CHAPTER FOUR

THE MORISCO PROBLEM AND SEVILLE (1480–1610)*

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From Mudejar to Morisco Community

By the late Middle Ages Christian Andalucia boasted only a few Mudejar communities, scattered across several towns along the Guadalquivir valley (Córdoba, Palma del Río, Seville, Écija…). Their figures were scarcely significant, and their social and economic import even smaller.1 In the Cortes of 1480, the Catholic Monarchs launched a new religious policy that ordered Muslims, as well as Jews, to dwell in special neighborhoods, known as morerías, separate from the rest of the Christian population, in a more efficient form of segregation than in the medieval past. This move revealed the political will to identify different “others” who lived among “us” Christians. In the framework of an initial process of confessionalization of political power, or perhaps we should say, a firm implementation of the concept of the unified identity of Church and Society, this policy, which had been defined from a legal-constitutional point of view in the Partida laws compiled by Alfonso X el Sabio [the Wise] in the thirteenth century, defined “others” by their religious, rather than national, divergence. It set them apart in order to make them visible, identifiable and

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1 In 1501, the following numbers of taxpayers (roughly equivalent to heads of household) are documented: 40 in Córdoba; 121 in Palma del Río; 34 in Seville; 17 in Écija. Further south, on the frontier with Granada, 67 in Priego (Córdoba) and 37 in Archidona (Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada, Los mudéjares de Castilla en tiempos de Isabel I, Valladolid, 1969, p. 19). Essential to an understanding of late medieval Andalucian Mudejarism, is Manuel González Jiménez, “Los mudéjares andaluces (ss. XIII–XV),” Andalucía a debate, Seville, 1994, pp. 121–154.
recognizable. The State thus set in motion an evolutionary process that created a social minority on the basis of the legal and ideological elements available and historically viable. The Muslims were physically gathered together, had new rules created for them and were subjected to a specific type of pressure that united them internally and fenced them in, differentiating and segregating them from their Christian neighbors. Thus, the interference of political power in everyday life shook the “normal” relationship patterns and the customary spaces of social interaction, creating a strained atmosphere that necessarily influenced, sooner or later and by degrees, the entire population’s behavioral patterns, personal attitudes towards others and psychological habits. As Norbert Elias pointed out in *The Civilization Process*, “...personality structures and social structures evolve in inextricably related patterns.”

This new policy marked the end of an era in which the Christian society had related to the Mudejars in a spirit of respect, embodied in a legal guarantee that precluded forced conversions. It was counterbalanced by surveillance to prevent renegade Christians from converting to Islam, and to implement the ban on sexual relations between Moorish men and Christian women. Likewise, the central authority’s interference threatened to render obsolete the arrangements between local notables and Mudejars which had, to some extent, been beneficial to both sides and had allowed certain Mudejar communities to thrive in towns such as Palma del Río (near Córdoba) and La Algaba (near Seville).

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2 The novelty of enacting this policy of isolation becomes apparent in the light of data reflecting the non-existence of such divides among Christians, Mudejars and Jews in the late Middle Ages. One example comes from the Burgos Synod’s statutes of 1411, when the bishop, Don Juan Cabeza de Vaca, explained, “Since contact between the said Jews and Moors and Christians has led to many ugly sins and errors and harm, the Holy Fathers issued the holy decree that Christians must not dwell with Jews or Moors, nor [should Jews and Moors] raise their [Christian] children, nor hold public office, nor reside among Christians. All of which has not been enforced in this, our bishopric, to this day,” and ordered that the followers of each religion henceforth live separately (Nicolás López Martínez, “Sínodos burgaleses del siglo XV,” *Burgense* 7 (1966), p. 290.


4 *Las Siete Partidas*, Partida VII, Título XXV.


6 We are indebted to Klaus Wagner for almost everything we know about the Mudejar community of La Algaba. See Klaus Wagner, *Regesto de documentos del Archivo de Protocolos de Sevilla referentes a judíos y moros*, Salamanca, 1978.