise that the social status of Jews varied considerably within the *aljama* and that the affluent sector found greater favor with the Crown. The Crown often turned to the elite individuals of the *aljama* for short-term loans or gifts to keep the realm solvent. In return for these contributions the Crown granted social and economic privileges like tax

that the sale entailed. In contrast, Jews and Muslims could freely sell properties to other Jews and Muslims. In such cases, the properties and the attached wealth remained under the indirect control of the Crown.

¹⁸⁰ “In most places now communal affairs are managed by a council of the community’s notables, since it is impossible for women, minors and the feeble-minded to have a voice in the management of affairs, and these few councilmen are assumed to be their guardians, taking care of their interests.” Ibn Adret on the organization of leadership as quoted in, *HJCS* Vol. I, 219.

¹⁸¹ See Isidore Epstein, *The ‘Responsa’ of Rabbi Solomon Ben Adreth of Barcelona (1235-1310): A Source of the History of Spain Studies in the Communal Life of the Jews in Spain as Reflected in the ‘Responsa’*, (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1925), 15-32. The *berurim*, among other duties as a representative of the community was tasked with assessing and collecting taxes.

¹⁸² “From the *aljama* of Valencia complaints reached James II charging the rich with shifting the burden of taxation onto the shoulders of the middle and lower classes.” *HJCS* Vol. I, 231; *Franchyos* is a term that appears in Pere’s 15 August 1280 document describing Samuel communal tax exemption. The term *franco* Jew is used by Yom Tov Assis to describe the stratum of the Jewish *aljama* set apart from their coreligionists by royal privilege, usually with regards to tax exemptions. Also see Catlos, *The Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom*, 175.

exemptions and weekly allotments of goods, effectively transforming the moneyed elite into a class of *franchyo* Jews.¹⁸³ Nor is it surprising that the elite stratum of the community received a disproportionate share of the benefits, while the majority of the community's members bore the brunt of the cost and responsibilities.¹⁸⁴ While these *franchyos* Jews were often the wealthiest members of the Jewish community, they were not obliged to contribute to the overall tax burden, which remained the same.¹⁸⁵ Because the overall tax rate owed to the Crown did not diminish when an individual or family received remittance from tax responsibilities, the burden shifted onto a diminished number of individuals of more meager means.¹⁸⁶

Internal tensions were further heightened when the Crown demanded advances on the *aljama's* tax payments.¹⁸⁷ In such cases the community turned to the *franchyos* Jews of the community for financial remittance.¹⁸⁸ As a means of mitigating the potential harm caused by late payments or an inability to meet financial obligations, the *aljama* relied on its wealthiest members to guarantee the necessary payment through loans to the community. These financial advances offered the wealthiest and best positioned Jews, already exempt from the communal tax burden, an occasion to further leverage their social status, again at the expense of their

¹⁸³ "Sheshet ben Isaac Benveniste... *alfiquim* and bailiff to Alfonso II and Pedro II (d. 1212)... and his brother Beneviste owned urban and rural property throughout Aragon and Catalonia and were the beneficiaries of certain state revenues. They were exempted from the payment of tolls on rivers or on land and they were removed from the jurisdiction of the local authorities, both Jewish and Christian... Jews in such high positions were removed from the jurisdiction of local administrative and judicial authorities, which, in effect, conferred upon them the legal status of the highest nobility of the realm." *HJCS* vol. 1, 91.

¹⁸⁴ See ACA, C., reg. 48, f. 65r, ed. Régne, Doc. 800. Royal benefits often took the form of financial exemptions. The king "undoubtedly derived certain benefits" from the elites whom he had freed from both royal and communal financial obligations. Assis, *Jewish Economy in the Medieval Crown of Aragon*, 109; Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry*, 34.

¹⁸⁵ Epstein, *The 'Responsa' of Rabbi Solomon Ben Adreth of Barcelona*, 15-32.

¹⁸⁶ "These unique prerogatives, which continued to be exercised for generations by the descendants of the original recipients, became a burden upon the *aljamass*." *HJCS* Vol. I, 92.

¹⁸⁷ Assis, *Jewish Economy in the Medieval Crown of Aragon*, 42.

¹⁸⁸ Shneidman, *The Rise of the Aragonese-Catalan Empire*, Vol. II, 436.

coreligionists. However, those same members who were also exempt from paying taxes for their services to the Crown, in turn demanded a full reimbursement for their personal contributions.¹⁸⁹ The tax benefits enjoyed by *franchyos* Jews and agents of the court placed the constituents of the Crown's *aljamas* into adversarial lender-borrower roles, so odious in Christian society, a dynamic exacerbated by the financial exemptions of the elites.¹⁹⁰

And yet, the issue was not so straightforward. The elites of the *aljama* played an important role in preserving the standing of the Jewish minority in the Crown of Aragón. From their socially elevated position, these elites could lobby the Crown on behalf of their community.¹⁹¹ Furthermore, royal patronage offered the Jewish minority some level of security in persons and goods and shielded the community from perdition.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ According to “Jewish law Jews were not permitted to take interest from fellow-Jews.” Assis, *Jewish Economy in the Medieval Crown of Aragon*, 43. However, Assis points to various instances that suggest such laws were summarily ignored. *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁹⁰ “The *aljama* of Valencia issued an ordinance assuming responsibility for any loan given by any of its members to the king or the members of his ruling court. The *aljama* understood to reimburse the lender, thus taking over any such loans... this ordinance was clearly at the expense of the poorer classes who had to share in the payment of loans given by rich Jews.” *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁹¹ “There are expenditures made annually [to the Crown] on the eve of a certain holiday of theirs for [the *aljama*'s] protection.” Ibn Adret as quoted in *HJCS*, Vol. I, 160.

¹⁹² ACA, C., Reg. 60, f. 20, ed. LHA, 288, Apéndice, 9; “The Jews were dependent for protection upon the kings...when this source of safety failed, they were exposed to attack from all quarters... The safety of the Jews could be secured only through the strong hand of the king and the influence of his Jewish official.” *HJCS*, Vol. I, 45, 51. Some of the privileges intended to protect Jews against popular attack were the result of agitation and hatred propagated by the Church.” Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry*, 29; Régné Doc. 236; “Most analysis of Holy Week begins and ends with the statement that violence occurred because medieval Christians saw the Jews as deicides...in contemporaries' understanding, the Jews crime had not gone unpunished: of this both history and their immediate present were proof. Christians did not have to be theologians to know that the fall of Jerusalem and the initiation of the diaspora had been both divine vengeance and evidence of the immanence of Christian empire.” Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 214 & 216.

Legally, the count-kings held conservatorship over the Jewish community.¹⁹³ This special status entered the legal precedent of the Crown of Aragón from the twelfth-century *fuero* of Teruel which classified Jews as “servants of the king and of his treasury,” (*servi regis*).¹⁹⁴ Importantly, the term *servi regis* entered into the law in the context of a physical assault or murder suffered by a Jew at the hands of a Christian. The clause concluded that attack on a Jew would be considered an attack on “royal property.”¹⁹⁵ The statute may reflect the notion that Jews in theory, though not always in practice on the Iberian Peninsula,¹⁹⁶ should not be permitted to carry weapons. Prevented from bearing arms, their defense was left up to the prince.¹⁹⁷

Under the Crown’s conservatorship, the *aljama* enjoyed relative communal autonomy.¹⁹⁸ With royal patronage came self-rule, access to religious rites and customs, and judicial authority. Preserved by royal interest, the communal leadership of the *aljama*

¹⁹³ “Que todos los judios sean... en especial guarda del senyor rey.” Cabarte, *Fueros y observaciones*, p. IIb; cf. ACA, Reg. 43, f. 30v, as quoted in Assis *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry*, 9.

¹⁹⁴ “*Nam iudei servi regis sunt, et semper fisco regio deputati*” David Abulafia, “*Nam iudei servi regis*,” 97; “*qual los jodio siervos son del senyor Rey et sienpre a la real bolsa son contados.*” Roth, “The Civic Status of the Jews in Medieval Spain,” 140.

¹⁹⁵ Abulafia, “The Servitude of Jews and Muslims in the Medieval Mediterranean,” 691.

¹⁹⁶ As Norman Roth points out, the statues barring Jews from bearing arms does not seem to have taken hold in the Iberian contexts. In fact, Jews guarded their privileges to bear arms, and were at times called upon by the Monarchy to protect the territory of the kingdom from attack. Roth, “Civil Status of the Jews of Medieval Spain,” 146-148; Also see Elena Lourie, “A Jewish Mercenary in the Service of the King of Aragon,” for a discussion of the 500 *solidi* fine if Jews failed to defend the realm against attack, and the various grants allowing Samuel and Abraham to carry weapons.

¹⁹⁷ This issue does not appear operative on the Iberian Peninsula. “In 1296 the *infante* Peter ordered the Jews of El Frago to prepare, with weapons, to join an expedition against Castile. Those who did not desire to participate could find replacements and pay 800 sous to exempt themselves. Our sources are replete with references to individual Jews getting into fights with swords, often in the synagogues and even on the Sabbath when carrying weapons was strictly forbidden.” Roth, “The Civic Status of the Jews in Medieval Spain,” 146

¹⁹⁸ Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry*, 21, 22. The Crown delegated to the Judiciary of the *aljama* the right to adjudicate cases between Jews according to Jewish custom except in serious cases such as murder.

determined the internal governing structure that gave shape and character to the Jewish community.¹⁹⁹ For the vast majority of the *aljama*'s constituents, communal control worked without issue. The authority that the *aljama* exerted over its constituents, however, unfolded in a space of conditional autonomy subject to royal oversight and intervention. As such, Jews remained a community apart, possessed a distinct judicial apparatus, and enjoyed a special relationship to the Crown. Royal grants and privileges provided Jewish communities a protected space in which to operate.²⁰⁰ At once a holdover of the Augustinian legacy protecting a subservient Jewish presence in Christian society, and a product of the legal understanding of Jews as direct subjects of the royal household or treasury, the Crown provided a place in Christian society in which a Jewish community could prosper as *servi regis*.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ The Aragono-Catalan *aljama* structure followed that of the composite kingdom. The “largely decentralized framework and administration” mirrored that of the Crown of Aragón, and “strongly enhanced the natural tendency of the local Jewish community to protect its independence... the *aljama*... remained basically an independent unit, jealousy defending its separate autonomous existence.” Ibid., 68.

²⁰⁰ The community charters do demonstrate the fragility of Jewish life under the Crown's authority since the legal of privileges could be removed by the will of the king. Abraham A. Neuman, *The Jews in Spain: Their Social, Political and Cultural Life During the Middle Ages*, Vol. I, (New York: Octogon Books, 1969), 30: It appears that the amendments made to the municipal charters which protected the Jewish communities, and the Crown's interventions on behalf of Jews, were overwhelmingly in favor of the Jews interest, often extending rights and privileges not attainable to the Christian majority. Régne Doc. 386— protection of Jewish community from being forced to listen to sermons; Régne Doc. 389— Jaume I affirms the rights of Jews of Barcelona to possess synagogues and take the necessary actions for their upkeep. Neuman, *The Jews in Spain* Vol. II, 224-5; also see Neuman, *The Jews in Spain*, Vol. 1, 6, 7, 34.

²⁰¹ For more on the Augustinian view of Jews in Christendom and a thirteenth-century understanding of Augustinian concepts see Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism*, (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 193-4; Fernando Suárez Bilbao, *El fuero judiego en la España cristiana: las fuentes jurídicas siglos V-XV*, (Madrid: Dykinson, 2000), 17; Lipton, *Dark Mirror*, 4. Augustinian thought preserved a Jewish presence in the Christian world. Jews, Augustine argued, had an active albeit subservient role to play in the lives of Christians. In the Augustinian view, Jews, by the necessity of Christian theology, had to remain a part of Christendom, if only to serve as proof of the Christian truth. The Augustinian vision for Jewish participation in Christian society also

As direct subjects of the Crown, the Jewish community relied on the good graces of the Crown for protection and order. If remaining in the good graces of the Crown meant meeting its burdensome financial obligations and the *aljama*'s ability to meet these demands relied on the intervention of wealthy and *franchyos* Jews, then the personal ties between favored individuals and the Crown offered the Jewish community security in persons and goods and shielded the community from perdition. Here then emerges a point of friction between the wealthy members and the common members. If the good stead of the community rested, in part, on its ability to satisfy the financial needs of the Crown, and the Crown often demanded expedited payments from an *aljama*, it was in the best interest of the community to turn to the members of that *aljama* who had the disposable capital to make the necessary payments. The reliance on the wealthy members to ensure payments made the non-elites reliant on the wealth of the elite.²⁰² This relationship also meant that the non-elites were socially indebted to the communal elites, and placed the interests of individuals ahead of the communal well-being.

The resistance of the *aljama* to the privileges of Abenamies and Samuel Abenmenassé demonstrates that the Jewish community sought to limit individual privileges that might impact the health of the *aljama*. The cases of Abenamies and Samuel highlight a critical tension that gave structure to the *aljama*'s communal autonomy: the law of the king is law, and the majority is not subject to the minority.²⁰³ The Jewish communities of Valencia and Játiva acted in accordance with the organizing structure of the *aljama* by impinging on Abenamies's and Samuel's access to clothing. The community leaders viewed social cohesion and communal

provided the theological framework stabilizing the Jewish minority's presence in Christendom.

²⁰² ACA, C., reg, 74, f. 80, ed. Régné Doc. 1889.

²⁰³ "*dina de-malkhutha dina*," as quoted in *HJCS*, Vol. I, 286.

integrity as the axis of continued autonomy and safety.²⁰⁴ Royal privilege placed the individuals interested in conflict with the consensus opinion. As the tax exemptions demonstrate, royal privileged heightened tensions within the Jewish community. Sartorial liberties further distinguished the elite from the non-elite, and highlighted the disparity between royal patronage in the Jewish community. In both cases, royal privilege placed individual benefit ahead of the majority.

The structural relationship between the Crown and the *aljama*, and the discussion internal to the *aljama*, reconciling the precarious position of its limited jurisdiction, demonstrates the depth to which royal interest infiltrated Jewish life. The conflict between personal interest and consensus opinion comes to a head most clearly in instances of contested privilege. While no member of the *aljama* could exclude himself from the *aljama*'s jurisdiction, the law of the King should be honored faithfully. The privileges Jewish functionaries and favored individuals enjoyed punctuate the historical records as a site of contestation. How then did the *aljama*'s leadership reconcile the inherent contradiction? The thirteenth-century jurist Ibn Adret distilled the answer: “know, therefore, that the king of the nation has dominion over us... the king's mandate came well under the principle, ‘The law of the king is law’.”²⁰⁵ That is, while the majority opinion was nearly absolute in the *aljama*, the nature and source of the *aljama*'s autonomous power, the Crown, could intervene and force the *aljama* to acquiesce. To make sense of this paradox the thirteenth-century jurist Ibn Adret argued that “the laws of the king were to be honorably fulfilled as contractual obligations, for they were the conditions

²⁰⁴ This sentiment appears in Rabbi Mier of Rothenberg's (d.1293) allegedly response to a Jewish man who, by way of dress, posed as Christian. In Rabbi Mier's estimation, the ambiguously dressed Jew was a “despicable creature.” The Rabbi's judgment reflects a notion that with rigorous community commitment to the moral prescriptions of the Law came rigorous social order and a (nearly) unassailable position in majority society. As quoted in Lipton, *Dark Mirror*, 160.

²⁰⁵ Neuman, *The Jews in Spain*, Vol. I, 9.

which he, as sovereign of the land, had the right to impose upon them, his subjects, *as the terms upon which they might live in his territory.*"²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ My emphasis. Ibid.

Conclusion

On a midsummer's day in 1292, riders set off from Jaume II's court in Barcelona toward the territory of Granada. As the riders plodded south toward the boarder with the Naşrid sultanate, they traced the well-worn paths of communication that carried countless riders and messages between the Christian patrimony of the Crown of Aragón, and the Muslim patrimony of Naşrid Granada. On this occasion the riders carried an epistle from Jaume II to the sultan Muhammad II (r.1273-1302) concerning one of Jaume II's trusted diplomats and a frequent sojourner to the Naşrid court, Abraham Abenamies. In the years prior to his death, Abraham Abenamies had been a regular visitor to the Naşrid territory. On occasion as the Crown's special envoy to the Naşrid court, and personal attaché to a member of the Naşrid nobility, Abenamies was familiar with the nearly nine-hundred-kilometer journey between royal courts. Unlike the circumstances of Abenamies's many missions however, the occasion for Jaume's July emissary was not explicitly political, rather it was a recovery effort. Sometime during the summer of 1292, Jaume II had received word that Abenamies had died while in Naşrid territory. The message indicated that Abenamies's body and belongings were being held by the Naşrids. Hearing of the death of Abenamies, Jaume drafted the correspondence to the Naşrid sultan urging the repatriation of the deceased and his estate.²⁰⁷

The warm lines of text that open and close Jaume's letter to Muhammad II document and extol the respect and friendship between the rulers (*muy noble y honrado Mahomet Abennaqaz Rey d Granada...salut i amor*).²⁰⁸ These lines are a testament to Abenamies's mediations. His near continual travels between the courts played an important role in suturing together any gaps that might have existed between the religio-political rivals. Abenamies as one of countless

²⁰⁷ ACA, C., reg. 95, f. 92-2, cit. JET, 95n122, ed. DJC, 23n120.

²⁰⁸ ACA, C., reg. 95, f.92-2, ed. JET, 95n122.

individuals enacted that basic tenet of the Mediterranean that gave the region its distinctive character. His efforts bought the micro-climates of the Crown of Aragón and the Naşrid sultanate together in creative exchange and collaboration.

The story of Abraham Abenamies is a difficult one to write. He is at once unique in his humanity and fascinating in his actions, and yet utterly commonplace in the dynamics of the Crown of Aragón. He sits astride a moment in the Crown's history marked by political calamity and expediency. Chancery records, though laconic, tell us of Abenamies's ambition and skill, of personal intrigue and unexpected connections—the very narrative elements that make Abenamies compelling. And yet they are the same elements that ran concurrent across many of the Crown's dealings at this political juncture. The same forces that propelled Abenamies into the annals of the Crown of Aragón shaped the lives of the scores of diplomats and functionaries similarly charged with succoring the Crown in its time of need. Looking to Abenamies to illuminate a rare or unique historical storyline is foolish. Neither he nor his story is singular. And that is exactly the point. Abenamies, entwined in a complex web of social tension, merits examination precisely because of his shared links to named and nameless individuals striving to achieve personal ambitions, vocational success, and to carve out for themselves a better place in society. While Abenamies's ambitions, his actions, and his success in the field of diplomacy certainly illuminate the political ambitions of the Crown of Aragón, they speak to and for a particular segment of society.

The opening lines from my introduction resonate in the actions and achievements of Abenamies; given the ideological and socio-political circumstances in the Latin West during the thirteenth-century, Jews in Christendom should have achieved at best modest social success. In the Crown of Aragón, however, Abraham Abenamies leveraged his cultural inheritance and

kinship network to access prosperity and influence beyond situational expectations.

Abenamies's linguistic and cultural fluidity facilitated his passage between the Crown of Aragón and the Muslim Mediterranean. Employed as a member the Chancery of Arabic Letters, Abenamies acted as a diplomat and agent across the religious and linguistic frontiers of thirteenth-century Iberia. His efforts resulted in tangible and immediately useful outcomes in support of his royal patrons. The support structure of the *aljama*, typified by Abenamies and his cousins, provided the Crown of Aragón the wellspring of capital (political, financial, and demographic) needed to pursue policy aims independent of venal hereditary interests. Against stiff opposition from both the macro and meso pressures of ecclesiastical legislation and the initiatives of the barony, arabophone Jews nevertheless persisted in positions of prestige and power, achieving vocational prosperity and providing stability for their communities.

In this thesis I explored the life of Abraham Abenamies in order to understand the macro, meso, and micro level forces that extended across the Crown of Aragón and mediated the lives of the Crown's Jewish minority population. Approached from the *Mediterranean Perspective*, Abenamies's provides greater insight into the latticework of social, cultural, and political pressures that undergirded the Crown of Aragón. As the *Mediterranean Perspective* dictates, moreover, a discussion of this particular individual occasions a much broader discussion than of just one man. To discuss Abenamies is to also discuss cultural mediators as they appeared on the local, regional, and trans-regional level. And in this regard there is much work still to be done. The vocational and cultural capacities exhibited by Abenamies were common traits for intermediaries across the Mediterranean.²⁰⁹ Such skills proved indispensable in creating

²⁰⁹ See Roser Salicrú i Lluç, "The Catalano-Aragonese Commercial Presence in the Sultanate of Granada During the Reign of Alfonso the Magnanimous," *Journal of Medieval History* 27, (2001): 289-312; "Crossing Boundaries in Late Medieval Mediterranean Iberia,"; "Translators, Interpreters and Cultural Mediators in Late Medieval Eastern Iberia and Western

coherence across the Mediterranean's regions and cultures, and drew the distant shores and disparate peoples together through contact and exchange.

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