Chapter 15

The Expulsion of 1609–1614 and the Polemical Writings of the Moriscos Living in the Diaspora

Gerard Wiegers

The word polemics is derived from the Greek polemiké techné, and originally signified the argumentational style aiming at defeating an opponent in front of an audience, contrary to apologetikós logos, which in ancient culture meant the defending, justifying style. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century the word polemic began to be used in modern languages for a “war of words,” which remains its present-day meaning. However, as Jesse Lander argues in his study on polemics in seventeenth-century England, polemic “is not only a literary form; it is also a social and cultural practice, a practice devoted to the constitution of particular communities. Located within a social context, polemic is always revealed to be part of a dialogue, not the face-to-face dialogue seeming to promise true communication, but a temporally and geographically extended exchange.” As is well known, many polemical encounters between Muslims and Christians have taken place over the course of the centuries. It is no wonder that, in view of their social and political position Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula were no exception.

Many studies have dealt with the details and general aspects of the polemical confrontations between Moriscos and Christians, among which Louis Cardaillac’s well-known study, Morisques et Chrétiens, un affrontement polémique (1492–1640), still stands out.

---

2 Hubert Cancik, Burkhard Gladigow, and Matthias Laubscher, eds., Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer), 1988, vv. (“Apologetik/Polemik” and “Konversion/Apostasie”). 29.
Two phases in the history of Morisco polemics against Christianity can be distinguished. The first phase is the period between the forced conversions which took place in Granada, Castile, Navarre and Aragón at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century and the Expulsion of 1609–1614. The second phase is the period after the Expulsion, which lasted well into the seventeenth century. One might even say it has continued to this very day, even though polemical writings by descendants of Moriscos are no longer found after the second half of the seventeenth century.5 In his Morisques et Chrétiens, Louis Cardaillac creates the impression that we are dealing with a homogenous body of Morisco polemical literature, as is suggested by its subtitle “un affrontement polémique (1492–1640).” More recent studies have shown, however, that this homogeneity hardly exists. For example, the polemicist identified by Cardaillac as the Morisco al-Qaysī could be identified on closer inspection as a Tunisian captive of war in fourteenth century Lérida.6 Al-Qaysī’s polemical works, which circulated first among the Mudejars and later the Moriscos in Romance and Arabic as late as the sixteenth century, are therefore a survival of the Mudejar period. Moreover, it seems that hardly any fresh contributions to the polemical genre came into existence during the sixteenth century. The extant sixteenth-century polemical manuscripts in Arabic and Aljamiado are copies of earlier writings rather than new compositions. After the Expulsion, the first datable polemical works came into being, as I will show, in Morocco, while only later do we witness the emergence of a body of polemical literature in Algiers and Tunis. It is very likely that this Tunisian corpus should be interpreted amongst other things in the light of the elaboration of higher religious learning and perhaps confessionalization among the Moriscos in Tunis, as is also evidenced by the existence of a madrasa founded by them in the city.7 It was also in Tunis that the most famous polemicist of the Moriscos, the Hornachero Aḥmad b. Qāsim al-Ḥaḡārī (ca. 1570–after 1642), settled at the end of his life, after having served at the court of the Moroccan

5 With the exception of the work copied out by Moriscos in Tunis in the eighteenth century for Fray Francisco Ximénez. See Alfredo Mateos Paramio and Juan Carlos Villaverde Amieva, eds., Memoria de los Moriscos. Escritos y relatos de una diáspora cultural (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal de Conmemoraciones Culturales), 2010, 238–241 (description of the manuscript by Clara Ilham Álvarez Dopico).


7 See on confessionalization in the Ottoman Empire and the role of Moriscos especially the contribution by Tijana Krstić in this volume.