In the early summer of 1391, a wave of anti-Jewish violence shook much of the Iberian Peninsula and engulfed the principal Jewish communities in Castile and Aragon. Thousands of Jews converted to Christianity to escape slaughter at the hands of the mob. This disaster was compounded by an aggressive preaching campaign led by Saint Vincent Ferrer and the disputation of Tortosa which resulted in many more conversions, both voluntary and unwilling.¹ The most important consequence of the calamitous period of 1391 to 1416 was that the converts and their descendants, who became collectively known as the conversos, emerged as a distinct social group that was integrated into mainstream Christian society although not assimilated. The exact number of Jews who converted during this period will never be known but it was sufficiently high for those that did to retain their own group identity.² Large-scale conversion did not result in increased social harmony but rather the contrary. There was widespread suspicion amongst Old Christians that the conversos were not sincere Christians but continued secretly to practice their old faith. By way of illustration, the author of the Alborcayco, an anti-Jewish polemic written in the 1480s or possibly even earlier, asserted that “in the kingdoms of Toledo, Murcia, Andalucía and Extremadura you will hardly find any of them [conversos] who are true Christians.”³ There was a widespread belief amongst certain sectors of Old Christian population that judaizing conversos were working to undermine the church from within and even that “Jewishness” was

² On the number of conversos in fifteenth-century Spain see B. Netanyahu, The Marranos of Spain from the late XIVth to the early XVIth Century, According to Contemporary Hebrew Sources (New York, 1973), 238–248.
transmitted by blood. This resentment against *conversos* was further fuelled by the fact that many of them, now unrestricted by a distinct religious identity, attained positions of power and influence in society. 

An uprising against the Crown in Toledo led to a violent anti-*converso* riot in 1449 and there was another wave of bloody riots directed against *conversos* in the towns of Andalucía in 1473. Jews were widely suspected by Old Christians of actively assisting judaizing *conversos* and this allegation led Isabel and Fernando to order the expulsion of the Jews from Castile and Aragon in 1492.

These terrible events have generated a vast body of historical literature and a heated debate still focuses on the real extent of crypto-Judaism amongst the *conversos*. One aspect of these momentous developments that has received much less attention, however, has been their impact upon the neighbouring kingdom of Portugal. Recently, a few historians have started to perceive this event as a key to the sudden decline of Portuguese Jewry. As we have seen in the introduction, Tavares has described the arrival of the Castilian Jews in Portugal as a “destabilizing element” that was crucial in bringing about the forced conversion of 1497. Another scholar has gone even further and made the following devastating assessment:

Contemporary sources tell us that in the early summer of 1492 Portugal was flooded with 90,000–120,000 Castilian Jews. The admission of such an influx was contrary to reason. This country, whose population numbered barely one million, could not afford such a move that would create chaos from socio-economic, health, and religious perspectives.

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