

The Massacre of the New Christians of Lisbon in 1506: A New Eyewitness Account

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On Sunday 19 April 1506, the city of Lisbon was convulsed by an explosion of bloodshed that lasted four days and is estimated to have resulted in the violent deaths of anywhere between 1,000 to 4,000 men, women and children. The victims were the so-called “New Christians”, the Portuguese Jews forced to convert to Christianity by King Manuel I in 1497.¹ The massacre of 1506 sent shockwaves throughout Europe and accounts of it exist in Portuguese, Jewish, Spanish and German sources. An anonymous German, who was present in Lisbon at the time of the massacre and personally witnessed the tragedy, wrote a vivid account that was printed in at least three different German editions.² Likewise, the Spanish chroniclers Andrés Bernáldez and Alonso de Santa Cruz – who did not bother to mention the forced conversion of the Portuguese Jews in 1497 at all – both devoted an entire chapter in their works to the tragedy of 1506.³ Some of these sources offer us stirring eyewitness accounts. The New Christian Isaac Ibn Faradj, for instance, was present in Lisbon during the massacre. He was fortunate enough to survive and later escaped from Portugal for Salonica

¹ On the events of 1497 see F. SOYER, *The Persecution of the Jews and Muslims of Portugal. King Manuel I and the End of Religious Tolerance* (Leiden, 2007).

² A discussion of these different editions of the account provided by this anonymous German source, together with a transcription of the most complete one, has been published in the original German by Y. H. YERUSHALMI, in *The Lisbon massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the Shebet Yebudab* (Cincinnati, 1976), *Appendix A*, pp. 69-80.

³ ANDRÉS BERNÁLDEZ, *Memorias del reinado de los Reyes Católicos*, ed. M. Gómez-Moreno and Juan de M. Carriazo (Madrid, 1962), chapter 206, pp. 503-9 and ALONSO DE SANTA CRUZ, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, ed. J. de Mata Carriazo (Seville, 1951), Vol. 2, pp. 85-8.

in the Ottoman Empire where he reverted to Judaism. He wrote a brief account of the slaughter that still has the power to move a modern reader:

‘It happened on a Christian holiday (...). It was while the King and the Queen were absent from Lisbon, the capital, on account of the plague which raged there at that time, that a priest with a cross stood up, and wicked men with him, murderers and scoundrels, and they killed more than 1,400 Jews [i.e. New Christians], and burned their bodies, men and women, pregnant women and children. They burnt them in the streets of the city for three days on end, till the bodies were consumed and became ashes. I stole from the fire one half of the burned head of a dear friend of mine, and I hid it, kept it, brought it to Valona [most likely the town of Vlorë in modern-day Albania], and buried it in a Jewish burial-place. When King Manuel heard of the great wrong done to the Jews (sic) he came to Lisbon, and the priest was burnt at the stake, and forty murderers hanged.’⁴

This article will deal with an, as yet, unexamined account of the massacre of 1506 that is contained in a manuscript entitled *Chronicas dos Reis de Portugal e sumarios das suas vidas com a historia das Indias e Armadas que se mandarom atbe o anno de 1533*. As the title indicates, the manuscript contains a series of narratives chronicling the lives of the King of Portugal from 1365 to 1533. This manuscript was acquired by the Portuguese State from the London auctioneers Sotherby in 1971 and deposited in the National Archive of the *Torre do Tombo* in Lisbon, where it is catalogued as *Casa Forte, 43A*. The manuscript was first identified by António Alberto Banha de Andrade who, in an authoritative article entitled ‘Gaspar Correia Inédito’ published in 1977, ascribed its authorship to the famous chronicler of Portuguese India: Gaspar Correia.⁵ Since then, however, the manuscript has remained ignored by historians until it was fortu-

⁴ A. MARX, ‘The expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Two new accounts’, *Studies in Jewish History and Booklore*, New York, 1944, pp. 77-106. Translated from Hebrew by Marx (page 105-6).

⁵ A. ALBERTO BANHA DE ANDRADE, ‘Gaspar Correia Inédito’, *Revista de Universidade de Coimbra*, 26 (1977), pp. 5-49.

nately rediscovered and edited in its entirety by José Pereira da Costa, who published his edition in two separate volumes in 1992 and 1996. The first volume included Correia's account of the reigns of King Pedro I (1357-1367), Fernando (1367-1383), João I (1385-1433), Duarte (1433-1438), Afonso V (1438-1481) and João II (1481-1495) whilst the second volume covered the reigns of Manuel I (1495-1521) and his son João III (1521-155) until 1533.⁶

Much of the life of its putative author, Gaspar Correia, remains a mystery. His precise date of birth is unknown but has been estimated to be situated around 1492. On 03 March 1506 he entered the service of the Crown as a *moço de câmara* of King Manuel I. He left Portugal for India in 1512, where he served as the secretary (*escrivão*) of the redoubtable Portuguese viceroy in the East: Afonso de Albuquerque. Gaspar Correia died in India apparently in the early 1560s.⁷ Correia's modern-day fame as a historian is chiefly due to his major work entitled "Legends of India" (*Lendas das Índias*), an account of the deeds of the Portuguese in India from the expedition of Vasco da Gama in 1497-9 until 1550. Gaspar Correia did not enjoy renown in his own lifetime. The manuscript of the *Lendas da Índia* – in all likelihood with his other unpublished writings – returned from Goa to Lisbon in 1582 and remained locked away in a private collection. The *Lendas da Índia* was itself only published for the first time in 1858.⁸

In sharp contrast to the *Lendas da Índia*, the chronicle of the kings of Portugal remained unpublished and forgotten. This obscurity is not really surprising. Whilst the chronicles that cover the

⁶ J. PEREIRA DA COSTA, *Crónicas de D. Manuel e de D. João III (até 1533)*, Lisbon, 1992 and *Crónicas dos reis de Portugal e sumários de suas vidas (D. Pedro I, D. Fernando, D. João I, D. Duarte, D. Afonso V, D. João II)*, Lisbon, 1996.

⁷ A. ALBERTO BANHA DE ANDRADE, 'Gaspar Correia Inédito', *Revista de Universidade de Coimbra*, 26 (1977), pp. 5-49.

⁸ See A. ALBERTO BANHA DE ANDRADE, 'Gaspar Correia Inédito', *Revista de Universidade de Coimbra*, 26 (1977), pp. 5-49 and J. Pereira da Costa's introduction to his *de D. Manuel e de D. João III*, (Lisbon, 1992).

reigns of Manuel and João III contain original information, those of the earlier monarchs are mostly derived from earlier Portuguese chroniclers, most notably from the works of the historians Rui de Pina (1440-1521) and Duarte Galvão (1446-1517).⁹ Even the accounts of the reigns of Manuel I and João III, which display far more originality, cannot be described as a finished work. It would probably be more accurate to describe them as preliminary drafts, quite possibly written to assist Correia in the completion of a final version.¹⁰ The unfinished nature of the work has resulted in numerous lacunae and even some errors. In his *Crónica of João II*, for instance, Correia briefly mentions the arrival in Portugal of the Jews expelled from Castile in 1492 and states that he would discuss the topic at length in the *Crónica de Manuel I* but in fact he never mentions them at all in that chronicle.¹¹ Furthermore, neither does Correia refer in the slightest manner to the expulsion of the Muslims and the forced conversion of the Jews ordered by Manuel I in 1496-7. In spite of these pitfalls, the *Crónica de Manuel I* does contain a particularly striking account of the events of 1506 that has yet to attract any attention from modern historians. This very detailed account of the massacre of the New Christians of Lisbon is to be found in folios 299v-300v of Correia's chronicle of the reign of King Manuel.¹² Whilst Correia mentioned the massacre of 1506 only very cursorily in the *Lendas da Índia*, the passage contained in the *Crónica de Manuel I* is a relatively extensive one and is a detailed description of the massacre which is, at least partly, written from the perspective of an eyewitness.

⁹ A. ALBERTO BANHA DE ANDRADE, 'Gaspar Correia Inédito', *Revista de Universidade de Coimbra*, 26 (1977), pp. 5-49.

¹⁰ For another example of 'historical notes' made by an author who was elaborating a chronicle of the reign of King Manuel see the anonymous codex 51-V-69 (*Appontamentos historicos*), currently preserved in the *Biblioteca da Ajuda* of Lisbon.

¹¹ '...e neste mesmo ano deytaram os judeus e mouros fora de Castela e se vieram a Purtugall como se dyra mais largamente na cronyca del Rey Dom Manuell.' J. PEREIRA DA COSTA, *Crónicas dos reis de Portugal e sumários de suas vidas*, p. 271, Chapter 56, fols. 179v^o-180. In fact the Muslim minority was not expelled from Castile until 1502.

¹² J. PEREIRA DA COSTA, *Crónicas de D. Manuel e de D. João III* (Lisbon, 1992), pp. 29-32.

The Account of the Massacre

Correia's narrative of the reign of King Manuel follows a clearly defined and rigid annalistic pattern, one of the characteristics that reinforce the impression that the work is just a rough draft designed to be used in the elaboration of a more complete printed work. The author thus begins his narration of the events that took place in 1506 with a brief description of the eventful voyage of the fleet led by Tristão da Cunha to India that year and by noting the birth of Prince Luis in Abrantes, where the court had sought refuge from the "great plague in Lisbon and other places of the realm".¹³ It is at this precise point that Correia turns to the incident that triggered the slaughter of the New Christians. Our chronicler relates that it was whilst the population of Lisbon was suffering the ravage of a virulent epidemic that large numbers of people sought spiritual solace in the Church of São Domingos, attached to the Dominican monastery of that name:

“...logo no Abryll syguymte a xix dele avemdo grande peste em Lysboa e em mujtos lugares do Reyno estando ele [i.e. King Manuel] em a vyla dAbrantes naço o Jfante dom Luys // E no mesmo tempo se alevantou em Lysboa hua ouujam muj grande em sam Domyngos...”

In that church, there was a chapel with an altar dedicated to Jesus Christ upon which a crucifix and an image of the Virgin Mary had been placed. According to our narrator, a number of people claimed to have witnessed the appearance of a strange light either next to the crucifix or in front of the head of the Statue of the Virgin Mary. The crowds of zealots who rushed to gather in the Church of São Domingos grew to such large numbers that people began to suffocate in the press of worshippers:

¹³ The *Infante* Luis, son of King Manuel and Queen Maria, was born in Abrantes on 3 March 1506.

“...no altar foy vysto per mujtas pessoas dy[g]nas de ho ver hua camdea aceza no lado do crucifixo e outras pessoas ha viam amte ha testa de Nosa Senhora com aluoroço de devação começou a correr algua gemte ao musteiro e foy em tamto crycymto que huuns com outros se afogavam e começaram a fazer alguus mjlagres.”

This narrative agrees in all its points with the testimony given by an anonymous German witness, who himself actually appears to have been present in the Chapel when the riot started.¹⁴ Correia’s narrative offers new information, however, when the author states that a German man who had been amongst the crowd – he is not identified by Correia but there is no little doubt that he must have been one of the sailors from ships of the Hanseatic League that had travelled to Lisbon from northern Europe or perhaps a merchant residing in Lisbon – came to church with his daughter. The girl had suffered from a crippled or deformed hand from her birth but this abnormality was miraculously cured in the Church of São Domingos:

“... veo hu alemão e trouxe hua filha com hu mão aleyjada de seu naçymento e com mujta deuação a ofereço e recebeo saude no mesmo momento.”

It was at this precise moment, according to Correia, that an event took place that initiated the massacre of the New Christians. The religious fervour of the crowd had already been fanned by the mysterious light on the altar and now reached a climax with the miraculous cure of the German girl. A man, whom Correia identifies as a New Christian and claims to have been motivated by “sin”, started to ridicule those who claimed that the mysterious light seen at the altar was a divine miracle. He derisively called for water to be thrown at the image so that the light might be extinguished and the fraud thus exposed:

¹⁴ See Y. H. YERUSHALMI, in *The Lisbon massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the Shebet Yehudab* (Cincinnati, 1976), pp. 9-11.

“...e estando a[sy] sobre emoçam mujta gemte a ver qys o pecado que veo hu cristao novo e por desdenhar dysse a camdea que parece deytem lhe dagoa e apagar se ha...”

The injudiciously uttered remarks immediately caused instant outrage. The same German zealot whose daughter had allegedly been miraculously cured attacked the offending New Christian and promptly stabbed him to death with a dagger. Another man chose to intervene and claimed that the murdered New Christian had been killed because he had spoken the truth. Gaspar Correia’s ambiguous turn of phrase does not permit the identification of this individual as a New or Old Christian but he leaves no doubt that this man was also lynched by the crowd.¹⁵ Following this second murder, the enraged throng sought out and put to death all the New Christians that were to be found in the Church. Having murdered all the New Christians in the Church, the mob emerged from the building and spilled out onto the square outside, where they proceeded to kill any other New Christians that they came across there.

“... o que ouujmdo o [a]lemão tall blasfemea estando cheo de mujta fe do mjlagre logo sem trespasso arramcou de hua adaga que tynha e o matou dentro na mesma ygreyja ao que acudymdo outro dysse que o mataram porque dysera ha verdade o quall tambem logo foy morto e se hergueo tall aluoroço na gemte que estaua na jgreyja que começaram a matar a todos os christaos novos que acharam com a quall furya sahyram ao alpembre de sam Domyngos omde tambem mataram os qude acharam...”

Correia describes how the *juiç do civil* of Lisbon, a certain Pero de Lisboa, arrived at this precise moment in the square on horseback and seemingly without any of his deputies (none are mentioned). Holding his staff of office, he attempted to end the riot,

¹⁵ The anonymous German source clearly identifies this man as a New Christian and states that he was the brother of the first victim. Y. H. YERUSHALMI, in *The Lisbon massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the Shebet Yebudab* (Cincinnati, 1976), p. 10.

beating rioters with his staff and apparently even endeavouring to arrest some of them. His efforts were in vain, however, as he only just escaped with his life when the crowd turned their anger against him. They pursued the hapless magistrate all the way back to his house and would have burnt it down, and him inside it, had not his neighbours intervened to protect their own properties:

“... acudyo Pero de Lysboa que hera juyz do cyuell e a caualo emtrou no alpendre com a vara de justyça na mao damdo pamcadas e qeremdo premdre os do arroydo comtra ho quall se hergueo aluoroço da gemte e o quyryam matar mas elle se sahyo fugymdo a caualo qamto mais podya o quall syguyram ate o emçarrarem em casa omde com mujta furya lhe quyseram poer o fogo se a vyzynhemça o nom estrouara mostrando que ardendo aquela casa se lhe qeymaryam as suas.”

The angry crowd that had set off after Pero de Lisboa returned to the Church of São Domingos and constructed a large pyre upon which they burnt the bodies of their victims. From there, the mixture of “foreigners from outside of Portugal” (*estramgeiros de fora da terra*) and “scoundrels from the riverside area and plebs attracted by loot” (*bargantes da Rybeira e gente bayxa por caso do roubo*) spread across the city in search of New Christians, although Correia claims that by this time they had been joined by other people who were attracted by the prospect of looting. Correia proceeds to provide an account of the how the riot spread from the Church across the whole town. With all fear of the authorities gone, the rioters ran through the streets of Lisbon, breaking into houses and savagely murdering numerous people, both old and young. In their murderous rage their victims even included, according to Correia, significant numbers of “Old Christians”:

“...com mujta gemte cruell desejosos de roubar começaram de correr polas ruas da cydade fazembo a dicta matamça com tamta hyra e furya que nom resguardavam cousa algua nom deyxamdo nenhua pessoa a vyda grande nem peçena e entravam nas casas e deyttauam nos pelas genelas e os outros os reçebyam em suas lamças e bysarmas que traziam em que sem duujda eu que ho vy afyrmo que tambem padeceram morte mujtos christãos velhos.”

The complete failure of the municipal authorities to act decisively to put down or at least circumscribe the extent of the massacre is revealed by Correia in the passage that immediately follows the previous one. Brás Afonso Correia, the *corregedor do crime*, was present in Lisbon at the time but was so terrified that the rioters would turn against him – as they had against Pero de Lisboa – that he did not dare to interfere. Instead, disguised as a one of rioters, he somewhat pathetically attempted to prevent the looting of property by shouting: “Boys! You have already killed them, at least don’t rob them!” In an implicit reference to the participation of foreign sailors in the massacre, Correia states that the looted property was being loaded onto ships moored in the River Tejo:

“Bras Afonso Correa corregedor do crime que emtam era em Lysboa vemdo o caso e o furor com que amdava a que nom podya nem ousava comtraryar polo nom matarem amdava desymulado amtre os matadors e dyzia filhos pois jaa os mataes nom roubes porque eles em todos estes dyas carregavam suas naos de grande roubos...”

This massacre lasted until the evening of Monday (*segunda feira*). Nonetheless, just when it seemed that the fury of the mob had at last abated, a Dominican friar emerged from the Monastery of São Domingos holding aloft a Cross. The Dominican, assisted by two other friars, organised a procession that reignited the murderous anger of the crowd:

“...durou esta matamça asy ate segumda feyra per noyte que jaa parecya que ao outro dya nom mataryam huu frade do dicto musteiro de Sam Domyngos ymcytado do ymjgo ou asy permytydo per Deus sahyo ha terça feira pola menã com hua cruz de pao grande aleuamtada em suas mãos e se foy pola cydade bradamdo aquy filhos pola fee de Jhesu Christo nom fyque nenhu destes judeos com o que se logo ajumtaram grandes cabylas destes matadores e açezos em mor yra nesta terça feira ate oras de jamtar que se o frade tornou a seu musteiro com outros dous seus parçeiros que per açerto com ele se toparam que ho ajudaram a trazer a dita cruz.”

The reference to the “great assemblies of murderers” is interesting and appears to suggest that this time the violence on the Tues-

day was carefully planned and its victims carefully and deliberately chosen. It was indeed during this third day of rioting, in the evening, that the crowd lynched a prominent New Christian who resided in Lisbon, named Mascarenhas:

“... neste dya a tarde foy achado huu crystao novo que se chamava o Mazcarenhas que hera grande remdeyro e omem mallqysto do povo o quall per eles tomado foy nele feyto cruas justyas com grandes alvorçoos e a quarta feira jaa dypoís da morte deste nom avya tamta matamça.”

This event is also mentioned by many other sources and documents (see analysis below). This particular New Christian, Correia informs us, was a prominent official and tax collector and therefore the focus of considerable public loathing. It was clear, however, that the original impetus of the riot slowly petered out. The massacre finally came to an end on Thursday (*quinta-feira*) when another religious procession of flagellating penitents emerged from the *Sé* (Cathedral) whose participants, shouting “Peace! Peace!”, cried for an end to the killing and the return to peace:

“...e logo ao outro dya que foy qymta feira sahyo da see huua muj devota procysão da myserycordya com mujtos decyprinantes todos badamdo paz paz com que apagou de todo a dicta matamça.”

It is at this point in the narrative that King Manuel is mentioned for the first time. Correia states that on receiving news of the massacre the Portuguese monarch, who was staying at Abrantes with the Queen and the court, wrote to the governor of the town of Lisbon. According to Correia, the governor was at the time staying at Torres Novas – a town situated circa 50 kilometres to the north of Lisbon – together with the judges of the Court of Appeals (*casa da sopricação*). The Portuguese monarch ordered the governor to go to the city forthwith and “hang all the evil doers responsible for the massacre”. Most of the sailors who had taken part in the massacre and looting had already left Lisbon on their ships with their loot by this time, but the punishment meted out to those whom the royal

official managed to arrest was none the less extremely severe as hundred of men were summarily hanged. According to the author, many New Christians falsely accused Old Christians who had hidden them during the massacre of having robbed them and the latter were put to death by the Crown's officials. The number of men condemned to hang was so great that three extra gallows had to be built on the riverside (*Ribeira*) to accommodate them:

“O governador fazemdo o mandado delRey asy o mamdou as justyças da cydade que asy o fyzesem e foram logo tomados tamtos desta gemte cruell que na Ribeira eram feytas tres forcas grandes cheas e a forca da mysericordia e a forca de Samta Barbora as quaes des que eram cheas os tyravam e enterravam pera enforcarem outros em que se afyrma morrerem mais de b.c homens enforcados na cydade e per fora omde morreram mujtos sem culpa porque mujtas pessoas da cydade recolheram e guardaram mujtos dos dictos christaos novos em suas casas e eles dypoio os acusavam que hos roubaram e sem mais proua que seus dictos avyam grandes penas e quallquer que acusava algu que fora na matamça logo sem mais nada era enforcado.”

King Manuel's campaign of chastisement only came to an end when a certain noblewoman named Isabel de Mendanha wrote a personal letter to the monarch, pleading with him to put an end to the mass executions. Isabel de Mendanha warned the King that the summary justice had resulted in the unlawful deaths of many innocent men and that he would have to give account of this to God for the deaths of these innocents on the Day of Judgement:

“...ate que dona Ysabell de Mendanha que estava em Samta Cruz espreueo sua carta a elRey lhe pydymdo que ouuese piadade de seu povo porque soubese çerto que mujtos matava a justyça sem rezam nem merecymento de que ele darya grande comta a Deus.”

The King correspondingly ordered his officials to halt the mass executions and instead only hang those men found guilty of having participated in the riot after a proper investigation and lawful trial. Correia also adds further that many guilty men who had fled the city to escape the King's justice, and who later returned with the cer-

tainty that their involvement in the massacre would have been forgotten, were nonetheless arrested, convicted and hanged:

“ElRey logo mandou que cesase asy e que nom enforcasem senam per ymqryção e dereyta justyça de verdade sabyda o que dypoys mujto tempo aynda mujtos padecyam polo dycto caso que emtam fogyram e se foram fora da terra e dypoys se tornavam parecemdo lhe que jaa nom syryam conheçy-dos e todavya se os conheçyam heram logo emforcados...”

Gaspar Correia concludes his account of the massacre of 1506 by explaining that the King sanctioned such a ferocious repression as the breakdown of law and order in Lisbon and the resulting violence against the New Christians had been unprecedented in Portuguese history. Until then, he asserts, the Kingdom of Portugal had always been one of the most ordered and “obedient” in the Iberian Peninsula.¹⁶ In the end, it was the New Christians themselves who, for reasons that Correia does not seek to explain, petitioned the King to end the trials and executions:

“...asy aprouve a elRey por ser feyto hu tamanho desmamdo em seu Reyno de Purtugall que ate ly sempre for a mays obrydyemte e regrado que nenhu da Espanha e sempre foy com a dicta justyça avamte ate que os mesmos christãos novos lhe pydyram myserycordya e asy cessou a dicta justyça.”

An Analysis of the Narrative

The broad outlines of Gaspar Correia’s account of the massacre of 1506, especially his description of the murderous fury of the

¹⁶ Insofar as violence against the Jews and, after 1497 against the “New Christians”, is concerned this certainly appears to have been the case. The only major anti-Jewish riot in medieval Portugal took place in Lisbon in December 1449. Even then the aim of the rioters appears to have been to loot the *Judiaria Grande* rather than kill the Jews. See the two articles of H. B. MORENO, ‘Movimentos Sociais Antijudios em Portugal no século XV’ and ‘O Assalto à Judiaria Grande de Lisboa’, *Marginalidade e Conflictos Sociais em Portugal nos séculos XIV e XV* (Lisbon, 1985), pp. 79-88 and 89-132.

crowd, does not differ substantially from that which can be found in the other principal contemporary sources, both Christian and Jewish, that are at the disposal of modern historians. By way of illustration, his reference to the horrifying detail that the rioters broke into homes and threw their victims from the windows of upper stories directly unto the pikes of others still in the street coincides perfectly with the accounts given by the Jewish authors Ibn Verga, Samuel Usque and Yosef ha-Cohen.¹⁷ The lynching of the tax collector Mascarenhas is also an important detail that features in the account of the anonymous German and is highlighted by Ibn Verga.¹⁸ Notwithstanding this, Correia also provides a number of details and elements that cannot be found in other sources.

First of all, it is important to underline the fact that this narrative is all the more precious as it is clearly an eyewitness account of the massacre. It is indeed striking that at one point in the narrative, just after having described the mayhem and murder wrought by the crowd after they had nearly killed the judge Pero de Lisboa, Gaspar Correia reveals that he was an eyewitness to the massacre of 1506 by using the first singular personal pronoun “I” (*eu*) once in the passage and even seeks to emphasise the fact (“...*afirmo que...*”). If we accept that Correia was born around 1492, or even a few year after that, then it is entirely possible that he was recalling memories of scenes that he witnessed as a child or adolescent. It is worth noting, however, that Gaspar Correia’s circumspect description of the “miracle of the light” in the Church of São Domingos, and also of the subsequent start of the riot, suggests that he may not have been personally present to witness the actual beginning of the massacre and

¹⁷ SUSANA BASTOS MATEUS and PAULO MENDES PINTO, *Lisboa 19 de Abril de 1506. O massacre dos Judeus* (Lisbon, 2007), pp. 81-2.

¹⁸ Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *The Lisbon massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the Shebet Yebudah* (Cincinnati, 1976), pp. 11-4.

might have been relying upon the accounts of other witnesses, or even some hearsay, to describe this particular part of the massacre.

Whilst many of the details conveyed by Correia are corroborated by other sources, he does provide new information concerning the atrocity of 1506. The role he ascribes to the German sailors – and possibly other Northern Europeans – in the massacre is particularly interesting. These men were merchants and sailors whose ships were docked in Lisbon.¹⁹ The part played by German sailors in the riots has already been remarked upon by Professor Yerushlami in his study of Ibn Verga's narrative, but Correia indicates that they – or to be more precise one of them – may not have just been “followers” in the violence but might actually have been its instigators.²⁰ Whilst other authors simply mention their presence, Correia portrays their role as crucial. The miraculous healing of a maimed German girl and the subsequent killing of the sceptical New Christian by her father are not details that can be found in any other source. It is certainly interesting that one of the Germans present at the monastery later wrote an account of the massacre and does not mention these crucial details. Could Correia have exaggerated, or even invented, this detail in order to blame foreigners for the massacre or, inversely, might the anonymous German author have hidden the extent of the part played by his countrymen in the slaughter? This is a question which, until new evidence is discovered, cannot be answered but is certainly an important one for further understanding the massacre of 1506.

Another aspect of Correia's narrative that surprises the modern historian is his apparent reluctance to provide figures. It is certainly

¹⁹ On the German presence in Lisbon and Portugal since at least the thirteenth century see I. M. R. MENDES DRUMMOND BRAGA, *Os Estrangeiros e a Inquisição Portuguesa* (Lisbon, 2002), pp. 93-7. See also A. H. DE OLIVEIRA MARQUES, *Hansa e Portugal na Idade Média* (Lisbon, 1959).

²⁰ Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *The Lisbon massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the Shebet Yebudah* (Cincinnati, 1976), pp

the case that, apart from referring to the fact that 500 men were executed by the royal justices after the massacre, Correia does not mention any other figure. Most other sources, whether Jewish or Christian, venture to estimate the number of New Christians murdered. The result is a number of quite different opinions and estimations. The Portuguese chronicler Damião de Góis, writing more than half a century later, thought that the number of casualties was “more than 1,000” whilst the anonymous but contemporary German eyewitness claims that “more than 600” lost their lives from Sunday afternoon until midday on Monday. Amongst the Jewish authors there is a similar discrepancy. Isaac Ibn Faradj, as we have seen above, thought that 1,400 had died whilst Ibn Verga put the number as high as 3,000 and it is important to remember that both these men were contemporaries and eyewitnesses of the Lisbon massacre. In his *Consolação às Tribulações de Israel*, published posthumously in 1553, Samuel Usque even went so far as to state that the true number of casualties was 4,000.²¹ A petition submitted by the New Christians to the Pope in 1544, and preserved in the Secret Archives of the Vatican, claimed that the number of deaths was “more than 4,000”.²² The absence of a figure for the victims in Correia’s narrative is puzzling but might be explained by the fact that he was in all likelihood writing in India and have to rely upon his own memory. Without access to documents, or even the testimony of other witnesses, the author may just have been unwilling to hazard a guess.

The description Correia provides of the Crown’s ferocious campaign against those responsible for the massacre also contains original details. His careful description of the erection of three further

²¹ For the various estimates see SUSANA BASTOS MATEUS and PAULO MENDES PINTO, *Lisboa 19 de Abril de 1506. O massacre dos Judeus* (Lisbon, 2007), pp. 80-7.

²² *Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Fondo Borghese* 893, fols. 8v-9r. Cited in SUSANA BASTOS MATEUS and PAULO MENDES PINTO, *Lisboa 19 de Abril de 1506. O massacre dos Judeus* (Lisbon, 2007), pp. 85-6.

new gibbets on the banks of the Tejo to cope with the surplus of condemned men is a sinister detail that does not feature in any other account. Also original is the gruesome detail that the suspended bodies of the men hanged at the gallows were not allowed to rot in the open air, as was the usual procedure, but taken down and hastily buried in order to make room for further executions. Another element of importance is the alleged role that Isabel de Mendanha played in persuading the king to bring the executions to a halt. Correia offers no clue as to the identity of this Isabel de Mendanha. It is possible that he was referring to the wife of Dom João de Menezes, who was later to become governor of the Moroccan coastal town of Azamor, which had submitted to Portuguese rule in 1486. What Correia means when he states that she was “in Santa Cruz” is also somewhat of a mystery. There is no parish in Lisbon that bears that name and it is thus possible that the author meant that she was staying outside Lisbon or possibly at the monastery of Santa Cruz in Coimbra.

Whilst the above details raise questions for which answers are difficult to come by, Correia’s description of the brutal and expeditious justice meted out by the Crown, in which 500 men were put to death, is corroborated by documents from the royal chancery. On 23 July 1506, for instance, the Crown granted to Diogo Fernandes, a knight of the royal household, all the property and chattels that had belonged to a merchant ‘found guilty of the death of New Christians and accordingly hung.’²³ Correia’s reference to the fact that many of those rioters who had fled the Crown’s justice and subsequently returned to Lisbon were nevertheless apprehended and executed is supported by documentary evidence. It was indeed only on 2 June 1512 that Manuel promulgated a royal edict instructing his judges to desist from ordering any further arrests and sus-

²³ *Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Chancelaria de D. Manuel I*, livro 38, fol. 10.

²⁴ A.N.T.T., *Corpo Cronológico*, Parte I, *maço* 11, doc. n^o 91.

pend any ongoing trials relating to the massacre of 1506.²⁴ Moreover, although Correia does not mention it, Manuel also imposed a highly symbolic punishment upon the city of Lisbon when, in May 1506, he issued an edict formally withdrawing a number of its privileges and no longer addressed it in official correspondence as “*mui nobre e sempre leal*”. The punishment inflicted upon Lisbon lasted for more than two years. Ultimately, the municipal authorities persuaded the Queen to petition the King on their behalf for the restoration of their privileges and Manuel restored the town’s privileges with a second edict promulgated in August 1508.²⁵ The fury of the King can be understood when we consider the patent setback that the massacre represented. On one level, the complete breakdown of law and order in Lisbon, presented a clear challenge and threat to royal authority as well as a blow to his international prestige. On another level, however, the slaughter marked the utter failure of a decade long effort by the Portuguese Crown to integrate and assimilate the New Christians into Portuguese Society since their forced conversion in 1497.²⁶

Another salient feature of Correia’s narrative that leaps to the attention of the reader and historian is the utter inability of the local officials to stop the massacre and the complete chaos that reigned in Lisbon for three days. The rioters were described by Correia as a mixture of foreigners and Portuguese, including a number of ‘rascals’ (*bargantes*) from the riverfront or dockside area of Lisbon (the *Ribeira*) as well as more well-to-do citizens from the low-lying centre of the town (the *Baixa*). The speed with which the riot blew out of control was in part clearly the result of a power vacuum in Lisbon.

²⁵ A transcription of these edicts is published in Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *The Lisbon massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the Shebet Yebudab* (Cincinnati, 1976), pp. 85-91, docs. 5, 7, 8.

²⁶ On the policy of social engineering pursued by the Portuguese Crown between 1497 and 1506 see F. PORTUGAL, “O problema judaico no reinado de D. Manuel”, offprint of *Armas e Troféus*, 3, (1975), 5-23.

The plague had forced the King and his wife, together with the court, to seek refuge up the river Tagus in the town of Abrantes, circa 120 kilometres from the capital. At the same time, the governor of Lisbon was himself away in Torres Vedras, roughly 50 kilometres to the North. The vain attempt of Pero de Lisboa, the magistrate in charge of civil offences (*juiz do civil*), to end the riot in the monastery resulted in his ignominious pursuit through the streets and near murder by a lynch mob. Brás Correia, the magistrate in charge of criminal offences (*corregedor do crime*), was similarly terrified by the mob into complete impotence. His pathetic effort to restore law and order, by which he disguised himself as one of the rioters and vainly attempted to dissuade the rioters from looting as well as murdering New Christians, provides a powerful counterpoint to the ineffectual bravery Pero de Lisboa.

The account of the unsuccessful attempt made by Pero de Lisboa's to halt the riot and arrest those responsible at São Domingos is corroborated by the anonymous German source, who states that just, after the first two murders, a municipal official arrived with some constables and attempted to arrest some of the culprits. The German also describes how the crowd turned against the magistrate, pursuing him back to his house intending to burn it down with him inside. Nonetheless, no reference is made in the German account to the intervention of the magistrate's anxious neighbours and he insists instead that the pursuers simply lost interest in the magistrate and returned to São Domingos.²⁷ Furthermore, there appears to be a clear parallel between Correia's description of Brás Correia's ineffectual efforts and the anonymous German source's account of that same *corregedor's* inadequate efforts to restore law and order. According to the German, the *corregedor* reached Lisbon on Tuesday and attempted to put an end to the rioting by threatening the rioters.

²⁷ Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *The Lisbon massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the Shebet Yebudah* (Cincinnati, 1976), pp. 10 and 74-5.

Unable to impress the mob, the *corregedor* supposedly compromised, telling them that they could continue killing “Jews” but must put a stop to the pillage.²⁸

The existence of a Brás Afonso Correia, *corregedor* of Lisbon, is attested to by a number of surviving documents that prove that he enjoyed a long and successful career. Brás Afonso Correia appears as *corregedor* of Lisbon as early as November 1497 and documents from the first decade of the sixteenth century refer to the fact that he was a member of the royal council of King Manuel. In May 1501, in accordance with laws enacted by King Manuel in 1497, the *corregedor* had sentenced a New Christian named Master Rodrigo to be publicly flogged and perpetually exiled to the islands of Cape Verde for the crime of illegally possessing Hebrew books.²⁹ Brás Afonso Correia certainly continued to enjoy that monarch’s favour and to hold his position as *corregedor* in spite of his inability to restore order in 1506. He was only replaced as *corregedor* of Lisbon in June 1515 and received a generous pension from the Crown as a reward for his services.³⁰ The evidence relating to Pero de Lisboa, on the other hand, is far more tenuous. On 15 December 1500, a knight of the royal household named Pero de Lisboa was

²⁷ Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *The Lisbon massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the Shebet Yebudab* (Cincinnati, 1976), pp. 10 and 74-5.

²⁸ Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *The Lisbon massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the Shebet Yebudab* (Cincinnati, 1976), p. 15.

²⁹ For Brás Afonso Correia see A.N.T.T., *Corpo Cronológico*, Parte II, *maço* 7, doc. n° 26 (25/02/1503); *maço* 14, doc. n° 158 (28/06/1508); A.N.T.T., *Chancelaria de D. Manuel I*, *livro* 28, folio 26v (07/11/1497); *livro* 29, fols. 124v-126r. 20/09/1498; *livro* 46, fol. 79r. 07/10/1501 and fol. 116v (03/11/1501); *livro* 2, fol. 2v (04/12/1501); *livro* 45, fols. 76v-77r (03/02/1501), fols. 55v-56r (04/02/1501); fol. 121r (07/05/1501); *livro* 45, fol. 123v (07/05/1501), *livro* 17, fol. 59r (24/06/1501); *livro* 45, fol. 109v (08/06/1501); *livro* 1, *folios*. 43r-43v (14/09/1501); *livro* 22, fols. 30r-30v (23/02/1504); *livro* 42, fols. 30v-31r (09/03/1513).

³⁰ A.N.T.T., *Chancelaria de D. Manuel I*, *livro* 24, fols. 85r-85v (11/06/1515). For the pensions and privileges accorded to Brás Afonso Correia A.N.T.T., *Chancelaria de D. Manuel I*, *livro* 24, fol. 119v (06/07/1515 and 01/08/1515).

granted the office of secretary in the royal treasury in Lisbon. The same individual held that office until January 1512, when it was handed over to Diogo Cais.³¹ Even later, in October 1513, King Manuel ordered a certain Pedro de Lisboa to hand over criminals condemned to overseas exile who were imprisoned in his jail.³² The name and the subject matter of this last document strongly suggest that this man might have been the courageous official mentioned by Gaspar Correia but I have not been able to unearth further proof to confirm this and establish his existence.

One last point that remains ambiguous is that of Gaspar Correia's own attitude towards the New Christians. Correia never articulates any expressly negative opinions towards the New Christians but at times his narrative seems to imply some bias against the converts. To begin with, he appears to lend credence to the miracles performed in the monastery of São Domingos, stating that they were witnessed by "worthy persons" whilst the New Christian would doubted their genuineness was in Correia's own words 'willed by sin' ('...*qys o pecado...*'). Later on in the narrative, when describing the manner in which the intervention of the Dominican friar holding the cross on Tuesday morning reignited the massacre, he speculates that it might not only have been the work of the Devil (literally "The Enemy") but may in fact have been sanctioned by no less an authority than God. Thus, for Correia, the events of 1506 might have been a divinely ordained spiritual "purification" of Lisbon. Such an interpretation certainly receives support from the only other part of the *Cronica* of King Manuel in which the Portuguese New Christians are mentioned. In that later part of his narrative, Correia informs his readers that in 1532 the bishop of the Algarve wrote to King Manuel's son, João III, informing him of the disturb-

³¹ A.N.T.T., *Chancelaria de D. Manuel I*, *livro* 12, fol. 62r (15/12/1500) and *livro* 8, fol. 105v (04/01/1512).

³² A.N.T.T., *Corpo Cronológico*, Parte I, *maço* 13, doc. n^o 71 (15/10/1513).

ing visions of a paralysed young woman that he had visited. According to Correia, the bishop reported that the girl, in her fits, prophesised that the continued toleration of the heretical New Christians by the Crown would provoke the wrath of God and only result in terrible disaster for Portugal:

“Ela altamente dizia que hos males terramotos pestes e fomes que auya em Purtugall Deus o permytya polos males dos crystaos novos que neste tempo avya fama que em Lysboa tynham synogas secretas e nunca em nenhu tempo reyno alguu foy tam mandado e regydo por christaos novos como entam Purtugall e se dyse que o bispo do Algarve asy o espreuera a elrrey que nom era nada o que fora pera o que Deus avya de fazer por os males que faziam os cristãos novos em Portugall.³³

Lastly, there is the striking allusion to the alleged iniquity of the New Christians in 1506, who betrayed those “innocent” Old Christians who had sheltered them during the massacre by falsely accusing them of having robbed them. This particular passage is both striking and puzzling. The story itself may not be a total invention. It is quite possible that some Old Christians who, sheltered New Christians from the murderous mob, may have taken advantage of the situation to extort money and possessions from the latter. Once the massacre was over, some New Christians might have sought redress with the royal officers. Was Correia deliberately attempting to portray the New Christians as sly and ungrateful? The fact that the author readily accepts that the Old Christians executed by the Crown were guiltless (*sem culpa*) of the crimes they were accuse of, and thus unjustly executed, would appear to demonstrate that the author did embrace anti-neophyte sentiment.

Conclusion

Gaspar Correia’s eyewitness account of the massacre of the

³³ G. CORREIA, *Crônicas de D. Manuel e de D. João III*, ed. J. Pereira da Costa (Lisbon, 1992), 304 (fol. 378v).

New Christians of Lisbon in April 1506 provides historians with a new insight into that terrible event. Not only does he offer his readers original details about the event itself but in comparison with other Christian Portuguese chroniclers – more particularly Damião de Góis and Jerónimo Osório – Correia offers a different perspective. His hostility to the New Christians and even, though only implicitly, to the Crown for its perceived unjust treatment of the inhabitants of Lisbon is barely concealed. In this last respect, Correia’s perspective also differs considerably, and perhaps unsurprisingly, from the Jewish writer Ibn Verga, who described the Portuguese monarch as “a gracious king” who meted out a just and rightful chastisement on those responsible for the slaughter.³⁴ Notwithstanding the Crown’s vigorous reaction against the rioters, the massacre was still a traumatic experience for the New Christians. Hundreds of men, women and children left Portugal in the following months and years.³⁵ On 1 March 1507, bowing to pressure, Manuel I issued an edict that legalised the emigration of New Christians from Portugal.³⁶

The value of Gaspar Correia’s text does not mean that it is flawless or that it does not present the modern historians with certain problems. By way of illustration, the part played by the Dominican friars in the riots is highlighted by most of the other sources but is relatively minimised in Correia’s account. Correia contents himself with mentioning their organisation of the procession on the morning of Tuesday 21 April 1506, inciting further violence against the

³⁴ Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *The Lisbon massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the Shebet Yehudah* (Cincinnati, 1976), pp. 35–66.

³⁵ On 26 October 1506, for instance, the Crown granted the confiscated property of the New Christian Henrique Vaz, who had left the realm without a royal license to do so, to another individual. The document mentions that Henrique Vaz was related to a number of New Christians murdered in the Lisbon massacre. A.N.T.T., *Chancelaria de D. Manuel I*, livro 38, fol. 12v.

³⁶ Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *The Lisbon massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the Shebet Yehudah* (Cincinnati, 1976), pp. 87–9 and SUSANA BASTOS MATEUS and PAULO MENDES PINTO, *Lisboa 19 de Abril de 1506. O massacre dos Judeus* (Lisbon, 2007), pp. 126–130.

New Christians, but he does not elaborate upon their actions or their fate. In fact, two of the Dominican friars, who had reignited the mob's murderous fury, did not escape the Crown's justice and were publicly burnt alive.³⁷ Moreover, some of the more original elements of the narrative are left without any explanatory details that might further our understanding of the massacre of 1506. The unexpected and somewhat enigmatic reference to D. Isabel de Mendanha's plea to the King for an end to the wave of executions after the massacre is a fact of major importance. Nonetheless, Correia's failure to identify this lady or inform his readers of the nature of her relationship with the King and why the Portuguese monarch should have been moved by her plea is frustrating in the extreme for the modern historian. In spite of these pitfalls, there can nevertheless be no doubt that Gaspar Correia deserves his place alongside Ibn Verga, Isaac Ibn Faradj, the anonymous German and Damião de Góis as one of our main sources of information relating to the massacre of 1506.

³⁷ Another Dominican implicated in the massacre of 1506 apparently escaped to North Africa, see G. MARCOCCIO, *I custodi dell'ortodossia. Inquisizione e chiesa nel portogallo del cinquecento* (Rome, 2004), p. 38.