BAD BLOOD: IMPURITY AND DANGER IN THE EARLY MODERN SPANISH MENTALITY

Rhonda Pyle, B.A.

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APPROVED:

Richard Golden, Major Professor
Pierina Beckman, Minor Professor
Marilyn Morris, Committee Member
Richard McCaslin, Chair of the Department of History
James D. Meernik, Acting Dean of the Robert B. Toulouse School of Graduate Studies
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The current work is an intellectual history of how blood permeated early modern Spaniards' conceptions of morality and purity. This paper examines Spanish intellectuals' references to blood in their medical, theological, demonological, and historical works. Through these excerpts, this thesis demonstrates how this language of blood played a role in buttressing the church's conception of good morals. This, in turn, will show that blood was used as a way to persecute Jews and Muslims, and ultimately define the early modern Spanish identity.
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INTRODUCTION

Blood has been, and continues to be, a very prominent theme in many cultures. Humans have always been obsessed with the idea that blood is something more than just a fluid that is circulated throughout our bodies, that it has mystical properties yet to be unveiled. For many, “blood” is who a person is, or it defines where the person comes from. When people say that something is “in their blood,” they typically intend to suggest that blood, nature, and heritage are all intertwined. Americans, in particular, use the expression “red-blooded” to suggest a deep level of patriotism. “Blue-blooded,” on the other hand, is used as a character defamation to imply that the person is well-to-do, snobbish, and disconnected from common people. Most people are also familiar with the theme of blood having supernatural properties. Historian Joshua Trachtenberg notes this phenomenon:

Medieval magic is full of recipes for putting to occult use human fat, human blood, entrails, hands, fingers; medieval medicine utilized as one of its chief medicaments, along with other parts of the human body, blood, preferably blood that had been freshly drawn, or menstrual blood.¹

The belief that blood was an appropriate and powerful tool for magic, though, goes back much further than the Middle Ages. Even now, blood is a constant theme, whether one realizes it or not. A work on this entire history would be ambitious. Rather early modern Spain presents a good illustration of what happens to a culture when it is fixated upon blood as a way to distinguish itself from other societies and people. The language and rhetoric surrounding blood that early modern Spanish writers used reveal a great deal about their culture, and how they handled other culture that existed within their land.

There are deeper implications within this obsession with blood. The blood is not simply a fixation with all things morbid, though this represented a small part of the fascination. For the early modern Spaniards, blood became connected with purity, and with identity. References to nobility's blood were consistently positive and flattering. However, any society or group living within Spain, but existing outside of the Spanish comfort zone underwent a different experience. Allusions to the blood of New Christians or non-Christians were negative and disparaging. For some groups, blood was coupled with other charges to bring about accusations of witchcraft. Some people's blood could even make them unintelligent. Blood was used as a linguistic tool for defining what the Spanish intellectual perceived as healthy and unhealthy in society. There were many factors that contributed to this Spanish mindset, and they will be addressed below to provide a comprehensive understanding of the situation in early modern Spain.

Spain's Two Main Influential Theological Philosophers

Early modern Spain, particularly university centers like Salamanca, adhered to the teachings and writings of the theologians St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas more so than the many other church fathers and theologians. This focus accounts for some of the supposed Spanish skepticism, such as that shown towards witches' flight in the early sixteenth century. Gustav Henningsen argues that it was not that the Spanish were skeptical, but that they were old-fashioned. Intellectuals were reluctant to believe anything that church fathers had not written about. It is therefore reasonable to highlight
some of the main tenets that Augustine and Aquinas had disseminated, and that the early modern Spanish Church used.

One of the earliest influential church fathers was Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430). Augustine’s most important idea for post-Reconquista Spain was possibly his conception of two cities. One of these cities was the City of God, where people lived in God’s grace, aspired to his will, and anticipated his justice. The other city was the earthly city, where the citizens were “sinners, including infidels and heretics.” The citizens of the heavenly city hoped to expand its boundaries by the conversion of others. Early modern Spaniards would certainly have seen this action and goal as a right for them to convert Jews and Muslims at all costs. And those who did not convert were required to leave; Spain was a forced City of God built around a façade of genuine piety. Augustine also wrote a great deal on the problem of evil in a world created by a supposedly good God. One of his key thoughts to emerge from these contemplations was that God tolerates evil, and allows it for the greater good. Spaniards saw this to mean that heretics and infidels were created from the Spanish “greater good” of converting them. Finally, another of Augustine’s prominent themes was that history had a moral interpretation. History was indeed a popular topic for early modern Spanish writings, and many authors applied Augustine’s concept. A perfect example is Relaciones Históricas Toledanas (Historical Relations of Toledo, 1544-72) by Sebastian de Horozco (1510-1581). The work is a history of Toledo, as the title suggests. However, Horozco includes a lengthy account of supposed Jewish dissension in which

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he inserts his own belief that Jews and *conversos* constantly attempt to subvert Christianity.

Early modern Spaniards were mostly influenced by the type of thought called Thomism after its creator, St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Although he can hardly be called a church father because he wrote in the Middle Ages, he became extraordinarily influential on European theology. Historian C. Warren Hollister states that, “The intellectual system of St. Thomas Aquinas was built on the conviction that reason and faith were harmonious.”\(^3\) Aquinas’s logical method of presenting a problem, then objections, then responses to these objections was popular among many early modern Spanish theologians and authors. Among those who used this method – or variations of this method – were Martín Del Río, Pedro Ciruelo, and Francisco de Vitoria. Like Augustine, Aquinas wrestled with the problem of evil. He came to see evil as a lack, or a defect. Evil was non-existence. Perhaps because early modern Spain followed the teachings of Aquinas and Augustine, heretics and infidels, and not the Devil, were concerns.

Both Augustine and Aquinas unknowingly made major contributions to witchcraft theory and demonology in early modern Spain. Aquinas’s belief that trances only come from God, the Devil, or bodily affliction, was the subject of many Spanish treatises, particularly in reference to female mystics and nuns. Aquinas’s views on miracles and wonders were debated in the early modern period. Jeffrey Burton Russell states:

Thomas Aquinas and other Christian Aristotelians abolished the middle ground between divine miracle and demonic delusion. All wonders that were not the works of God must be the works of the Devil. All magic became the works of

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\(^3\) Hollister, *Medieval Europe*, 302.
Satan. Magicians, whether they were aware of it or not, had made a pact with the Devil.\textsuperscript{4}

The treatises from Spain that debate whether something was a miracle or not are numerous. The debate over miracle or magic was related to another line of thought from Aquinas and Augustine, which took equal prominence in early modern Spanish writings. This was the debate over superstition, and what could be classified as such. Magic fell under the heading of superstition, because, for Aquinas, words only had meaning or power if both the speaker and the receiver were intelligent beings.\textsuperscript{5} This is most likely where Spain developed its definition of superstition, which was quite different from the modern concept of superstition as, for example, the belief that one will have seven years of bad luck after breaking a mirror. In early modern Spain, superstition was relying in any way on magic, spells, amulets, etc. in lieu of relying on the help of God and the Church. Thus, church officials considered even attempting to speak to or communicate with the Devil or demons (assumed to be intelligent beings) as superstitious. This can account for why superstition within Spain was seen as a fairly serious crime. Furthermore, superstition could be punishable as heresy because the people who practiced superstitious acts had, in a small way, forsaken God. The majority of the Inquisition's cases, in fact, concerned superstition.\textsuperscript{6}


\textsuperscript{5} Clark, \textit{Thinking with Demons}, 287.

\textsuperscript{6} In Geoffrey Parker, “Some Recent Work on the Inquisition in Spain and Italy,” \textit{The Journal of Modern History} 54, no. 3 (Sep., 1982), 529. Parker states that after 1580, the Inquisition was less concerned with heresy cases, and “spent almost half of [its] time searching out and persecuting superstition, magic, and sorcery.” 529. In E. William Monter, “The New Social History and the Spanish Inquisition,” \textit{Journal of Social History} 17, no. 4 (Summer 1984), 705, Monter points to Henningsen’s and Contreras’s numbers on the Inquisition, saying that the category of “heretical propositions” was the largest, comprising almost 30% of Inquisition cases.
Church and State in Early Modern Spain

In spite of the interest in prosecuting superstition, Spain was not as involved with hunting witches as were most of early modern European states. One of the contributing factors to European witch-hunting was the lack of cohesion within a certain area. Brian P. Levack provides the example of the Holy Roman Empire, which he describes as, “a very loose confederation of numerous small kingdoms, principalities, duchies and territories which acted either as sovereign or near-sovereign states.”7 However, unlike many states at that time, Spain was unified as one state under one monarchy. While early modern Spanish writers still produced demonologies, Levack argues that “the cumulative concept of witchcraft did not become firmly established in Spain, especially in the south.”8 In southern Spain, the generally accepted notion of witches was that they were sorceresses. In fact, the famous sorceress Celestina represents a good example of what most Spaniards thought was a witch. These witches did not overtly worship the Devil and they did not fly at night to the sabbat, where they would participate in degenerate acts. Spain’s only real experience with the cumulative concept of witchcraft was during the Basque witch-hunt of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Consequently, this was also the only area of Spain that gave Spanish authorities much trouble. The cumulative concept arrived in northern Spain from France, with the help of the judge and demonologist Pierre de Lancre. And while folk tales about witches who lived in caves existed before his arrival, de Lancre helped

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8 Ibid., 239. The cumulative concept of witchcraft is the idea that all witches sign a pact with the Devil, attend the sabbat, practiced night flight, and practiced harmful magic with the intent of destroying Christendom. In some cases, the cumulative concept also included the belief that witches could change shape (32-51).
introduce the concern that arose from the idea that witches were the associates of the Devil.

Historian Stuart Clark also postulates that demonology might not have had a strong foundation in early modern Spain because the monarchy did not have a coronation ceremony, the power to heal (early modern Spanish demonologists like Martín de Castañega and Pedro Ciruelo further argued that no other king had the power to heal, either), or “an unrestrained tradition of court festivals.” The king had a relationship with God, but it was one that focused on the kings “divinely demanded duties,” not his “divinely bestowed rights.” Gustav Henningsen postulates that Spain’s strong adherence to Thomism is a reason that its officials did not concern themselves with witches:

The Thomist doctrine, which left little scope for the Devil, was to dominate the intellectual world of the whole Iberian Peninsula and led to a relatively relaxed attitude to the European witchcraft propaganda. In Spain and Portugal we do not normally encounter the type of frightened, alarmist descriptions of the witch phenomenon that was so widespread north of the Pyrenees. This Thomist background meant that the intellectuals did not attribute great significance to demonology, nor did they take the witches’ confessions too seriously.

Furthermore, the Spanish Suprema encouraged its inquisitors to be skeptical of what was written in the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), a manual intended for judges.

Because early modern Spain did not have, for whatever reason, a strong cumulative concept of witchcraft and a strong political demonology, there were very few charges of collective devil-worship, and, thus, there were few instances in which

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9 Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 618.
accused witches were expected to give up under questioning the names or their cohorts. In this way, Spain’s witch-hunts, with the exception of the Basque witch-hunts, stayed small and relatively harmless. Furthermore, the early modern Spanish church was more concerned with affecting reconciliation between witches and itself than with putting witches to death.

Levack also argues that the Spanish Inquisition actually made it difficult to prosecute witches. After 1478, the Inquisition was centralized in Madrid and exerted its control over the majority of local tribunals; but, by 1550, la Suprema had established its influence over all of the tribunals. The Supreme Council introduced stricter policies on witches over time, culminating definitively in the early seventeenth century with Alonso de Salazar’s procedural rules called the Edict of Grace. These essentially dissolved – though did not make impossible – the possibility of falsely prosecuting a person as a witch.

Finally, a possible reason that Spain was not wholly concerned with witches and maleficium (harmful magic) is that the state’s and the Inquisition’s attentions were focused on the conversion or removal of Jews and Muslims, and on their “insincere” converts to Christianity. In 1391, before the establishment of the Inquisition, pogroms broke out in many of Spain’s cities, forcing many Jews to flee, convert, or be murdered. The Jews who converted and remained in Spain after 1391 comprised a new group called conversos. Before the massacres of 1391, a voluntary conversion earned a converso the classification of cristiano viejo. However, any Jews who converted after this point in Spanish history were classified as cristianos nuevos.12

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The first phase of the Spanish Inquisition which lasted from its inception in 1478 until about 1530 to 1540, was the most brutal for these groups, and for Jewish conversos in particular. Historian William Monter says that during this first phase, “the tribunal of Valencia alone executed no fewer than 754 Judaisers between 1484 and 1530.” He argues that after 1530, the Spanish Inquisition killed relatively few Jews, Muslims, and conversos due primarily to the fact that, by then, there were few Jews and Muslims still left in Spain. However, punishments they faced after this point, included house arrest, confinement to a religious institution, confiscation of property, public penances, and family humiliation. And even once they were not being prosecuted, Jews, Muslims, and conversos were still the subject of popular opprobrium and many hateful treatises, which did not wane in popularity until after 1540.

Sources and Method

The literature that condemned Jews, Muslims, and conversos was vast and varied. This literature was so popular for early modern Spaniards that it constituted a distinct genre. There are entire treatises devoted to ant-Semitic and anti-Islamic sentiments. Some titles, for example, include Treatise Against the Jews, Execration Against the Jews, and The Justified Expulsion of the Moriscos. However, more commonly these attitudes were not limited to this genre. In many cases, authors slipped their opinions on Jews and Muslims into their demonological treatises. An even


15 Ibid., 69.
commoner practice was to include such views in written sermons, or in histories.

The primary sources I have used in this paper, therefore, are extremely diverse. Other than the limits of availability, I have abided by two restrictions. The first is that all authors must have some substantial connection with early modern Spain, or with Portugal from 1580 until 1640. Not all of the authors lived their entire lives in Spain; some were not even born in Spain. Martín Del Río, for example, on whom I rely heavily in the third chapter, was born in Antwerp, but received his doctorate from the University of Salamanca. Nor were all of the works themselves written in Spain. This is certainly the case with the works on the New World, whose authors generally recorded what they witnessed as it happened. The common thread among all of the authors – and their works – is that Spain exercised over them a reasonable influence; Spanish culture was as much a part of the authors’ works as the works were a part of Spanish culture.

The other restriction I set for the primary sources of this paper was that they all had to be non-fiction, with the exception – arguably – of Antonio de Torquemada’s *Jardín de Flores Curiosas* (1570). This work is a compendium of popular folk beliefs, which could place it in the realm of fairy tales. However, I see it as a pioneering work of early modern anthropology. There are actually many other fictional works in which there are references to “bad blood” – blood being used for evil purposes, a character who comes from low origins, etc. Lope de Vega’s *El Niño Inocente de La Guardia* (1617), a play about the child martyr of La Guardia, is a perfect example of both of these. However, analyzing Spain’s fiction and literature would be more speculative than analyzing its non-fiction. While authors’ mentions of blood in non-fiction works may be a way of subconsciously expressing other concerns, nearly any mention of blood in a
fictional work is likely to be symbolic. Reading into early modern Spanish fiction’s symbolism is, for my purposes, less enlightening than reading what some authors actually thought happened.

Aside from these restrictions, I did not limit the primary sources I consulted. The scope of the writings is limited. There were actually few genres that were acceptable, and what the Inquisition did not like, it would censure. Therefore, all of the primary sources were works that the state felt it could support. The bulk of the writings are, admittedly, demonologies, but this was inevitable given my topic. Many more are execrations against Jews and Muslims; some of these works are historical in nature. Spaniards followed the Augustinian approach that history was morally instructional for Christians. Interpreting it was a way for them to see God’s hand in their state’s and people’s lives. Therefore, few of the histories – especially those included in this paper – are simply histories. The historical writings often reveal Spanish justification for current actions, such as the persecution of Jews and Muslims.

The present work is an intellectual history. It focuses on the Spaniards who created and propagated the ideas, and mainly, on the ideas and the attitudes themselves, not the people whom they affected. By disseminating their views among other writers and thinkers, these men influenced thought in Spain. With the exception of a letter written by three inquisitors, this thesis analyzes the writings of individuals, and not collaborative writings. For this reason, I did not investigate documents from the Inquisition; these are undeniably collaborative works, lacking the clear voice of any individual (except for perhaps the accused).

An intellectual history of early modern Spain demonstrates that, over the course
of time, some ideas changed very little, but continuously impacted the society for which the ideas had been expressed. This is certainly the case with ideas about blood – ideas that began even before the Middle Ages, and are perpetuated even today. For Spain, blood’s bad or evil characteristics – which will be discussed throughout this paper – were acquired in the Middle Ages. But even these beliefs had roots that dated much earlier than the Middle Ages. As late as the nineteenth century, some of these beliefs reappeared. Ideas do not come and go as easily as many believe.
BLOOD – FIGURATIVE AND LITERAL

Blood and the Four Humors

In early modern Spain, as in most of early modern Europe, the popular theory of the four humors dominated medical and physiological thinking. While it is debatable when and how the idea of four humors started, historians generally accept that it was before the time of the Hippocratic School. Before there were four humors, the Greeks recognized four qualities – cold, moist, dry, and hot. These qualities corresponded to the four elements; earth was cold, water was moist, air was dry, and fire was hot. Taken together, qualities and elements produced the essentials. It was Galen who, while perhaps not the first to develop the thought, influenced the idea of a connection with the essentials and the body.16

The resulting idea was that there were four humors that corresponded with the essentials. Black bile was cold and dry like earth, yellow bile was hot and dry like fire, phlegm was cold and moist like water, and blood was hot and moist like air. Yellow bile and black bile also went by the names of choler and melancholy, respectively.17 The four seasons could also influence the four humors. Blood corresponded with the season of spring. Hence, physicians reasoned that during this time, people experienced an increase in their quantity of blood. Illnesses or diseases that arose in spring came from this overabundance of blood.

All humans possessed each of the four humors. People in the Renaissance believed that a person was naturally "inclined toward an excess of one particular humor." This inclination was contingent upon a number of factors, including age, health, diet, and the weather. People even had distinct personality traits depending on which humor's influence they were under. For example, a man who had more black bile

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18 Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance*, 49
than any other humor was “melancholic,” while a person with an abundance of blood was “sanguine.” Notably, melancholic people who were of a cold and dry composition were held to be the most intelligent. Young women, on the other hand, were always considered to have a cold and wet composition, therefore making them simple.19 This was a reminder of women’s place. Women supposedly dried up as they aged, but this did not mean they became more intelligent. Rather, for demonologists, this meant that older women aggressively sought out moisture (semen), became lascivious, and often took demon lovers for themselves.

Because most people had more of one humor than the others, Renaissance scholars were persuaded to believe that people needed to aim for a proportional balance of their humors. A balance of the humors was important to good health; illnesses and diseases were the results of an imbalance of humors.20 Healthy people and ill people alike structured their diets around balancing their humors. To avoid an excess of blood in the spring, for example, a person could avoid blood-rich foods such as red meat.21 For the treatment of an illness, physicians used medicines and herbs with the opposite qualities of the illness.22 A sixteenth-century Italian author, Leonardo Fioravanti, continued the use of fours in physiology: “I say there are no more than four operations that make up all of medicine, and they are these: namely, those [symptoms]

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19 Juan Huarte Navarro, The Examination of Mens Wits, trans. R. C. Esquire (London: Adam Flip, 1594), 48, 59, 80, 286; Clark, 130; Kathryn A. Edwards, “Female Sociability, Physicality, and Authority in an Early Modern Haunting,” Journal of Social History 33, no. 3 (Spring 2000), 611; Edwards posits that because women were cold and wet, they were more likely to leak fluids and transform their shape. “This physical instability was seen as a sign of women’s inferiority.”

20 Fraser Harris, “The Influence of Greece on Science and Medicine,” The Scientific Monthly 3, no. 1 (July 1916), 58; Albala, Eating Right in the Renaissance, 49; Sharpe, “Isidore of Seville,” 24, 55-56

21 Porter, The Greatest Benefit to Mankind, 57-8

22 Clark, Thinking with Demons, 47; While this was a popular practice, Clark discusses here the reaction in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries against the belief in duality.
that are too hot, chill them; those that are too cold, heat them up again; those that are
too dry, moisten them; and those that are too wet, dry them out.” When these
strategies did not work, physicians resorted to things like bloodletting or purging, in
order to rid the body of the excess humor. However, more often than not, physicians
would bleed or purge their patients at the onset of a fever alone.24

Blood was the most abundant of the four humors, and contemporary physicians
generally considered it to be the most important humor. Modern scholars have
postulated that the idea of four humors itself came from watching blood coagulate. If
this is truly the case, it demonstrates an interest in blood long before there was an
awareness of the four humors. Contemporary scholars believed that blood made men
laugh, but that those who had too much blood were typically simple.25 A person
“generously endowed with blood,” Roy Porter states, “would present a florid complexion
and have a sanguine temperament, being lively, energetic and robust, though perhaps
given to impulsive hot-bloodedness.”26 Those with a sanguine complexion were prone
to “skin complaints, to haemorrhages and menstrual fluxes.”27 Blood was one of the
humors (along with phlegm) that made the flesh tender. For Juan Huarte Navarro,
humors that made the flesh tender also rendered a person simple. Two types of people

this in his own work, saying, “Everie fever which springeth from cold and moist humours, ought to be
cured with medicines hot and dry.” See Juan Huarte Navarro, The Examination of Mens Wits, 179.
24 Albala, Eating Right in the Renaissance, 49; Porter, The Greatest Benefit to Mankind, 75.
25 Albala, Eating Right in the Renaissance, 52; Navarro, The Examination of Mens Wits, 32, 59, 60, 81.
26 Porter, Blood and Guts (New York: Norton, 2004), 27
27 George Gaskoin, The Medical Works of Francisco Lopez de Villalobos (London: John Churchill and
Sons, 1870), 161; Gaskoin also states that according to men living in the early modern period, blood was
considered to be the mildest of the four humors.
had tender flesh: children and young women.\textsuperscript{28} This was yet another way of discrediting the female sex's intelligence.

Blood was also the source of life. Roy Porter points out that blood had had this connection since Homeric times.\textsuperscript{29} Isidore of Seville statements seem to support this; he argues that blood, or “sanguis, gets its name from the Greek etymology, since it is so active, sustaining and giving of life.” However, he later says that others have argued that blood is so named because it is sweet, “suavis.”\textsuperscript{30} Furthermore, many men thought that a person’s soul was in their blood. This was an ancient belief, dating back to the Egyptians.\textsuperscript{31} The court physician to King Ferdinand of Aragon, Francisco Lopez de Villalobos, stated that the soul escapes from the blood as it coagulates, or – in other words – upon death.\textsuperscript{32} Occasionally, the soul was not the only thing that existed in a person’s blood. Demonologists believed that demons could also inhabit the blood of a possessed person. By moving throughout the humors and the bloodstream, these demons sometimes caused the possessed to have visions and apparitions.

Before and even during the early modern period, there were many misguided notions of blood and its function. Popular theories included that blood was cooked from digested food in the liver, that arteries did not contain blood, and that the brain was bloodless.\textsuperscript{33} A sixteenth-century French surgeon, Ambroise Paré, maintained that blood

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{28} Navarro, \textit{The Examination of Mens Wits}, 80.
\textsuperscript{29} Porter, \textit{The Greatest Benefit to Mankind}, 57
\textsuperscript{31} Harris, “The Influence of Greece on Science and Medicine,” 59
\textsuperscript{32} Gaskoin, \textit{The Medical Works of Francisco Lopez de Villalobos}, 297
\textsuperscript{33} Porter, \textit{The Greatest Benefit to Mankind}, 68, 76; Albala, \textit{Eating Right in the Renaissance}, 61; Harris, “The Influence of Greece on Science and Medicine,” 60; Gaskoin, \textit{The Medical Works of Francisco Lopez de Villalobos}, 26; Gaskoin seems to think that Villalobos was up in the air on whether the arteries
only moved from the ninth hour to the third hour of the day.\textsuperscript{34} In the early Middle Ages, Isidore of Seville believed that both semen and breast milk came from blood. Later, in the seventeenth century, Gaspar Navarro repeats the notion that breast milk comes from blood.\textsuperscript{35} The obvious connection between these two bodily fluids is life; semen helps produce it, and breast milk helps sustain it.

A Short History of Blood

Since antiquity, humans have been fascinated with the purportedly magical properties of blood. In many cases, the use of blood in sacrifices, rituals, or magic can be used constructively for positive results. Gods often called for the sacrifice of an animal and its blood in order to gain their favor or aid. Hebrews practiced sacrificing animals to their God, and had many laws about acceptable animal sacrifices. Certain sins or rituals necessitated certain animals, usually bulls and rams, but sometimes sacrifices included goats, birds, or grain. Depending on the kind of sacrifice it was, a priest usually sprinkled the animal’s blood on the sides of the altar, or poured it out at the base.\textsuperscript{36} William Robertson Smith suggests that sometimes a worshipper would shed his own blood at the altar; Smith explains that this could have been seen as a replacement for other sacrifices.\textsuperscript{37} Finally, priests would consecrate and initiate new

\begin{itemize}
\item contained blood as well as spirit.
\item Gaskoin, \textit{The Medical Works of Francisco Lopez de Villalobos}, 163.
\item Isidore of Seville, 30, 43; Isidore says that, “The male’s semen is the froth of blood shaken up like water on the rocks of the seashore, which makes the spume white, or as dark wine shaken in the cup turns white.” On breast milk: “Milk is produced in the breasts from blood not needed for intrauterine nourishment of the fetus after parturition...” See also Gaspar Navarro, \textit{Tribunal de superstición}, 147.
\item When I say “kind of sacrifice” here, I refer to either the burnt offering, the sin offering, or the guilt offering, all of which are discussed in Leviticus.
\item W. Robertson Smith, \textit{Lectures on the Religion of the Semites}, new ed. (London: Adam and Charles
\end{itemize}
priests with the blood of a ram, after pouring some on the blood on the altar.38

The Greeks and Romans had similar blood beliefs and sacrifices. After sacrificing a bull to their god, initiates to the cult of Mithras bathed themselves in its blood.39 In one of the Greeks’ creation stories, the blood of Ouranos (Uranus) that was spilled on the earth gave life to the Giants and the Erinyes (the Furies).40 Both of these groups typically took life instead of giving it, but in spite of this fact, this creation myth does suggest that the Greeks believed in blood’s life-giving properties.

For Christians, the blood of their Messiah has redeemed them and saved them from sin. Statements in the New Testament demonstrate that Jesus and his followers considered him to be the sacrifice, and his spilled blood to be the saving grace for humankind.41 As a reminder of the sacrifice made for them, Christians developed the tradition of communion, based on the last supper. For some Christians, the bread and wine served during this ritual miraculously transform into the body and blood of Christ. One could say that Christians cannibalize their god and savior, a relatively common theme in mythology. Other accounts describe the effects of literally drinking Christ’s blood, a thing that some people had claimed to do. One woman was able to give birth without any pain, while a man experienced ecstasies and visions.42

Martyrdom is another important feature in the history of Christianity. Early

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38 Exod. 29: 19-21
41 Rom. 3:25, 5:9; Eph. 1:7, 2:13
Christians considered martyrdom as one of the best demonstrations of devotion, and a way to combat evil.\textsuperscript{43} The demonologist Martín de Castañega, in a section devoted to sacrifices, states that God does not require a sacrifice that involves the shedding of human blood, “with the exception of martyrdom.” \textit{This} is a “very acceptable” sacrifice.\textsuperscript{44} For early modern Spaniards, Henry Charles Lea remarks that, “the blood of martyrdom is the most efficacious of all sacraments.”\textsuperscript{45} Christians might have forgotten the practice of animal sacrifice, but martyrdom – which is essentially the sacrifice of human blood to their God – continued to be revered. After all, becoming a martyr and sacrificing one’s own blood was one of the most reliable ways to ensure a place in heaven.

There is, however, a darker side to blood’s history. The Ancient Greeks and Romans believed in a wide variety of creatures that subsisted off of human blood. Long before the vampire as we know it came into mythological being, the strix was one of the most widely known and recognized bloodsucker. For the Romans, strigaes were women who turned themselves into birds, and hunted down children in the night that they might gorge themselves on their blood.\textsuperscript{46} The idea of the strix would transcend generations, continuing well into the Middle Ages. Many historians believe later concepts about witches derived from beliefs about strigaes. The lamia, in Greek mythology, was a Libyan queen who became a terrible demon that seduced men and

\textsuperscript{43} Russell, Satan, 98. On this same page, Russell quotes Tertullian, saying, “the blood of the Christians is the seed of the church.”


\textsuperscript{46} Norman Cohn, Europe’s Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom, rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 162-64.
drank the blood of children.\textsuperscript{47} The lamia would later merge with a Hebrew conception named Lilith, another beastly female creature of the night. The earliest mention of a creature like Lilith that bore a similar name appeared in the Sumerian king list, which is dated around 2400 B.C. After this time, the Babylonians, and later, the Hebrews would adopt the belief in creatures like Lilith. Lilith even appears in certain versions of Isaiah 34:14. These female demons – Lilith, Lilitu, etc. – are one in the same, roaming about at night, seducing men, attacking children, and drinking human blood.\textsuperscript{48}

Aside from believing in creatures that drank human blood, humanity has obsessed for a very long time over the possibility of other humans drinking human blood. For the ancient Greeks and Romans, a blood accusation could be a way to underline the dishonest nature of a person, particularly one who was leading an uprising. Sixteenth-century political theorist Francisco de Vitoria points to Sallust’s Catiline to demonstrate that “even pagan authors” thought that drinking human blood was “grim and ghastly.”\textsuperscript{49} Describing an even that took place in 63 B.C., Sallust states that the conspirator Catiline had his cohorts drink a mixture of wine and human blood to join them to one another.\textsuperscript{50} Later, in the second century A.D., Polyaenius describes a

\textsuperscript{47} David Walter Leinweber, “Witchcraft and Lamiae in ‘The Golden Ass,’” \textit{Folklore} 105 (1994), 77; Leinweber describes the lamia as “vampire-like.”


similar meeting in which conspirators “unit[ed] themselves” by killing a youth and drinking his blood.51

Norman Cohn describes the Roman belief that Christians drank children’s blood as being “traditional” by the time Tertullian wrote about it in 197 A.D.52 Indeed, after Greeks and Romans had finished accusing other Greeks and Romans of drinking blood, they began to level these charges at the Christians. Early Christians in the second century were a small group, but gaining initiates and notice, and were not yet understood by their fellow Romans. Theirs was a brand new, unauthorized monotheistic religion. In some ways, outsiders could have seen Christians as a threat to their religion. Making matters worse, the ritual of the Eucharist in which Christians partook was seen by outsiders as cannibalistic, especially because Christians at that time explained it as being literally the body and blood of Christ.53

A power shift and growing numbers resulted in Christians being the next group of people to apply the blood accusation to small, marginalized groups. In the case of the Phrygians in the mid fourth to mid fifth centuries, the Paulicians in 719, and the Bogomiles in 1050, the story is the same: the group assembles, kills a baby or child, and mixes its blood with their dough or wine.54 Christians eventually accused the Jews of ritual murder and blood-drinking; this accusation held and resurfaced for many centuries to come. Christians indicted Jews as early as the thirteenth century with

51 Polyaenus, *Stratagems of War*, trans. and ed. R. Shepherd (London: Pall Mall, 1793), 240; Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons*, 6. In this instance, also, the blood is mixed with wine before the conspirators drink it.
52 Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons*, 2
53 Ibid., 8-9, 15.
54 Ibid., 35-8
needing human blood for restoring themselves to health.\textsuperscript{55} The condition that supposedly needed healing was generally something shameful or embarrassing, such as bleeding from the genitals or anus.\textsuperscript{56} The most logical cure for this bleeding, the Christians postulated, was to drink the blood of Christians. By the fourteenth century, Christians believed that the blood taken – most often from children according to the accounts – would be dispersed among the Jewish communities and used at their ceremonies, especially during Passover, Purim, circumcisions, or weddings.\textsuperscript{57} Christians also held that blood could be taken from host mutilation.\textsuperscript{58} Drinking this blood, or mixing it with the dough of their unleavened bread, supposedly relieved Jews of the impure bleeding that was the result of their disbelief and disdain of Christianity.

Interestingly, the Jews were not alone in their thirst for blood. Long before the blood accusation against Jews, Christians also believed that demons had a penchant for blood. Demons dwelt near idols and gods’ temples, waiting for the next blood sacrifice. Origen describes the demons as not only feeding on the blood, but also delighting in it.\textsuperscript{59} Because demons are so attracted to blood, a person should avoid eating the dead animals that have been sacrificed to idols, or that still have blood in them. He states that, “Perhaps, then, if we were to eat of strangled animals, we might have such spirits feeding along with us.”\textsuperscript{60}

\begin{footnotes}
\item Trachtenberg, 148.
\item Ibid., 50
\item Ibid., 31, 131, 133-34; Lea, \textit{Chapters from the Religious History of Spain}, 442-46
\item Trachtenberg, \textit{The Devil and the Jews}, 116-17; Lea, \textit{Chapters from the Religious History of Spain}, 444, 445; “Host mutilation” occurred when people who were not Catholics abused or maltreated the host, or wafer, used during Mass. According to some, this made the wafer bleed.
\item Ibid., 515.
\end{footnotes}
It is one thing to say that demons have an affinity for blood. Demons, or evil spirits for some, were supposed to revel in filth and squalor; they were creatures without laws or morals. However, the accusations of Jews of consuming blood merely demonstrate the ubiquitous hatred towards different religions of the time. Hebrew laws regarding blood and impurity appear as early as the Hebrew Bible. These laws were not only stated early, but often. An important dietary law concerning purity was to not eat the blood of any animal. Francisco de Vitoria, in his section on Dietary Laws, even posits that the blood mentioned in Leviticus 7:26-7 and 17:14 “refers to any manner of blood,” not just animal blood or human blood, but possibly both.\(^\text{61}\) Considering he wrote this at a time when the blood accusation against the Jews was still very popular, it is possible Vitoria was specifically trying to combat these rumors. Regardless, the blood of any creature was not to be consumed because its life was considered to be in the blood. Blood – or an animal’s life – was only to be used ceremonially in sacrifices to their God.\(^\text{62}\) Eating the blood of an animal, either by itself or in the meat, could have the serious consequence of being cut off from the rest of the Israelites.\(^\text{63}\)

Other laws regulated and controlled one’s personal hygiene. After giving birth, a woman was to wait seven days, then “thirty-three days to be purified from her bleeding,” if she had given birth to a son. If the woman had given birth to a daughter, both of the waiting periods were twice as long.\(^\text{64}\) A long passage in Leviticus further describes how a woman is ceremonially unclean during menstruation. She contaminates everything

\(^\text{61}\) Vitoria, Political Writings, 208.


\(^\text{63}\) Gen. 9:4; Lev. 7:26-7, 17:10-12, 19:26; Deut. 12:23-5.

\(^\text{64}\) Lev. 12:2-5.
she sits on. Others who sit where she has sat will also be contaminated.\textsuperscript{65} Naomi Janowitz even mentions that there was, “a striking claim made in the Talmud that a menstrual woman passing between two men can kill them if it is the onset of her menses or simply cause strife between them if it is the end.”\textsuperscript{66} Having sex during menstruation is absolutely out of the question. This, too, can result in being cut off from their people.\textsuperscript{67} If a woman has any condition that causes her to bleed for longer than usual, she is required to make a sin offering and a burnt offering at the end of eight days of cleanliness.\textsuperscript{68}

If the idea of a blood accusation alone was not implausible enough, it should have been inane for Christians to think that the Jews would have gone against many of their foundational laws. As Vitora demonstrates, Christians were not wholly ignorant of these observances. In some cases, Christians even had to invent reasons why Jewish people would defile themselves so. But Jewish customs simply did not fit into their worldview, so they tried to reconcile this with blood accusations.

“Limpieza de Sangre,” or Blood Purity

Spaniards, however, had their own definitions of purity. In 1469, Isabel of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon were married, bringing about the unification of their kingdoms and a Golden Age for Spain. However, their union also inflamed religious intolerance. It was not simply that the “Catholic Monarchs,” as they are known in Spain and Spanish

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{65} Lev. 15:19-24.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Naomi Janowitz, \textit{Magic in the Roman World: Pagans, Jews, and Christians} (London: Routledge, 2001), 93.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Lev. 18:19, 20:18.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Lev. 15:28-30.
\end{itemize}
culture, wanted to reclaim definitively their land from the Moors (this movement to regain their land better known as the Reconquista); they also attempted – rather successfully – to exile all believers in non-Christian faiths. At the time, these groups included Muslims, Jews, and Gypsies. Over time, these groups were given the option to convert or leave.69

1492, the year associated with Christopher Columbus’s arrival in America, is also the year that saw the toppling of the last Muslim stronghold in Granada to the Catholic Monarchs, and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. This expulsion marked the beginning of the Sephardic Diaspora. Between fifty thousand and one hundred thousand Jews chose to leave the country rather than convert to Catholicism.70 The mudéjares, or Moors who lived under Spanish rule after the Reconquista, were not all expelled at once. In some kingdoms, such as Castile, they were allowed to practice their own religion, albeit for a short time. In 1501 and 1502, all moriscos were forced to convert or leave Granada and Castile and Leon, respectively. Later, in the beginning of the seventeenth century, Philip III drove out the majority of the remaining moriscos.

But Henry Charles Lea points to 1449 as the first year that there was any indication in Spain of exclusiveness. In the Sentencia Estatuto of Toledo, all conversos were stripped of official positions. This was not a popular move, however, as it was considered by higher officials as unchristian.71 There was no uniformity in action

69 Spain was not the first country to adopt these laws. England exiled their Jewish population in 1290, France had – to borrow Lea’s word – “experimented” with banishing the Jews, and many of Germany’s states had expelled their Jewish population. See Lea, Chapters from the Religious History of Spain, 438.
70 Richard L. Kagan and Abigail Dyer, Inquisitorial Inquiries: Brief Lives of Secret Jews and Other Heretics, 30
towards conversos or moriscos, and there was a great deal of confusion over what lines to draw. Should all the descendants of Jewish families who converted after the massacre in Barcelona in 1391 be considered Old Christians? Were conversos truly sincere in their conversion to Christianity? The Inquisition was indeed established in 1478 with the purpose of sorting out false converts and New Christians, but it contributed little order.

The conversos who had stayed often found themselves banned from holding public offices and from taking holy orders, regardless of the sincerity of their conversion. In some cases, New Christians might not be allowed to learn a trade or get married. If a man was to apply for an official position or for holy orders, the authorities would not only investigate his genealogy, but also that of his wife’s. Even then, no one was ever wholly safe because officials had never quite agreed on how far back a family’s conversion had to take place in order for them to be considered an Old Christian. Modern scholars have argued that New Christians were still able to live quite comfortably, and were “among the richest and the noblest of the land.” This ignores the New Christians’ desire for anything more than titles, honors, positions, and relationships.

All of these regulations that controlled the lives of people of non-Christian

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72 A note on the use of “converso.” Converso only means “convert,” and can refer to both the Muslims and the Jews who converted to Christianity instead of leaving Spain. But in this work, converso will refer only to Jewish converts to Christianity, while morisco will refer to Muslim converts to Christianity.

73 Townsend Miller, The Castles and the Crown: Spain: 1451-1555 (New York: Capricorn Books, 1964), 112-113. Miller claims that nearly immediately after the establishment of the Inquisition, “suspected conversos were pulled from their beds, the dungeons filled and the racks creaked, all over the pyres were soon lighted and the flames went up…” This sentence feels slightly melodramatic, but one can take away from this that the Inquisition – a state office designed to uphold laws – exercised no moderation in its pursuit of false converts.


descent hinged on the idea of *limpieza de sangre*, or blood purity. The common belief for Spaniards was, just as one could inherit certain physical characteristics, one could also inherit heresy. The evil of being a heretic or an infidel was therefore in the blood.\textsuperscript{76} Worse still, Jerome Friedman states, was that, “it was maintained that degenerate Jewish blood was impervious to baptism and grace.”\textsuperscript{77} Having pure blood became an obsession for many Spaniards. Having relatives who had only recently converted, or who had been investigated by the Inquisition could taint a person indefinitely. Blood did not just constitute one of the four humors now; blood was identity. Never before in Spain had interest in genealogy been so prevalent or widespread. A cult – to borrow Henry Kamen’s word for it – of blood purity existed in Spain for well over two centuries, seeing even a recent revival with Franco’s dictatorship.\textsuperscript{78}

Jesus’ Blood

Another way early modern Spanish Christians distinguished themselves from the heretics and infidels they believed were overtaking their land was by constantly alluding to Jesus’ blood. Authors frequently refer to “Christ’s redeeming blood,” or “the blood of our Savior” in many genres, but these appear most in historical treatises and sermons. In some treatises, allusions to Jesus’ action of sacrificing his own blood seemed strategically placed to contrast with the inferiority and disbelief of the Jews and the Muslims.


\textsuperscript{77} Jerome Friedman, “Jewish Conversion, the Spanish Pure Blood Laws and Reformation: A Revisionist View of Racial and Religious Anti-Semitism,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1987), 16

\textsuperscript{78} Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 231.
One of the most blatant examples of this can be found in Jaime Pérez de Valencia’s *Tratado Contra los Judíos* (1484). Valencia dedicates much of his book to the discussion of circumcision. He argues that while Jews believe the act of circumcision is an act of commitment and sacrifice to God, it is not enough:

> Ahora bien, la delgada membrana que se arrancaba en la circuncisión con un ligero derramamiento de sangre, era una pequeñísima parte del cuerpo y la más despreciable respecto al alma; luego no constituía precio suficiente para el hombre en su totalidad, especialmente en cuanto al alma y, en consecuencia, no podía redimirla ni librarlal del débito.

[However, the thin membrane that tore during circumcision with a slight shedding of blood, was a very small part of the body and the most contemptible with respect to soul; then there did not constitute a sufficient price for the whole man, especially with regard to the soul and therefore, he could not redeem or free himself from the debt.]

Valencia concludes that only Jesus’ blood is sufficient, and that only sacraments such as the Eucharist can bestow grace upon humanity. The Jews were typically at the receiving end of such comments because early modern Spanish writers, like most Catholics, believed that the Jews had killed Jesus. The same Francisco de Quevedo who wrote plays in Spain’s Golden Age also wrote a work entitled *Execración Contra los Judíos* (*Execration Against the Jews*, 1633). In it, he echoes the popular verse, Matthew 27:25, for justifying Jewish persecution: “All the people answered, ‘Let his blood be on us and on our children!’” Alonso de Cabrera also reports this incident in his sermons: “y confesando que Cristo era inocente, y cargándoles á los judíos la pena

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80 Francisco de Quevedo, *Execración Contra los Judíos* ed. Fernando Cabo Aseguinolaza and Santiago Fernández Mosquera (Barcelona: Crítica, 1996), 20; Matt. 27:25 (NIV). The Gospel of Matthew does not actually explicitly say that it was the Jews who said this.
de su sangre” […] and confessing that Christ was innocent, and the Jews taking the punishment of his blood…].

Early modern Spanish authors did not want their readers to forget that it was the Jews who had killed Jesus, and so they placed their discussions of the misdeeds of the Jews as they addressed Jesus’ blood. In this way, the association became fixed: the Jews shed Jesus’ blood. In one of Alonso de Cabrera’s sermons, he discusses the event itself, and states that the Jews, “como uvas pisadas, reventaron con impaciencia y mancharon con injurias, tiñeron con su sangre y acabaron con muerte cruel (like crushed grapes, burst with impatience and marked him with injuries, stained him with his blood, and slew him with a cruel death).” Later, he again specifically addresses the murder of Jesus, and asks God not to bestow upon himself or other Christians the punishment that has fallen upon the “evil” Jews for the spilling of Jesus’ blood. It is no wonder that most early modern Spanish people hated Jews and their descendents when many of their writers held the Jews singlehandedly responsible for the death of the Old Christians’ savior.

When an early modern Spanish author referred to Jesus’ blood and Jewish or Moorish blood within the same paragraph, he did so normally to demonstrate the baseness of Jews and Muslims. To demonstrate the corruption that infidels can bring in their wake, Lucas Fernandez de Ayala reminisces about an area that is no longer agreeable: “ilustrada con las pisadas, vida, predicacion, milagros, y preciosa sangre del Salvador del mundo (lit with the footsteps, life, predictions, miracles, and precious blood

82 Alonso de Cabrera, Sermones, 328.
83 Ibid., 414.
of the Savior of the world)” was obscured by the “barbarous Turks.” It would appear that Ayala suggests that Jesus’ blood sacrifice was not intended for these Jews and Muslims; their existence in the region, in fact, diminishes his sacrifice. The witchcraft theorist Nicholas Eymerich seems to make a similar suggestion in his Manual de Inquisidores (1376) when he states:

> Siempre ha sido nuestro mas vivo deseo que ni el javalí del monte, esto es el herege, devorase, ni los abrojos de la heregie sofocasen, ni el ponzoñoso aliento de la sierpe enemiga envenenase la viña del Dios de Sabaoth, plantada por la diestra del Padre celestial, regada con la sangre de su hijo, fertilizada con los dones del Espíritu Santo, y dotada con las mas ilustres gracias de la incomprehensible y Santísima Trinidad…

[It has always been our most earnest desire that neither the boar of the mountain – this is the heretic – devour, nor the thistles of heresy suffocate, nor the venomous breath of the serpentine enemy poison the vineyard of the God of Tzavoat, which was planted by the right hand of the heavenly Father, watered with the blood of his son, fertilized with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and endowed with the most distinguished thanks of the incomprehensible and most Holy Trinity…]85

Eymerich makes many contrasts here. He equates heresy, which by the typical early modern Spanish definition would have been the renunciation of Christianity, but more specifically Catholicism, to destructive beings – a boar, thistles, serpents. These beings are bent on destroying the Catholic faith, which is sustained by Jesus' blood. Eymerich uses blood here to demonstrate the justification of the Catholic Church’s position of intolerance. The Church’s supporters must defend that for which they believed Jesus shed his blood.

Gonzalo de Illescas in Historia Pontificial y Catholica writes that Jesus’ blood

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84 Lucas Fernandez de Ayala, Historia de la Perversa Vida y Horrenda Muerte del Antichristo (Madrid: Francisco Garcia, 1649), 196.
85 Eymerich, Manual de Inquisidores, Para Uso de las Inquisiciones de España y Portugal (Mompeller: Imprenta de Feliz Aviñon, 1821), 46. “Tzavoat” means hosts or armies, so “God of Tzavoat” means “God of hosts,” or “God of armies.”
actually saves Jews. However, the Jews of which Illescas speaks were there the day Jesus was crucified. According to Illescas, the Jews had converted “to the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ” upon seeing Jesus’ blood come out of his side after he had already died.\textsuperscript{86} It is notable that Illescas includes this mention of salvation by blood in his work. Perhaps he demonstrates that for some early modern Spaniards, Jesus’ blood was intended to save all people, not just Catholics. Or perhaps it was entirely unintentional. Throughout this passage, of course, remains the assumption that Jews need to convert to Catholicism in order to be redeemed. However, this was the one account I found in which a Spaniard seemed to believe that it was possible for Jews to experience a complete and sincere conversion, without harboring any malice or evil intentions towards the Catholic Church. On the other hand, it is curious that the author seems to believe subconsciously that it would take Jews seeing Jesus’ death for them to want to convert.

Early modern Spaniards, for the most part, saw Jews and Muslims as incorrigibles who refused to accept Catholicism and Jesus. God’s gift to mankind was not intended for them. Many Spanish writers often implied that infidels’ conversion was only rarely sincere. Their real intention according to Catholics was to destroy the Church, in the same way that the boar and thistles destroy the vineyard. Furthermore, there is a duality in what the Spaniards wrote and preached. Catholicism was the one true faith; all other religions and denominations were seriously misguided. Their Catholic duty, as demonstrated by the purpose of the Spanish Inquisition, was to convert others to their faith. However, inquisitors did not trust other faiths enough to

\textsuperscript{86} Gonzalo de Illescas, \textit{Historia Pontifical y Catholica, en la Qual se Contienen las Vidas y Hechos Notables de Todos Los Summos Pontifices Romanos}. … (Barcelona: Jayme Cendrar, 1606), 130.
encourage this. Many spouted hatred for other faiths, instead of tolerance and love. Why would any person want to convert to a faith that did not embrace them? For obvious reasons, the option to stay and convert did not appear attractive to the many Jews who left Spain in the late fourteenth and late fifteenth centuries, and the Muslims who left in the early seventeenth century. Regardless of the actual convictions of those who converted and stayed, many inquisitors did not trust any New Christians. The Inquisition closely scrutinized moriscos and conversos, and brought many in under charges for practicing their faiths secretly. The goal of early modern Spain was uniformity, but the Spanish actually polarized the “New Christians” who had not always been staunch Catholics.
BLOOD IN WITCHCRAFT

Early modern demonologists were obsessed with blood’s use for evil. Many aspects of the witches’ sabbat represented an inverse to proper Christian ceremony. The use of blood for evil was one of these facets. Christ represented the use of blood for the ultimate good; his blood had saved humanity. To accuse a person of using their blood for evil was therefore a serious allegation. Most of the following examples of descriptions of blood being used for evil purposes come from demonological treatises. Maleficium was part of the nature of the charge; if a person had used blood for evil, they had surely sided with the Devil.

The Use of Blood in Magic, Rituals, and Spells

The idea of the use of blood for evil in witchcraft or sorcery bulked large in demonological writings. Just as men believed that sacrifices were made to gods, demonologists and other intellectuals believed that men and women made sacrifices to the Devil as part of their contract with him. Even upon initiation, new members gave up just enough of their blood to sign their names to a pact. In Spain, as in other states, demonologists believed that there were explicit and tacit pacts, but initiates did not necessarily put their signatures to them. An exception is Alison Weber’s description of a nun in Saint Teresa’s convent who, after having been accused of possession, confessed to signing a pact with the Devil with the blood from her arm.\textsuperscript{87} Typically, though, the pacts discussed in Spanish demonology consist of the Devil drawing blood or taking blood from the witch-to-be. Martín Del Río’s \textit{Disquisitiones} mentions that

\begin{footnotesize}\marginpar{\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{87} Alison Weber, “Saint Teresa, Demonologist,” in \textit{Culture and Control in Counter-Reformation Spain}, ed. Anne J. Cruz and Mary Elizabeth Perry (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 182}}\end{footnotesize}
initiates give the Devil some of their clothing and their blood. The Devil desires their clothing so that he may have something personal of theirs, but the reason he wants their blood is not discussed. By Pedro de Valencia’s account, the Devil not only draws blood from the new initiate by pricking his or her forehead, but he also collects the blood in a cloth or a vase. Again, the writer does not mention what the Devil intends to do with this blood. However, since many intellectuals at this time believed that blood represented one’s life or soul, it is clear they believed that signing a pact with the Devil was the same as giving up one’s soul to him. However, saying that people signed pacts using their blood was an easier way to scandalize people and call their attention to the inhuman nature of the witches.

The mark discussed by these men could have referred to the Devil’s mark. The Devil would have given a witch a mark upon his or her induction, similar to the above stories. This mark would have bled directly after the Devil had made it (or might have been painless, according to some), and then would have appeared in a strange shape somewhere on the body, perhaps on an eye, or on the genitals. The important thing about the mark in the history of witch-hunts was its lack of blood. Pedro Ciruelo, furthermore, believed that witches could not be made to bleed when they were in a state


of trace: “Attempts to burn them or cut them produce no reaction. Two or three hours later they stand up gingerly and begin talking about other lands and places where they have been.”

If an inquisitor or judge pricked an accused witch on a suspicious spot, and the spot did not bleed, it was an immediate sign of his or her guilt. This indicated close contact with the inhuman.

Blood was also an important part of magic and spells used by witches and sorcerers. Martín Del Río twice mentions men who have used blood to write on objects, an assumed facet of having used sorcery. One of these men was a priest who had written on an unconsecrated host using blood from his ring finger. The other man was Pythagoras, who wrote on a mirror using his blood. He would then “hold the mirror up to the moon, and so make his divination.”

Menstrual blood in particular was a choice magical tool. Philtres were a type of love magic that utilized menstrual fluid. Women sometimes used these spells to bind a man to them, or to render him impotent with any other woman. But the use of menstrual blood was not limited to love magic. Del Río mentions this type of magic in one of his discussions in which he cites another man’s experience with it. Del Río’s point is irrelevant here, but the other man’s story is interesting. This man’s baby daughter, Francisca, was inexplicably very ill. Evil forces must have been at work:

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92 Ibid., 158; Juan Horozco y Covarrubias also discusses this story about Pythagoras in his treatise *Tratado de la Verdadera y Falsa Profecía* (Segovia: Juan de la Cuesta, 1588), 85.

Then my wife started to suspect that because Francisca was very attractive the cause lay in envy or the venomous magical hatred (*odium veneficium*) of some old woman. So a skilled exorcist looked in the child’s bedding and found several signs of venomous magic – chick-peas, coriander seeds, a piece of charcoal – and brought out a compacted lump which I could not identify. It was made out of bones from a corpse and certain other things these shameless women had bound together with menstrual blood.94

Strangely enough, Del Rio later notes that menstrual blood has also been used to protect one against the “demonish arts and traps of magicians.”95 This is a rarity, however, as most men considered menstrual blood to have souring, poisonous properties, which I will discuss in more detail in a later section.

Blood sacrifice also had a prominent place in working magic. Because the consensus among demonologists was that a person could not work magic without the aid of demons, they believed that the person trying to do the magic had to provide something the demons wanted. While small children were often the go-to, demons also accepted the blood of adults. In *Disquisitiones*, Del Río, going against nearly everything he has said in his work until this point, defends one society’s use for “pour[ing] the innocent blood of young children into a certain lake” in order to quiet the demons that restlessly roamed the surrounding area. He reasons that this was not a satanic act because it happened in earlier times, and “it could have had some natural effect, although one which would have acted indirectly.”96 This discussion, consequently, was included in his work to defend his position that human blood possesses a “natural,

94 Martín Del Río, *Investigations*, 252; Del Río brings this up in the first place because he was trying to make an argument against burning superstitious things like the “compacted lump.” This was probably a bad example, since the daughter got better, which would not be in accord with his point that burning these things is just the same as believing in them.

95 Ibid., 255

96 Ibid., 255
indirect” power. It is therefore dually curious that in his story, it is the blood that is innocent, not the young children.

In these circumstances, blood — the seat of the life and/or soul — is being used in unproductive and unfruitful purposes. In stark contrast to Christ’s example of sacrificing his blood to save humanity, blood is not being used to create more life in these examples (except in the last example). The witches who pledge their services to the Devil only do so under the condition that they will wreak havoc on their neighbors and their neighbors' possessions. The blood pledged to Satan therefore became the beginning of their downfall into taking life — of humans, of crops, of livestock, etc. This is also the case with witches who attempted to murder a child. Using their menstrual blood — a substance that was a reminder of their failure to create life, in the early modern Spaniard’s eye — they concocted another substance that would take life.

The Reality of Blood Sacrifice

While it might seem irrational for the Spaniards to have feared groups of people within their own state who sacrificed blood to their master, the truth is that they were hearing stories from the New World that only substantiated their concerns. Whether or not the stories related by conquerors or explorers actually happened or were exaggerated, Spaniards back home were implicitly trustful of their men abroad.

Pedro Cieza de León, a chronicler of Spanish colonialism in Peru, relates that the Incans frequently sacrificed human blood to their gods, either to appease them or to show their gratitude. In Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s account of the conquest of the Aztec Empire, the stories are much the same. The person whose blood was sacrificed varied,
but by these men’s accounts, it does not seem that the natives were very discriminating. Sometimes children’s blood was sacrificed, but more often Spanish chroniclers relate that natives used the blood of men taken in war, or just any other natives.97 Diego Durán, who chronicled the rites and festivals of the Aztecs, noted in one instance that the Aztecs would bleed various parts of their own bodies as a sacrifice to the god Ehecatl. Cieza de León and Castillo do stress the instances in which the sacrifices took place in front of an idol. For a Spaniard, a sacrifice to an idol would have constituted idolatry, no different from a sacrifice to a demon. Spaniards believed that demons lived within the idols, or dwelt in the temples, and waited for a feast of blood, much like Origen described. Cieza de León’s and Castillo’s language suggests that they, too, believed this. Cieza de León describes the idol as a “figure of [a] devil,” and Castillo uses the word “cursed” to describe an idol. Spaniards saw these idols as animate. In one of Cieza de León’s accounts, an idol even supposedly speaks to a native, telling him to sacrifice the blood of human beings.99 The fear of human blood being sacrificed to the natives’ gods no doubt contributed to the fear of blood sacrifice within Spain itself, particularly in areas like the Basque Country, where a different language was spoken.

Diego Durán, because of his knowledge of Nahuatl, was able to record more accounts of Aztec blood sacrifice. One common practice, he noted, but did not explain,  

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was for young men and women to smear their own blood across their temples after a midnight incense ceremony. According to Duran, the priests then used this blood to sprinkle the idols for which the sacrificed belonged and their chambers. In one case, the victim’s blood was sprinkled over a fire. This account holds many parallels to the descriptions of the aquelarres. In both, a spiritual leader extracted blood and collected it in some kind of vessel. And for the Spaniards, the Aztec victim whose blood was sacrificed committed his or her soul to Satan in the same way a witch pledged his or her soul to the Devil at the aquelarre.

It is indeed likely that these stories inspired Spaniards who remained at home. Already fearing insurrection in Spain due to their zeal for religious conformity, priests heard these stories with concern. This reception can explain the missing parts of the aquelarre, such as what is done with the blood once it had been collected. The writers might not have intended to discuss what the Devil, demons, and witches did with this blood; perhaps they were simply transferring – albeit poorly and with little basis in reality – what they had heard about one group of “others” to another, leaving out the less important details.

The stories of blood sacrifice were furthermore reminders that Spanish rule extended to territories that were entirely un-Spanish. Having just emerged from the

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101 Ibid., 212, 213-14, 226, 235.
102 Ibid., 214.
103 Contemporary historians like Julio Caro Baroja and Gustav Henningsen merely mention that the initiate’s blood was caught in a vase or vessel or sorts; they fail to explain or conjecture why the witches would do this.
Reconquista, the Spanish Empire was anxious to define itself, mainly through morals. Spaniards did not make sacrifices to false idols or gods; this rule was stated clearly in their Bible: “Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the Lord must be put to death.” Moreover, Spaniards did not believe that a sacrifice of animal blood was necessary since Jesus’ death. The only acceptable human sacrifice had been Jesus’ sacrifice for humanity. The strange new natives were not Spanish, and were clearly not Christian because they did not abide by these rules. For many Spanish intellectuals, natives’ religion separated them from the Spaniards and Christianity. It was then easy for the Spanish to believe that, because the natives participated in these practices, they were not equal to Europeans. Spain sent missionaries to the New World to Christianize and humanize the natives. In many cases, the supposed primitivisms of the natives gave the Spanish reason to subject the natives to slavery, to maltreat them, or to kill them. The hierarchy in which the Spanish were naturally at the top that developed in the early stages of colonization still remains in place, even after all of the countries have achieved independence.

Sex with the Devil

Sex with the Devil was an all too common aspect of most sabbats across Europe. The sabbat culminated with an orgy. The witches practiced every depravity imaginable, including sex with the Devil in some cases. The accounts penned by intellectuals who actually discussed the *aquelarre* were no different. Looking at the Basque witch-hunts in particular, there are two cases in which a person confessed to

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104 Ex. 22:20 (NIV)
having sex with the Devil. Blood appears as an important part of both of these accusations. In a letter to King Philip III detailing the events of an *aquelarre*, the inquisitors assigned to Logrono, Alonso Becerra, Alonso de Salazar Frías, and Juan Valle Alvarado, state, “Catalina de Lizardi, a girl of seventeen from Vera, confessed to having had sexual intercourse with the Devil frequently. On one occasion he drew forth such a flow of blood that she saw it gush forth and spill on the ground.”105 Another interesting account comes from the Spanish writer Pedro de Valencia:

Y Martín Vizcar, Bruxo reconciliado (que en el Aquelarre tenía officio de alcalde para regir y governar los niños) refiere que la primera vez que el Demonio lo conoció sométicamente padeció gran dolor y llevó a su casa mucha sangre, y para dar satisfacción a su muger(que le preguntó qué sangre era aquella) fingió que con un ramo de una mata se airó herido en una pierna.106

[And Martín Vizcar, a reconciled witch (who in the aquelarre had the office of mayor, and of ruling and governing the children) relates that the first time the Devil sodomized him, he suffered much pain and when going home, lost much blood. To placate his wife (who asked whose blood this was) he lied that the branch of a bush wounded his leg.]107

Both situations go beyond the idea that sex with the Devil was an enormous taboo. And Catalina’s case cannot be explained with the usual circumstances of a woman having sex for the first time; the instance in which Catalina began to bleed does not appear to have been the first time she allegedly had had sex with the Devil.

Rather, the presence of blood in these examples is meant to demonstrate proper sexual behavior. Catalina, “a girl of seventeen,” was most likely not married, yet was

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107 Translations are my own, unless otherwise stated. The word “sométicamente” presents a problem for translation since there is not a good English equivalent. It is to say that Vizcar willingly had homosexual relations with the Devil.
having sex. The seventeenth-century men detailing Catalina’s story would certainly have frowned upon sex outside of marriage. The theologian, Vicente Ferrer, gives the command in one of his sermons, “Los que no están casados, vivan castamente, según el consejo de Tobías” [Those who are not married, live chastely, according to the advice of Tobias].108 Another theologian, Juan Luis Vives, dedicated many chapter of his book, De Institutione Feminae Christianae (On the instruction of the Christian woman), to the virtues of chastity, particularly in women.

Martín Vizcar has two strikes against him. The first is that he was having an affair outside of his marriage. The second is that – since according to Spanish intellectuals the Devil’s gender and sex are masculine – the affair he was conducting was of a homosexual nature. The blood from the genitals of Catalina and the anus of Martín Vizcar demonstrate corruption and impurity. The implication was not simply to be afraid of the Devil and his wiles. The Basque outsiders were being taught to fear illicit sexual relations.109 This brought them closer to the Catholic Church, and thus, closer to the Spanish ethos.

Blood-Drinking and Blood-Sucking

There is evidence that as late as the seventeenth century, stories about blood-sucking creatures continued to circulate. Mostly, the stories were remnants of Greek and Roman myths that no one actually still believed. Francisco de Vitoria, a Spanish

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109 This conclusion is in part based on the notion that the inquisitors (before Salazar became directly involved in questioning the locals) guided the Basques to these deductions with leading questions. This conclusion is not far-fetched as men of the Inquisition used these methods often.
philosopher and theologian, mentions the lamia briefly, not indicating whether or not he
gives the creature credence. An early editor of Pedro Ciruelo’s *Reprobación de las
supersticiones y hechicerías*, Pedro Antonio Jofreu makes a note in Ciruelo’s work
about the lamia and the vampire, which he believes are known for stealing children and
sucking their blood. Martín Del Río includes in his work a quote about the strix taken
from Ovid.\(^{110}\) Antonio de Torquemada includes a short discussion on the lamia and the

Lamia es un animal muy cruel, que tiene la cara de mujer y los pies de caballo, y
Estrigia es un ave nocturno, que de noche hace gran estruendo, y cuando puede
entrar donde están niños, les saca la sangre del cuerpo y la bebe; y por esta
causa a las brujas llaman Estrígias, por hacer el mismo efecto, que es chupar la
sangre a los que pueden, y principalmente a los niños pequeños.\(^{111}\)

[The lamia is a very cruel creature that has the face of a woman and the feet of a
horse, and the Strix is a nocturnal bird that makes a great clamor in the night,
and when it can, enters where there are children, takes their blood from their
bodies and drinks it; and for this reason witches are called Strigae, by the same
effect, which is to suck the blood of those they can, and that principally of small
children.]

Torquemada also says that even though the lamia is a type of demon, the name has
started to become applied to witches.\(^{112}\) He concludes a little later that few people
believe in the existence of such demons anymore. These passages demonstrate how
the accusation of blood sucking passed from creatures to humans, so much so, that the
varieties of blood-sucking witches take their names from these demons. Interestingly,
Martín Del Río argues that the reality of blood-sucking witches caused people to believe


\(^{112}\) Ibid., 251.
in the strix, and not the other way around.\(^{113}\) Blood-sucking witches occupied many other theological Spanish minds.

Of the men whose treatises included discussions on blood-sucking witches, Martín de Castañega published his treatise first, in 1529. His work is atypical in many ways from other European demonological works at this time. He offers no lurid descriptions of the sabbat or of the Devil. However, in a short section on human sacrifice to the Devil, he mentions that sometimes witches kill children secretly for the devil. He makes this accusation mainly against midwives, and they suck the blood of these children “in secret and hidden ways that the devil shows them.”\(^{114}\) Del Río offers a very similar account of sacrifice to the Devil. In his version, witches are bound to kill a small child every month or fortnight “by witchcraft (strigando), i.e. by sucking out its life.”\(^{115}\) Del Río disagrees that witches pretend to be midwives to do this, though. He instead suggests that the witches take the appearance of wild animals, attack unguarded children, and suck their blood while they sleep.\(^{116}\)

In the Basque Country, accounts of vampirism were all too prevalent. Historian Gustav Henningsen mentions a María de Zozaya who killed many of the neighbor’s children by vampirism.\(^{117}\) Pedro de Valencia recounts a shepherd’s confession of having sucked his young nephew’s blood “por el sieso y por la natura” (from the anus

\(^{113}\) Martín Del Río, *Investigations*, 119.


\(^{115}\) Martín Del Río, *Investigations*, 75.

\(^{116}\) Ibid., 120.

\(^{117}\) Gustav Henningsen, *The Witches’ Advocate* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1980), 159; Julio Caro Baroja’s *The World of the Witches* also includes many references to blood-sucking witches in the Basque Country, which I did not include because these come from Inquisition records.
and genitals).118 Another of Valencia’s accounts of blood-sucking witches was lifted exactly from the letter written by the three inquisitors – Alonso Becerra, Alonso de Salazar y Frías, and Juan Valle Alvarado – to Philip III. Out of the accounts given, it is by far the most explicit, a testimony to the unruly nature of the Basque witch-hunts:

As for the tiny children, they suck their private parts and anus, squeezing them tightly with their hands on their loins until they draw blood, which they suck. They pierce the temples, the crowns of their heads, the spines and other parts of the body and suck them there also. The Devil tells them: ‘Suck and swallow that, for it will do you good.’ Whereupon the children die or remain ill for a long time. On other occasions they kill them at once, squeezing their hands or biting their throats until they choke them.119

It is immediately evident that all of these accounts share the idea of small children having their blood sucked by witches for the Devil, or at his request. There are two possible explanations in interpreting these accounts.

It is possible, and not entirely implausible, to accept that children were dying without what would seem a good reason. According to Del Río, infanticides were indeed happening, and could be proven, because parents were finding their children with the life sucked out of them.120 It is equally possible that either the parents, or Del Río, could have exaggerated their accounts, or could have simply been mistaken. That is the second explanation that I will come to in a moment. For now, we will take most of Del Río’s account at face value.

Anthropologists Hugo G. Nutini and John M. Roberts published a relevant

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118 Pedro de Valencia, Discurso Acerca de los Cuentos de las Brujas 179; “Natura” is a difficult word to decipher here. If it means genitals, it means female genitals, which is confusing because the man is accused of having sucked his nephew’s blood. It could also translate to “naturally,” perhaps suggesting that the man sucked the blood from his nephew’s throat.


120 Martín Del Río, Investigations, 231.
modern source on the subject of bloodsucking witches in 1993. The book, *Bloodsucking Witchcraft*, is an anthropological study of an indigenous village in Tlaxcala, Mexico. Essentially building from Evans-Pritchard’s works on witchcraft, Nutini’s and Roberts’ study was aimed at explaining the function of witchcraft in this village, and at “placing bloodsucking witchcraft in particular, and anthropomorphic supernaturalism in general, within the context of Mesoamerican studies.”121 Their main purposes are not pertinent to the current work, but some of the conclusions they reached, and information they gained can be applied here. However, their work does rely strongly on the fact that the current trend of belief in bloodsucking witchcraft could not have occurred without the syncretism of Mesoamerican polytheism and sixteenth-century Spanish Catholicism.

Rural villages in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Spain may not have been very different from the current rural villages in Mexico. People living in the northern Spanish provinces did not speak the same language as the rest of Spain, and very few of these people would have known Castilian as a second language. Rural Basques would certainly not have had the same access to education and learning – religious or secular. The circumstances are therefore, similar, between the demonological accounts from Spain and the Nutini-Roberts study. Even the witches were similar. The Mexican *tlahuelpuchis* sucked the blood of infants and young children, transformed into animals to accomplish their nocturnal misdeeds, and were considered by locals to be “kindred spirits to the Christian Devil.”122 Nutini argues that


122 Ibid., 56.
the idea of the *tlahuelpuchi* is the descendant of the European witch and/or vampire.

Over the course of about six years, Nutini visited villages in the Tlaxcala-Pueblan Valley where there were reported cases of blood-sucking witchcraft. From November 27, 1960 until August 17, 1966, he encountered forty-seven incidences in which infants were inexplicably found dead in the morning by their parents. What Nutini discovered was that the infant and the mother had slept in the same room at the time of death. Two possible scenarios seemed likely for Nutini. The infants had slept in their parents’ bed and had been suffocated by one during sleep. Or, the mothers had fallen asleep while breastfeeding their child, and had suffocated them in this manner.

As a way of dealing with guilt, or simply explaining a confusing, traumatic event, the villagers blamed the bloodsucking witch, the *tlahuelpuchi*. Notably, this was not an entity the villagers actively pursued, or even wanted to take revenge on. Nutini and Roberts state:

…the ideology of bloodsucking witchcraft emphasizes the death of infants rather than how to prevent it, the circumstances and conditions under which infants die rather than the nature of the witch, the ambience and temporal context of the sucking rather than the otherworldly character of the perpetrator.\(^{123}\)

The activity of bloodsucking clearly defines the creature as inhuman. Yet, perhaps because of villagers recognized their own guilt, the supernatural qualities they bestowed upon the witch also make their scapegoat impossible to apprehend.

So for peasants living in early modern Spain, too, blood-sucking witches could have provided an explanation for infants and young children killed during the night, particularly where there might have existed a folkloric tradition of the strix, or some creature like it. As for why the intellectuals would write about blood-sucking witchcraft,

\(^{123}\) Ibid., 231.
one should note that all but one of these men (Castañega) relied on hearsay. Many of
their stories seem entirely dependent upon the information they received from others
who had heard it first hand from peasants and villagers.

However, it is also possible that the stories’ cycle could have gone from the top
of society to the bottom. Perhaps the uneducated were hearing all of their stories from
the intellectuals first. In many witch-hunts, the principal methods that provided the
average person with stories about the pact with the Devil, cannibalistic infanticide, and
incestuous orgies were court hearings and sentences. These were circumstances in
which the upper level Spaniards controlled the information that the villagers received
auditorily. If a person were called in to testify, or to be questioned, he or she already
knew what to say (plus the accused had a little help from inquisitors’ leading questions)
to satisfy the inquisitors.

In Spain, the blood accusation intellectuals concocted appears mostly in
connection with the Basque Country. The importance of this region should not be
disregarded. All of the Iberian Peninsula had been united by the time of the biggest
witch-hunts in this area.¹²⁴ The Portuguese and the Spanish were most likely able to
understand each other; their languages were not so different, nor were their cultures.
The Basques, however, represented a unique population in Spain. While the other
languages spoken in Spain are Romance languages – Catalan, Galician, etc. – the
Basque language is a pre-Indo-European language, and therefore had existed before
Spanish and Portuguese. During the seventeenth century, few people in this region of
Spain actually spoke Spanish. We know this because missionaries and inquisitors had

¹²⁴ This was the Iberian Union, which lasted from 1580 till 1640.
to take translators with them. The Basque Country also extended into France. It was
difficult for Spaniards to know how to classify these people.

The time in which the Basque witch-hunts occurred is also relevant. The Basque
people had existed longer than the Spaniards, and had never represented a threat
(substantiated or not) before the sixteenth century. As Spain expanded its territories
outwards, it started looking more inward. After recent struggles to forcefully integrate or
expel other cultures – Jews and *moriscos*– the identity of early modern Spain was still
being compromised by the Basques, or so the Spanish thought. The blood accusation
was then applied to this group of people as a way of defining them as the Others, or as
unwelcome strangers in Spanish culture. Perpetrating the belief that there were groups
of Basque witches that drank young, innocent blood (and it is almost always the case
that the blood is described as being innocent, not the children) served as a means to
demonstrate that the Basques were less than human. But unlike Tlaxcalan villagers’
contentions, Spanish inquisitors’ accusations of witchcraft and maleficium (with an
emphasis on the bloodsucking witchcraft) were intended to incite the pursuit of the
accused bloodsucking witches. After trying the witches, and allowing (or forcing) them
to confess their misdeeds, the inquisitors would attempt to bring them into the folds of
Catholicism, thus establishing a connection, and a form of unification.

Finally, it should be noted that elsewhere in their empire, Spaniards were
encountering groups who people who really did ingest the blood of sacrificed humans.
Diego Durán described two separate occasions in which the consumption of human

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125 It is also important here to observe that Spaniards who had written works on the Antichrist described
him as having an intense craving for blood. He also had “dirty blood” or was from low origins. See Lucas
Fernandez de Ayala, *Historia de la Perversa Vida y Horrenda Muerte del Anticristo*, 34, 162. The Antichrist
is the epitome of human evil. This, by Spanish standards, actually made more him fiend than human.
blood occurred. In one ceremony, the blood of sacrificed victims was taken and sprinkled, “generously upon the image of dough and upon the pieces of dough which represented the flesh and bones of the god.” The priests then distributed it to the townspeople, who ate it and, “claimed that they had eaten the flesh and the bones of the gods, though they were unworthy.” In another ceremony, a sacrificed man’s blood was caught in a small bowl. This bowl was carried out, and a man impersonating the goddess wet his finger with the blood, and licked it off. Later, a warrior would do the same.

Perhaps these accounts influenced the stories back home. Events such as these certainly shaped the Spanish opinion of natives as being subhuman. These people were not Catholic, they did not speak a recognizable language, and they occasionally consumed the blood of victims sacrificed to false idols (aka demons). Significantly, the sixteenth-century philosopher, Francisco de Vitoria, stated, “Christian princes can declare war on the barbarians because they feed on human flesh and because they practice human sacrifice.” This was indeed how the Spanish reacted. There are clearly parallels between the people in the New World, and the Basque people. However, blood-drinking accusations to depict people as inhuman had existed for a very long time. In this case, the Spaniards actually witnessed it in the New World, and allowed their opinions to be shaped from these experiences.

The modern reader will realize that we must look at all of these accounts of blood

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126 Durán, Book of the Gods and Rites, 94-5
127 Ibid., 235
128 Francisco de Vitoria, Political Writings, 225.
129 For discussions on whether or not the natives were inferior humans, see works by Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda.
drinking (with the exception of the last example) as purely allegorical, whether or not that was the author’s conscious intention. The writers themselves may or may not have actually believed these accounts were accurate, but they still meant something in relating their accusations. Drinking blood, apart from the acceptable form performed during Mass, set a person or society apart as strange, objectionable, and other.
Women and Menstruation

By the early modern period, a stigma was still attached to women and their menstruation cycles. Many intellectuals were rather vocal about a subject that should seemingly have been more of a taboo. Menstruating women were unstable and were to be feared. It seems that early modern Spaniards had not broken much with earlier thinkers, like Isidore of Seville, who believed that the cycle was controlled by the moon and that:

On contact with this gore, crops do not germinate, wine goes sour, grasses die, trees lose their fruit, iron is corrupted by rust, copper is blackened. Should dogs eat any of it, they go mad. Even bituminous glue, which is dissolved neither by iron nor by [strong] waters, polluted by this gore, falls apart by itself.  

When Isidore wrote this, Europe had not yet experienced the witch-hunts that began in the late 1420s. Yet his view of menstrual blood is reminiscent of beliefs about witches during that time. Witches were notorious for making potions and powders that would kill all crops and plants, among other living things. It is evident that the ideas linking women to harmful materials changed little. It might not even be far-fetched to assume that one idea (menstruation) directly corresponds to another (witches' brews). Women had supposedly always used their menstrual fluid in spells and potions. The potions and powders that intellectuals wrote about witches using could simply be an extension of this belief. Some writers might have believed, as Lyndal Roper suggests in *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany*, that certain women set out to attack fertility. These women were often the poor and elderly of a society. Eventually, in the

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130 “The Medical Writings,” ed. and trans. William D. Sharpe, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 54, no.2 (1964), 48; Within the same paragraph, Isidore also calls woman a “creature.”
131 Roper, “Fertility,” in *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven and London:
early modern period, these often became the village’s witches. One can easily see how old prejudices persisted, just in different forms.

That is not to say that the perceived instability of women was directly connected with their being witches. While the topics of women’s nature and female witches sometimes overlapped, these were generally kept separate. I will only discuss women’s perceived nature here, as this was connected with their humors and blood. Often, however, these beliefs appeared in treatises on witchcraft. The witchcraft theorist Martín Del Río reaffirms the belief in his treatise, for example, that it is possible for a woman who is menstruating to kill all the vermin in a field just by walking around it.\(^{132}\) It was convenient for early modern Spanish men to include these accounts, because much of the time they were already discussing either the unreliability of women or the doubts surrounding some superstitions.\(^{133}\) Martín de Castañega and Enrique Villena manage to weave both of these items together. The evil eye was a topic of ardent debate in early modern Spain, with many authors believing it to be a superstitious act. Enrique Villena asserts the possibility that menstrual women can damage mirrors, causing spots to form on them.\(^{134}\) Martín de Castañega’s comments concur with this, but further lead the reader to understand that this power – what Villena calls

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Yale University Press, 2004), 127-159. Roper believes that societies saw witches as a threat because they attacked fertility; this was evident in their attacks on crops, livestock, and children.

\(^{132}\) Del Río, *Investigations into Magic*, 255. His source is Columella’s *De re rustica*, or, *Country Matters* (ca. AD 60-5).

\(^{133}\) Superstition for early modern Spaniards did not signify at all what it does today. For them, it would have meant going outside of God, and outside of the Catholic Church for help. For example, going to a “saludador” or quack doctor, instead of praying or going to a physician, was a very superstitious act by many writers’ standards.

“fascination” – can be turned on humans. This is not an act of witchcraft or superstition, but can be explained scientifically:

This is how a menstruating woman can stain a new and clean mirror with the rays that come from her eyes, because the body’s natural powers at such a time throw off corporeal impurities, and the most subtle ones come from the eyes and thereby dirty the mirror. If at such a time the woman should stare closely at a tender and delicate child she would imprint on him those poisonous rays and distemper his body in such a way that he would be unable to open his eyes or to hold his head up. Even her breath could harm him, because it is harsh and smelly at that time, which is a sign of the corrupt and indigestible humors, as we say of the wolf…

He continues to explain that old women who no longer menstruate are actually more potent in this way than young menstruating women because the older women have to purge more impurities through their eyes.135 Martín Del Río also contributes to the debate of whether the glance of a menstruating woman causes contagion, especially in the case of mirrors. He, too, believes this is possible, but says that the emission of the eye that causes contagion comes from “the cavities and angles of the eye.”136

The “gore” itself is not the primary concern for these writers. Rather, women were, at times, not to be trusted. This was particularly true for older women, who had “dried up.” The Spanish were not alone in these beliefs; many Europeans had a mythology surrounding menstruation and its effects on women, especially older women. The above passages from Castañega’s and Del Río’s works demonstrate that social constructs surrounding menstruation were still in place in the sixteenth century, and had evolved little from the time of their conception. In many cases, these beliefs shaped and influenced the way that men understood and treated women.

136 Martín Del Río, Investigations into Magic, 124
The beliefs surrounding the menses were closely connected with the four humors. Furthermore, the four humors can be connected with early modern beliefs in women’s natural inclination to be deceived by the Devil.\textsuperscript{137} To begin with, women supposedly had more moist humors in their composition than men had; the more moist humors a person had, the less intelligent she was – at least according to Doctor Juan Huarte, writing in 1575.\textsuperscript{138} Blood was one of the humors that made people simple, and owing to menstruation, women had this humor in excess. So, women’s simple natures made them more susceptible than men to the Devil’s artifices.

Additionally, men believed that since women leaked blood, females were fluid in nature, which had its own negative connotations. If a person’s nature was fluid, it meant that the person was unstable because of the potential of being in two states. “This physical instability was seen as a sign of women’s inferiority to the apparently more solid, less porous male.”\textsuperscript{139} Men reasoned that because women were not fully solid, and hence, weaker, they were also more vulnerable than men to evil influences.

So, in more ways than one, men used women’s menstruation to substantiate their belief that women were not equipped to operate effectively in the outside world. The men who helped create and disseminate the myths surrounding menstruation did not do this with the intention of dehumanizing women; men neither needed nor wanted to do that. Hopefully, most men did not hate women. Furthermore, most men realized

\textsuperscript{137} There were many men accused of witchcraft, as well. However, as Robin Briggs points out, “There does seem to have been a widespread conviction that women were specially vulnerable to the wiles of the Devil, so that most confessing witches said they were more numerous at the sabbat…” See: Briggs, \textit{Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft} (New York: Viking, 1996), 22.

\textsuperscript{138} Juan Huarte, \textit{Examen de Ingenios. The Examination of Mens Wits}, trans. M. Camillo Camilli, then translated from the Italian by R. C., esquire, (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum Ltd., 1969), 60.

\textsuperscript{139} Edwards, “Female Sociability, Physicality, and Authority in an Early Modern Haunting,” 611.
they needed them to build their families and legacy. Women’s menstrual cycle was unique to their sex, and was not well understood during the early modern period. Men viewed this singularity in women as something that made them inferior to men. Women’s bleeding made them less intelligent, less strong, and less stable. Men used menstruation to keep women where they wanted them, along with other myths about women. If women were not equipped to handle the outside world because they were weak and unstable, they could stay in the home. A man who kept his wife within the confines of his home was also able to exert more control over her. Finally, if men could make women believe they were less intelligent than themselves, then there would be no arguments from the women. Thus, men were able to keep control of their wives and homes.

Muslims and Moriscos

Muslims and moriscos experienced many of the same restrictions as the Jewish conversos. Even once they had converted, people of Moorish descent were not permitted to hold certain positions and jobs, their acceptance to universities was limited, they were not allowed to become priests or inquisitors, and for the most part, they were not allowed to marry Old Christians. However, Henry Charles Lea states that the popular feeling seems to have been mostly directed against the Jews and Jewish conversos and we hear of no action against the Mudéjares in the bloody risings against the former in Toledo in 1449, in Valladolid in 1470 and in Córdova and other towns in Andalusia in 1473.\textsuperscript{140}

Indeed, the works of many authors which appear to have been written on Muslims and

\textsuperscript{140} Henry Charles Lea, \textit{The Moriscos of Spain: Their Conversion and Expulsion} (Philadelphia: Lea Brothers and Company, 1901), 15.
their converts to Christianity – works with titles such as Expulsión Justificada de los Moriscos Españoles (The Justified Expulsion of the Spanish Moriscos, 1612) by Pedro Aznar Cardona – decry the evils of the Jewish people and the conversos more than the ills of the Muslims and the moriscos. While the distrust Spaniards felt towards the moriscos was widespread, there are few extant examples of Spaniards using the blood accusation against the Muslims and moriscos. There is one mention of blood drinking in Expulsión Justificada de los Moriscos Españoles:

Cesaran ya los homicidios de los Mahometanos, sus discordias, sus engaños, sus falsedades, sus odios contra la Fé de Christo, sus crueldades para con los pobres Christianos mendigos, de cuya sangre inocente (si eran niños) matándoles ocultamente, bebían, o a lo menos se lavaban las manos.

[The homicides of the Mahommedans, their discord, their tricks, their lies, their hatred against the Faith of Christ, their cruelties to the poor Christian beggars – of whose innocent blood (if they were children) they killed secretly, and drank, or with which they at least washed their hands – have already stopped.]141

Other references to Moors and blood do not go beyond the Spanish obsession with limpieza de sangre. These allusions convey that the Spaniards still did not think of moriscos as their equals. Cardona, for instance, argues that intermarriage between moriscos and Christians has infected what was once healthy blood:

y esta infamia se estendiera a muchos Christianos viejos que se casserá con las Moriscas, o los Moriscos con Christianos, inficionando por esse camino la sangre sana, y dando sucesion, a que nunca se acabaran tan aviessas plantas.

[and this infamy will extend to many old Christians who marry with Moriscas, or Moriscos with Christians, infecting in this way the healthy blood, and giving rise to that which will never end such perverse plans.]142

141 Pedro Aznar Cardona, Expulsión Justificada de los Moriscos Españoles y Suma de las Excelencias Christianas de Nuestro Rey Don Felipe el Catholico (Huesca: Pedro Cabarte, 1612), 141; Henry Charles Leas briefly mentions rumors circulating in early modern Spain of moriscos drinking the blood of their victims. He does not directly mention who was behind these rumors, but does cite Jaime Bleda as a possibility. See: Lea, The Moriscos of Spain, 181-82.

Notably, he also describes non-Christian blood as “mala sangre,” or “evil blood.” This is a harsh contrast against the Christian blood, which is described above as “innocent.” Spaniards did not regard Muslim or morisco blood any better than they regarded Jewish blood. It was all the same to them, impure and infectious. However, there is a difference between how the early modern Spaniards wrote about the Jews and about the Moors. The writings against Jews and Judaism were more passionate and vitriolic than the writings against Muslims and moriscos. The Moors seemed an inconvenience; the Jews, a malevolent threat against Christians and Christianity. Early modern Spaniards’ descriptions labored over the atrocities and misdeeds of the Jews; the Spanish were more accepting of the Muslims’ wrongs against Christendom.

It would appear logical to argue that the early modern Spaniards did not waste their time in discussing Muslims and moriscos as much as the Jews and conversos because, after the Reconquista, the Moors were no longer perceived as a threat. The battle to drive the Muslims out of Spain had been largely successful. Later, in the early seventeenth century, the Spaniards would reinforce their victory by compelling the remaining Muslims to convert, or leave. The Spanish thus saw themselves and their monarchs as successful. This could be why Spaniards writing after 1492 only rarely attempted to paint the Moors as inhuman by accusing them of drinking blood. But medieval Spaniards and early modern Spaniards alike saw Jews and conversos as a menace to Christendom, and so continued to persecute them relentlessly.

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143 Ibid., 127-28.
The early modern Spanish beliefs about Jewish blood carried notably more negative connotations with them than the beliefs about Moorish blood. Jews’ blood was corrupted from the time before they were born. This, early modern Spaniards reasoned, was why they so willfully denied Christ and Christianity. Perhaps this idea of corruption before birth explains why Francisco Torrejoncillo comments that when Jewish babies are born, “traen la mano derecha llena de sangre, y pegada en la cabeza” [they bring forth their right hand full of blood, and stuck to their head.]¹⁴⁴ Torrejoncillo does not explore this accusation any further than this. Nor does he attempt to connect its relevance to the rest of his work. Considering that Portuguese writer Vicente da Costa Matos’ work, written before Torrejoncillo’s, includes the same passage, verbatim, it is most likely that Torrejoncillo simply repeats what he read in Costa Mato’s work. Interestingly, Costa Matos does not provide a context for this comment, either, other than repeating what other people have said about Jews.¹⁴⁵ For early modern Spanish writers, Jewish children were immediately contaminated by their parents’ blood upon coming into this world. These men did not consider Jewish children innocent. They did not see the children as children; they saw what they believed the children would become – offenders of the Catholic Church and its laws.

Furthermore, early modern Spaniards feared that Jewish blood could infect others, specifically Catholics. And while the blood infection they spoke of was

¹⁴⁴ Torrejoncillo, Centinela contra judíos puesto en la torre de la Iglesia de Dios, 169
metaphorical, the language used by the Spanish writers suggests a more tangible infection. The blood infection was the infection of heresy and disbelief, a very real threat by early modern Spanish standards. Francisco de Quevedo – the same man who wrote poetry, and works such as *Los sueños* and *El Buscón* – also wrote a treatise entitled *Execración Contra los Judíos* (1633). In it, Quevedo argues that just one drop of Jewish blood can “seduce a motines contra la de Jesucristo (induce riots against Jesus Christ).” Torrejoncillo similarly believed that the blood of the Jews was corrosive. He spoke of it like one would speak of a virus, suggesting that it would increase and expand, and stain whatever it touched. Finally, Nicholas Eymerich, the man best known for his manual for inquisitors, wrote that those who were not of “sangre limpia (clean blood)” were more likely to transgress against the faith, a statement that implies that heresy, like high blood pressure or diabetes, is genetic and is simply in the nature of Jewish people and their descendents. Eymerich gives this as a reason to investigate the families of people who were on trial by the Inquisition. Torrejoncillo asserts a similar idea that “para los quales oficios se deven escoger los de sangre limpia, que llaman Christianos viejos… (for which offices one should choose those of pure blood, who are called Old Christians).” Early modern Spaniards feared that Jewish blood in a person’s heritage could be corrosive; they also feared that its infection would spread to the detriment of the Catholic Church. By limiting the Church’s exposure to Jewish *conversos*, they were protecting it. If it was in the Jews’ blood and

147 Torrejoncillo, *Centinela Contra Judíos*, 10.
149 Torrejoncillo, *Centinela Contra Judíos*, 213.
nature to lash out against the Church, then Spaniards could not even risk allowing Jewish descendents to attach themselves to closely to the Church. Spaniards would demand the Jews’ conversion, but even after their compliance, they would not allow them to hold jobs within the Church. State jobs were also restricted to *conversos* and New Christians, since church and state were so closely connected in early modern Spain. As Eymerich’s statement suggests, early modern Spanish men did not trust *conversos* to remain true to the Catholic faith, and they did not want their influence to corrupt any of the Church’s men.

**Blood and Jewish Sorcery**

Joshua Trachtenberg states

…when the Reformation destroyed the effectiveness of some of the more popular, earlier accusations coincidentally with the startling revelation of the Kabbalah, the sorcery accusation came into its very own.\(^{150}\)

If one were to apply this theory to blood accusations, Trachtenberg’s comment seems to suggest that the charges of diabolism (the main interest authorities showed in persecuting sorcery) and blood drinking became separate concerns after the Reformation. This might have been true for other countries, but it was certainly not the case for Spain. Perhaps this was because Spain avoided the Reformation almost entirely, and instead turned inwards and experienced a Counter-Reformation. This resulted in the tightening of Church laws. Regardless, the Jewish people and the Conversos living within Spain experienced accusations even after the Reformation that blended their assumed disbelief with the heresy of devil-worship. On the one hand,

\(^{150}\) Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 79.
their descent alone made it impossible for them ever to be considered pureblooded by the early modern Spaniards. For the latter, the Jewish descent extended from the Devil, and would eventually produce the Antichrist. Francisco de Torrejoncillo devotes an entire section of his work, Centinela Contra Judíos, to accusing the Talmud of teaching the Jews “magical arts, lies, and diabolical inventions.”¹⁵¹ On the other hand, they were known to drink the blood of Christian children and of to desecrate and mutilate hosts. This last accusation mirrors the witches’ sabbat, in which children were killed and eaten, and the Devil and demons made a mockery of the Mass.

Trachtenberg has thoroughly covered the sorcery and blood accusations of the Middle Ages. Early modern Spaniards merely perpetuated these ideas. Trachtenberg even states that one of the main reasons for the Spanish expulsion of the Jews was, “the constantly repeated accusation that they drank Christian blood.”¹⁵² This would seem to be the case after the incident of the Santo Niño de la Guardia, lamentably still celebrated today.¹⁵³

The Holy Child of La Guardia

Recorded originally by the Licenciado Vega in 1544, the Memoria muy verdadera de la pasión y martirio, que el glorioso martir, inocente niño llamado Cristobal, padescio … es esta villa de la guardia describes the murder of a young child, probably about two

¹⁵¹ Torrejoncillo, Centinela Contra Judíos, 51.
¹⁵² Trachtenberg, The Devil and the Jews, 134.
to four years of age, that occurred around 1491 in the village of La Guardia. The Inquisition took it upon itself to discover the perpetrators. Inquisitors found a group of men, two Jews and about five or six conversos, who they claimed had been responsible. After spending some time in jail and being tortured off and on, the men yielded the response that the inquisitors were looking for. The men reported that they had taken the young child to a cave, where they crucified him in a mockery of the Passion, and collected his blood in vessels. Their ultimate intention, according to Sebastian de Horozco’s account, was to bring down Christendom. Although this event supposedly happened sometime around 1490, anti-Semitic Spanish writers were still addressing it in the early eighteenth century.

Contemporary historians conjecture that the Inquisition fabricated the story to give the Catholic Monarchs impetus for expelling the Jews from Spain. It is undeniably true that the story was fabricated, with little creativity. The supposed murder of the holy child of La Guardia was actually the one of the last in a series of accusations. The idea that Jews drank blood as part of their Passover rituals, according to Trachtenberg, only dates back to the fourteenth century. Outside of Spain, people believed that Jews

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154 Ibid., 151; I will not be using this account, however, as it does not appear to be extant. I rely mostly on accounts from Francisco de Torrejoncillo and Pedro Aznar Cardona

155 This number varies drastically depending on the account one reads. Antonio de Guzmán, writing much later, does not establish a number, but Sebastian de Horozco claims a leader, Benito García and eleven others. See: Sebastian de Horozco, Relaciones históricas toledanas, ed. and trans. Jack Weiner (Toledo: I. P. I. E. T., 1981), 29. Henry Charles Lea provides the most reliable secondary account of the incident, and provides the names of seven men, not including Benito García, who were brought into questioning by the Inquisition. See: Lea, Chapters from the Religious History of Spain, 449.


157 Trachtenberg, The Devil and the Jews, 134. Moreover, Trachtenberg adds that the accusation that the Jews mixed Christian blood into their wine and unleavened bread did not “became a fixed element of the charge until the fifteenth century.”
mixed the blood of Christians with their wine or unleavened bread, and consumed them.\textsuperscript{158} In Trent in 1475, an event similar to the one at La Guardia, occurred. Before the incident in Trent, in 1235, Jews in Fulda were accused of having murdered five Christian children in order to collect their blood for medicinal purposes.\textsuperscript{159} Furthermore, it is highly likely that this was all the Inquisition was looking for because the Jews were forced to convert or leave Spain less than a year after the men confessed. Henry Charles Lea comments that there was not even any damming evidence to convince one that a murder had occurred. A body was never found, nor had any parents complained about losing a child.\textsuperscript{160} The blood libel remained, as ever, a way to ostracize further the Jewish community. Jews were most likely the easiest scapegoat for Spaniards, as they had communities all over Spain, unlike the Basques who lived in the north, and the Moors who lived predominantly in the south.

It would be misguided to think that the accusations of blood drinking and sorcery were separated after the Middle Ages. The La Guardia incident is laden with imagery from the sabbats: blood collected in vessels, a desecrated host, blood drinking, and cannibalistic infanticide. The whole episode is supposed to be a mockery of the Passion, just as the sabbats were in part. In Sebastian de Horozco’s account of the child martyr, included in his history of Toledo, Benito García, the Jewish man accused of killing the holy child, bears unmistakable similarities to a sorcerer. After García and his associates had “crucified a Christian child in the same way” the Jews had crucified Jesus,

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 31, 134.
\textsuperscript{159} Trachtenberg, \textit{Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion} (Forgotten Books, 2008), 12.
\textsuperscript{160} Lea, \textit{Chapters from the Religious History of Spain}, 454
Dándole apestes y bofetadas, escupiéndole y abriendole las venas con cuchillos, e cogiendo la sangre en un caldero e escudilla e poniéndole aulagas e yerbas espinosas en las plantas de los pies y en las espaldas, y poniéndole el dicho Benito García una guirnalda de yerbas espinosas a manera de corona. E abriendo como abrieron el costado del dicho niño cruelmente con un cuchillo bohemio por debajo de la tetilla, e sacandole como le sacaron el corazón para el efecto y hechizos susodichos...

[they whipped him, slapped him, and pulled out his hair, they spat in his face and opened his veins with a knife, and caught his blood in a cauldron and large bowl and put furze and thorny herbs on the soles of his feet and his back, and the said Benito Garcia placed a garland of thorny herbs on his head like a crown. And they opened the side of the said child cruelly with a Bohemian knife underneath his nipple, and took the heart for this effect, and for suspected sorcery…]161

As if mentioning cauldrons and strange thorny herbs was not enough to indicate that these men practiced magic and other diabolical acts, Horozco even says that the men probably removed the boy’s heart with sorcery. In Pedro Aznar Cardona’s telling, the transgressors said that, when they drank the boy’s blood, it was as if they were taking communion.162 This is very similar to the stories of the sabbats in which the witches and demons partook of a strange, foul-smelling liquid, claiming that this was part of their communion. The two accusations – blood-drinking and sorcery – seem to have continued to be integral to the story, as the Santo Nino de la Guardia incident continued to be retold well into the eighteenth century.

Other Accounts of Blood-Drinking Surrounding the Jews

One can clearly see the relationship between Jews drinking Christian blood and blood-sucking witches in early modern Spanish authors’ accounts. Francisco de Torrejoncillo, author of the infamous *Centinela Contra Judíos*, even begins his account

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161 Horozco, *Relaciones Históricas Toledanas*, 42.
accusing Jews of trying to poison a town’s water supply in the year 148 AD.¹⁶³
Establishing that Jews have always been wicked, Torrejoncillo’s account continues to
describe evil deeds the Jews had supposedly attempted to achieve against Christianity,
and leads to his conclusion that Jews had become more evil over time. Much later,
Torrejoncillo states that the Jews practiced their own invented tradition of killing an
innocent Christian and drinking the person’s blood.¹⁶⁴ Building from what Joshua
Trachtenberg has discussed in his book, *The Devil and the Jews*, one can see that the
blood accusation did not end in the Middle Ages. Nor did it cease to be connected with
sorcery and diabolical arts. In early modern Spain, the belief that the Jews drank
Christian blood remained common. Spaniards believed that Jews did this as part of
their Passover rituals, in mockery and hatred of the Passion, similar to the witches’
sabbat. But the Spaniards did not only think that Jews drank Christian blood in hatred
of Christianity; they also believed Jews actually needed Christian blood, similar to the
stories of witches needing children’s blood.

**Jewish Menstruation**

Myths about Jewish menstruation was another concept that had been formed in
the Middle Ages, and showed no signs of fading in early modern Spain. Spanish
authors claimed that Jews needed to drink Christian blood because it was the only way
to stop their bleeding fluxes and take on a human appearance, which were supposedly
affected because of their rejection of Jesus and Christianity. Even within one text,
*Centinela Contra Judíos*, the author discusses the many bodily afflictions that cause

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 169.
bleeding on various days that the Jews supposedly suffer. One Jewish man had a
wound all of his life that never healed and constantly “rained blood.”¹⁶⁵ He mentions
that a rabbi suffered the same affliction, but only on March 25.¹⁶⁶ Members of the tribe
of Zabulon suffered from a sore in their mouths that bled the entire day of March 25.¹⁶⁷

But the popular theory held by Spaniards, Torrejoncillo included, was that the
Jews bled, or hemorrhaged, from their genitals and/or anus from Good Friday until
Easter Sunday. Shortly before Torrejoncillo’s account, a Portuguese author, Vicente da
Costa Matos commented on this condition in his work. He argued that there was not a
doubt that Jews suffered from a bloody, menstrual flux.¹⁶⁸ Torrejoncillo’s exact words
are, “Otros afirman, y dizen, que el Viernes de la Pasión todos los Judíos, y Judías
tienen fluxo de sangre (Others affirm, and say, that on the Friday before the Passion, all
of the Jews have a flux of blood).”¹⁶⁹ Note that the author says, “Judíos, y Judías,”
specifically implicating that both female and male Jews suffered from these fluxes of
blood. On the same page, Torrejoncillo makes a more openly defamatory remark
regarding how one can distinguish a Jew. One of the ways is that, “otros echan: y
derraman sangre por sus partes vergonçosas cada mes, como si fueran mugeres
(others pour and spill blood from their shameful parts each month, as if they were
women).”¹⁷⁰ Again, it is worthwhile to note that the author uses the phrase “shameful
parts.” Does he intend to convey that they bleed from their genitals, their anus, or both?

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 165.
¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 183.
¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 182.
¹⁶⁸ Vicente da Costa Matos, Discorso Contra los Judíos, 167.
¹⁶⁹ Torrejoncillo, Centinela Contra Judíos, 168.
¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 168.
This is uncertain; what is clear, however, is that these accounts were meant to degrade Jews, going so far as to suggest that they were hermaphrodites.

Interpretation

Early modern Spanish writers not only accused the Jews of having corrupted blood, and of drinking Christian blood – like the moriscos – but they also combined these accusations with the degrading allegation that all Jewish people menstruated. In this way, they conveyed their belief that Jewish people were the not human. Males menstruated like women, which placed them below men. They also drank Christian blood, which essentially put them on the same level as animals. They were maligned and degraded. In order to rationalize driving the Jews out of Spain, early modern Spanish writers initially made the assertion that Jewish people drank Christian blood to cure their menstruation. These beliefs, in fact, were also applied to conversos, as is evidenced by Benito García’s cohorts. Attaching this stigma to Jews and conversos in order to make them leave or to ostracize them, was successful. However, attitudes towards Jews and conversos did not change. These conceptions of Jews and their descendents continued to penetrate into the Spanish mentality centuries after 1492.
CONCLUSION

Attitudes about blood, and the uses of blood in early modern Spanish writings were varied and complicated. The connecting thread in this thesis’ chapters is that early modern Spanish writers employed the language of blood to discuss what was healthy and unhealthy, pure and impure in their society. For Catholics, Jesus’ sacrifice of blood for the salvation of humanity was the ultimate example of the use of blood for good in religion and society. One took communion to remember this event, and in so doing, became closer to God. Martyrs’ blood was another representation of the use of blood for good; it was the sacrifice of one’s own blood to progress the City of God. Blood was therefore a crucial facet of Catholicism in early modern Spain and elsewhere. Complicating matters more, Catholicism was central to the early modern Spanish identity. Church, state, and blood became interconnected. Blood helped define the Spanish identity, reinforce the Church’s morals, and justify persecution of the “other.”

Defining Identities

The early modern Spanish obsession with identity cannot be understated. Early modern Spanish writers, in searching for their distinctiveness, confirmed Catholicism as the most important aspect of the ideal Spaniard. This was not haphazard. Visigothic Spain had had a nearly 800-year history of supporting Catholic victories over Moorish foes. Their heroes had been infamous slayers of Moorish forces – Pelagius of Asturias, Saint James the Moor-Slayer, and El Cid are all legendary Spanish heroes who fought against evil infidel infiltration. Simply, a good Spaniard was Catholic. Cementing this ideal in the Spanish mentality were Ferdinand and Isabella, who were (and still are)
labeled “the Catholic Monarchs.” Their religion was an indissoluble part of who they presented themselves to be. Isabella’s own pet project, the state-sponsored Spanish Inquisition, upheld Catholic virtues and beliefs within its communities.

Because Spanish identity was so closely connected with religion, blood, with its great importance in Catholicism, became intrinsically connected with identity as well. Early modern Spanish writers used the language of blood to create and explore further these definitions of identity. In society, as in health, blood was could be an indication that something was wrong or unhealthy. For the Spaniards living during and after Ferdinand and Isabella, the idea of what was good blood was simple – old, established Christians with no questionable heritage. In the majority of their works, when Spanish writers utilized the phrase “of good blood,” or “of noble blood,” to describe someone, it was intended to imply that he or she was an Old Christian from old nobility.

People who were not Christians – this category, to some degree, included New Christians – had bad blood. Not being a Catholic, in this light, was an inherent aspect of the identity of that person.¹⁷¹ It was almost as if non-Catholics were diseased, or were the personifications of a disease. Many Europeans, in fact, believed that Jews were a disease and spread diseases. Because one’s religion could corrupt one’s blood, heresy was one of the worst crimes a person could commit. One could choose to convert, but their blood would forever be tainted with non-Christian ancestry.

Reinforcing Morals

As the Church was connected to the Spanish State, early modern Spanish

¹⁷¹ I make the distinction here that not being Catholic was a crime to early modern Spaniards because. One could still be considered a heretic even if they were a Protestant. Heresy, for early modern Spaniards, was a crime against God and the state.
writers were often tasked with buttressing their Church’s morals. One of the ways in which they communicated the Church’s ideas of bad morals was to allude to blood. The bloody scenarios described by the three inquisitors, for instance, were instructive in what was proper sexual behavior.\textsuperscript{172} The shameless women who supposedly drank children’s blood and/or used blood in magic spells and potions were women who most likely acted indecently before they had been accused of witchcraft. Ideally, at least for those who could afford it, a woman’s place was in the home. Women who did not participate in this social construct consequently attracted more attention, thereby becoming subject to criticism. The language surrounding menstruation does not necessarily have a moral purpose. It can, however, reveal the discomfort males felt towards this bodily function, and how out of touch they were, in many cases, with Spaniards in different classes.

Establishing and controlling Catholic morals in early modern Spain were duties of the Spaniards who had a voice because Church and state were so intertwined. Many writers only worked under the commission of the kings and queens, so their works were highly scrutinized. Furthermore, the Inquisition typically censured the Spanish writer who did not create works that promoted Catholic morals. Therefore, to avoid any misunderstandings with the Inquisition, it behooved writers to scatter acceptable moral commentaries throughout their works.

Justifying Persecution

Spaniards’ establishment of identities for themselves and for others was one of

\textsuperscript{172} These are the three inquisitors who wrote the letter to King Philip in The Salazar Documents.
the first steps towards justifying persecution. This justification became even easier once the Church and the state had aligned under the Catholic Monarchs. The state had the power and ability now to enforce the ideals of the Church. And for most early modern Spaniards, the issue was black and white; Jews and Muslims, and their descendants, did not have the same blood as Spanish Catholics. Jews and Muslims should convert or leave. Of course, this did not guarantee their security. The Inquisition ensured that *conversos* and *moriscos* be closely monitored to make certain their continued adherence to the Catholic faith.

Blood was such an obsession that it affected how Spaniards saw other religions’ belief systems. While the beliefs surrounding Jews and Muslims drinking blood were in no way new, early modern Spaniards were able to continue to believe that blood played as central of a role for these religions as it did for Catholicism. If anything, because these blood accusations were centuries-old, many Spanish Catholics already found it easy to consider Jews and Muslims as inhuman. Any association these religions had with blood, moreover, was considered by Catholics to be bad, or the opposite of what Catholics believed. Not only did Catholics say that Jews drank Christian blood in mockery of the Passion, but Catholics also insinuated that Jesus’ sacrifice had been lost or wasted on Jews, just as their alleged senseless killing of Christians for their blood was a waste.

Early modern Spanish writers most likely did not realize that their stories of blood-drinking conspirators lacked originality. By thinking that they could generate enough hatred for a group of people by claiming that these people drank the blood of others, they were participating in an old written tradition. Early modern Spanish writers
exploited this method in the same way that the Greeks and Romans had, aiding the
state’s program to dehumanize, and thereby control, groups of minorities. Indeed, it
seems unlikely that Spain would have had much success in quelling diversity without
the aid of the writers, who made certain beliefs widely known to the people in power.
These men’s writings and their language of blood contributed to Spain’s slowly
becoming homogenized.

Ultimately, early modern Spanish writers viewed blood that was not like their own
– Spanish and Catholic – as bad and impure. In fact, most references to blood, with the
exception of Jesus’ blood and the humors, have negative connotations. Purity of blood,
and good blood, was directly connected with being Spanish and being Catholic. For
early modern Spaniards, if one did not have pure Spanish Catholic blood, one was more
inclined to use blood for evil. Spanish writers therefore were inclined to produce works
on this subject. In this way, early modern Spain helped continue to sustain belief in
Jewish, Moorish, and Basque blood-drinking, and Jewish menstruation.
APPENDIX

GLOSSARY
Blood libel – The belief that Jews killed Christians and drank their blood so they could appear physically normal and stop their hemorrhaging.

Catholic Monarchs – “Reyes Católicos;” the title given specifically to Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile.

Converso – A Jew who had converted to Christianity after the pogroms of 1391.

Morisco – A Spanish Moor who converted to Christianity.

Cristiano nuevo – “New Christian;” a person who had come from either Moorish descent or Jewish descent. The term could be applied to a person whose family had been Christians for five generations.

Cristiano viejo – “Old Christian;” the term is basically applied to old, established families. This went hand in hand with one’s faith.

Marrano – Literally, “pig” or “swine.” The term was applied to conversos who were accused or suspected of secretly practicing Judaism.

Moor – A Muslim from African descent.

Reconquista – “Reconquest;” the term used to describe the Spaniards’ taking Spain back from the Moors.

Spanish Inquisition – Established in 1478 by Ferdinand and Isabella. It was put in place to impose Catholic morals. It extended throughout Spain, and even into parts of the New World and Sicily. It was composed of different tribunals, but eventually became more centralized after 1495.

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