Infamy within Sight: Making and Unmaking Sambenitos in the Early Modern Iberian World

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Across the early modern Iberian world, a unique form of infamy materialized in the sambenito. Mostly known as the penitential garment imposed by the Inquisition on the individuals it condemned, the sambenito was also exhibited in churches and monasteries as a monument of infamy. This article traces the origins, development, and decline of the sambenito, with a particular focus on its material and visual aspects. It argues that displayed sambenitos performed mnemonic and evidentiary roles in societies obsessed with genealogy, while also bringing to light the continuous resistance and opposition to the sambenito on the ground.

INTRODUCTION

THROUGHOUT THE EARLY modern period, a unique and highly visible form of infamy known as the sambenito became widespread across the vast geography of the Iberian world. Intrinsically connected to a social order shaped by the operation of Inquisition tribunals and notions of purity of blood, the sambenito was the material manifestation of a system of punishment and genealogical memory. That the sambenito has become one of the most well-known emblems of inquisitorial persecution is largely the result of its frequent artistic depiction. It appeared in official representations commissioned by the Inquisition but even more often in works made by critics of this institution. These critics ranged from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Dutch and British Protestant polemicists to Enlightenment-era Spaniards, such as Francisco de Goya (fig. 1). Nowadays, the sambenito is an object of fascination, frequently reproduced in Inquisition museums and on book covers. Yet the

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Figure 1. Francisco de Goya. *For Having Been Born in Other Parts*, 1814–23. © Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.

historical significance of the sambenito is by no means merely emblematic. Invested with the power to dishonor individuals and stain lineages, it is an object that impacted people's lives in profound ways.

The sambenito took two forms, which corresponded to two interrelated yet distinct uses. First, it was the notorious habit that individuals condemned by the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions had to wear as a form of penance. Like other infamy-inflicting punishments in early modern Europe, which ranged from being paraded backward on a horse to being executed in gruesome fashion, donning the sambenito shamed the condemned by reconfiguring their physical appearance in front of society's gaze. The sambenito also had more enduring consequences for those convicted of crimes against the faith. Often used as an element of lengthy sentences, it continuously marginalized individuals in a similar way to punitive marking of the body. However, this public declaration of infamy was not confined solely to the body of the condemned. In its second life stage, the sambenito was detached from the body of the deviant and hung on the walls of the local church or monastery. Publicly exhibited, very often for centuries, the sambenito was no longer a shameful garment but, rather, a visible monument of infamy.

The creation, spread, and final decline of the phenomenon were inextricably linked to the rise and fall of the Iberian Inquisitions.[1] Sambenitos were first used in the Iberian Peninsula. The Spanish Inquisition, which was sanctioned by a papal bull in 1478 and established its first tribunal in 1481, used sambenitos as a form of punishment from its foundation. The establishment of Inquisition tribunals across the territories ruled by the Spanish monarchy brought the sambenito to places such as Sicily, the Canary Islands, and Peru. With its adoption by the Portuguese Inquisition (founded in 1536) in Portugal and in its imperial dominions, the sambenito became a truly global phenomenon, extending from Mexico to Goa. It was only when the Iberian Inquisitions were finally abolished in the nineteenth century that the sambenito disappeared from public sight.

Given the ubiquity, importance, and extent of the phenomenon, scholarly attention to sambenitos is surprisingly scarce.[2] Historians have discussed the sambenito primarily in the context of the *auto de fe*, the inquisitorial spectacle of ritual punishment during which the condemned had to appear dressed in this

[1] There is some evidence that the Roman Inquisition employed a similar practice, but with lesser impact and duration. See Lea, 1906–07, 3:172.

[2] The fundamental point of departure remains Lea, 1906–07, 3:162–72. Also still useful is the analysis of Juan Antonio Llorente, a nineteenth-century Inquisition secretary who became its critic: Llorente, 1:326–29. For recent discussions, see Bethencourt, 2009; Peña Díaz, 2012; Peña Díaz, 2019; and the literary analysis by Irigoyen-García, 80–101.

shameful garment. This focus obscures a key aspect of the sambenito—namely, its enduring presence beyond the ritual punishment. It was in the wake of the *auto de fe* that the sambenito metamorphosed into something different. Publicly displayed on church and monastery walls, the sambenito changed its form from garment to image and acquired a new function: the infamy it inflicted no longer centered on the body of the condemned, but, rather, on their memory. This new form of the sambenito, as well as its relationship to the garment, poses some problems of categorization. Some scholars artificially differentiate between the penitential garment and the displayed sambenito by referring to the latter as a *manteta* (blanket), a term that appears rarely before the late eighteenth century.[3] In the pages that follow, however, we employ the term *sambenito* in reference to both the penitential garment and the images displayed on the wall, as Iberians did throughout the early modern period. By doing so, we are able to follow the conceptual connections between the two forms while attending to their material and functional differences.

In terms of function, the few scholars who have addressed the displayed sambenito view it as intended to instill inquisitorial authority and deter others from erring in matters of faith. Francisco Bethencourt, for instance, has suggested thinking of the sambenito as a Renaissance "trophy," a visual symbol of inquisitorial power collected and exhibited serially.[4] While we acknowledge the sambenito's role in propagating inquisitorial authority, this article offers a new perspective, arguing that the display of sambenitos performed mnemonic and evidentiary functions in a society obsessed with genealogy.[5] Periodically checked and renovated by the Inquisition, sambenitos kept alive the memory of heresy. Inquisitors, clergymen, and other officials used them as visual registers of infamy. The general populace would also frequently turn to sambenitos as aide-mémoires that preserved knowledge about which members of the community were descended from ill-famed individuals. The archival function of the sambenito was intrinsically related to Iberian concerns with purity of blood.[6] Beginning at latest in the fifteenth century, numerous Spanish and Portuguese institutions decreed purity-of-blood statutes, exclusionary regulations that prohibited New Christians—that is, those Christians who descended from Jews or Muslims—from joining or serving in certain religious and military orders, university colleges, and cathedral chapters.[7] De facto forms of discrimination

[3] The use of the term is derived from Llorente, 1:xlii. Peña Díaz, 2019.

[4] Bethencourt, 2009, 288 and 290. The notion depends on the polemical phrasing of Dellon, 294.

[5] On the emergence of this anxiety, see Nirenberg.

[6] Spanish: *limpieza de sangre*; Portuguese: *limpeza de sangue*.

[7] The classic study remains Sicroff.

were used in conjunction with this de jure exclusion; for instance, difficulties could arise were a New Christian to seek to marry a so-called Old Christian. Under these circumstances, it is easy to understand how a record of inquisitorial punishment imposed on one's ancestors could hinder claims to social status. Simultaneously, and precisely because of the wider legal and social consequences associated with their display, sambenitos became a target of abuse and opposition. Sambenitos were thus powerful material agents of a discriminatory and disciplinary order, yet they were also constant targets of resistance.

This article traces the life and death of the sambenito, from its beginning in the late fifteenth century to its eventual disappearance in the early nineteenth century. The first two sections trace its origins, both real and invented, in late medieval Spain and its development into a system used by the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions across the Iberian world. They emphasize the emergence of a relatively loose set of codes and regulations that accommodated regional variations. The next section examines uses and abuses of the sambenito during its heyday, in the late sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth. It first looks at how the sambenito functioned as a form of legal evidence in purity-of-blood investigations and then moves to explore popular forms of resistance to this system. This is followed by an exploration of a different form of opposition to the sambenitos—an opposition that came from within the church and that was focused on the status of sambenitos within sacred space. The final section charts the eventual corrosion and abolition of the practice during the era of reform and revolution.

By studying the visual and material aspects of this system of punishment and memory, we aim to contribute to the study of the relationships between premodern law and images.[8] Scholars have analyzed Italian *pitture infamanti* and German *Schandbilder* as legal systems that relied on the power of images to confer shame in public contexts and, thereby, to enforce individual penalties and establish collective deterrence.[9] While these aspects were central to the Iberian sambenito, its distinctiveness lay in the fact that it was carefully preserved by the authorities and continued to exert power for centuries, an aspect we explain in relation to the unparalleled centrality of notions of purity of blood in Iberian societies. As a legal image, the sambenito was unique in its longevity. Yet the power of the sambenito also had its limitations—particularly its dependance on visibility and material integrity. When inquisitorial infamy met with ever-increasing resistance, criticism, and calls for reform, the sambenitos were left to fade and were eventually removed from sight.

[8] For an overview, see Behrmann, 2019, esp. 43–51.

[9] Ortalli; Edgerton; Freedberg, 246–82; Lentz; Behrmann, 2016.

ORIGINS

The origin of the sambenito can be traced to the biblical Fall of Man. Or so, at least, explained the Spanish Inquisitor of Sicily, Luis de Páramo, in his influential *De origine et progressu oficii Sanctae Inquisitionis* (On the origin and progress of the office of the Holy Inquisition, Madrid, 1598). Genesis 3 recounts that after Adam and Eve had committed the original sin, God cursed them to a life of hard labor and painful childbirth. Just before expelling them from the Garden of Eden, God created "garments of skin" that Adam and Eve were to wear. For Páramo, these skin garments were not intended to simply cover their bodies but, rather, to inflict a lasting disgrace on their persons.[10] As such, they set a precedent for the sambenitos used by the early modern Spanish Inquisition. The skin garments imposed on Adam and Eve were not the only ancient precedent invoked as an authoritative model for the sambenitos. Francisco Peña (ca. 1540–1612), a Spanish Inquisitor best known for his commentary on the fourteenth-century inquisitorial manual the *Directorium Inquisitorum*, signaled other biblical models. For instance, he referred to the sackcloth King Ahab imposed on himself in atonement for having had Naboth killed so he could possess the victim's vineyard (1 Kings 21:27).[11] The most common theory, however, was that the sambenito was derived from a penitential practice used in the primitive Christian church.[12] This practice involved requiring those performing public penance to wear a sackcloth garment that had been blessed by a bishop or a priest—this garment became known as the "blessed sackcloth" (*saccus benedictus*). After the penitents had finished the designated period during which they were supposed to wear this penitential dress, they were absolved of their sins and readmitted into the fold of the church.

The sackcloth has a long history as an artifact of Christian penitence. Sackcloths and cilices, or haircloth garments (*cilicium*), were commonly worn to perform self-imposed penance in late antiquity, and the practice continued among certain religious orders into modernity.[13] The primitive Christian church instituted rituals of public penance in which sinners wore sackcloths and appeared before the bishops at church doors to signal their humility and repentance. Generally, these public rituals had fallen into disuse by the early

[10] Páramo, 38: "tunicas pelliceas." On the broader use of the Bible as legitimization for the Inquisition, see Lynn, 2006.

[11] Peña, 498.

[12] Román, vol. 1, fol. 317^{v}; Covarrubias, s.v. "sambenito"; Páramo, 40. This theory informs modern accounts. See Lea, 1906–07, 3:162; and Corteguera, 31.

[13] Alston; Tentler, 3–27.

Middle Ages, but they were revived within the context of later reforms.[14] In the ninth century, an attempt was made to restore the earlier canonical penance, although it was transformed into a ritual primarily concerned with offenses of a scandalous public nature.[15] The Episcopal and Papal Inquisitions, which began operating in the late twelfth century, adopted aspects of these earlier public rituals, integrating them into a system of discipline and punishment that included some innovations.[16] For example, the penitential garment imposed by the medieval Inquisition on heretics borrowed the common practice among pilgrims of wearing a cross. Thus, these garments became signs of both contrition and infamy.[17]

As this brief overview clearly shows, the sambenito introduced by the Spanish Inquisition in the late fifteenth century drew on earlier forms of penitential garbs employed in rituals of public penance. Yet it would be mistaken to consider the early modern sambenito simply as a product of an unbroken tradition. Such a notion of continuity was promoted by the Inquisition as part of a legitimizing campaign. At the center of this theory was an etymology. *Saccus benedictus*, it was argued, was transformed through linguistic corruption into the Spanish and Portuguese *sambenito*. Therefore, in their quest to save souls from sin, the Iberian Inquisitions could claim that they merely followed an ancient Christian penitential tradition. This etymology, however, was refuted by the famed philologist Américo Castro, who showed that before it assumed its early modern inquisitorial meaning, the sambenito had a more neutral significance, as a sort of apron.[18] In his opinion, the sambenito was not derived from an obscure ancient Christian penitential practice of wearing episcopally blessed sacks but was instead simply linked to San Benito—that is, to the monastic order of Saint Benedict and, in particular, its monks' practice of wearing shoulder-width scapulars over their habits. Castro's critical remark debunks the existence of a linear continuity between the primitive Christian church and the early modern Iberian Inquisitions. It also opens up the possibility of a further consideration, one undeveloped by Castro, of the apparent tension between the honorable name of Saint Benedict and the negative connotation of the habit imposed by Inquisitors.

[14] Lea, 1896, 2:73–101. These ancient rituals were later incorporated into medieval canon law. See Mansfield, 171–72.

[15] De Jong.

[16] Arnold, 57–63.

[17] Peña, 498; Roach.

[18] Castro. There were also early modern Spaniards who suggested other etymologies. For example, Francisco del Rosal links the term sambenito to *sábana*, or "sheet"; see Rosal, 554–55.

Some early modern authors were well aware of this dissonance. The friar Antonio de Yepes, author of a history of the Order of Saint Benedict (published between 1609 and 1621), explicitly asked how an order so renowned and honored by popes, emperors, and kings could be so outrageously associated with the scapular worn by heretics.[19] Yepes entertained several theories that dealt with this seemingly unholy pairing. One theory came from the contemporary general of his own order, who argued that Saint Andrew's cross, a symbol of "Christian nobility and Old Christian ancestry," was used to adorn the penitential habit imposed on heretics as a form of irony. Thus, "in the same way that we call a black man John White and we call 'good women' those that are very lost," so is the "sack" the Inquisition imposed on the "ignoble and unclean" ironically called by the name of Saint Benedict, "father and patron of Spanish nobility."[20] Yepes considered this explanation, regardless of its authoritative provenance, to be rather thin, and outlined an alternative. Drawing on ecclesiastical legislation, he argued that at least since the early Middle Ages, Christians undergoing public penance wore monastic habits and undertook periods of confinement in monasteries. And since the Benedictine Order had set down roots all over Spain and across Europe, it became synonymous with this form of penance. Additionally, Yepes explained that it was a common custom to dub certain types of clothing according to their places of origin. Thus, for instance, *tudescos* are the capes worn by Germans, and *saboyanas* are the dresses worn by ladies in Savoy. In the same way, Yepes concluded, Spaniards employed the word *sambenitos* to refer to the scapulars used by the Benedictine monks and by those who performed public penance.[21]

What Yepes described was a process of cultural diffusion through which the term *sambenito* expanded beyond a strictly monastic context to become a generic concept. His historical reconstruction was clearly written from the perspective of a chronicler of the Benedictine Order, yet it appears credible and was accepted by others during the early modern period.[22] Rather than suggesting a direct link—based on a dubious etymology—between the primitive church and the early modern Inquisition, Yepes's theory emphasized a slow process of borrowing and adaptation. The term *sambenito* thus refers

[19] Yepes, vol. 2, fol. 337^{r}.

[20] Yepes, vol. 2, fols. 337^{r}–338^{v}, here at fols. 337^{v}–338^{r}: "de la manera que llamamos al negro Joan blanco, y a las muy perdidas llamamos buenas mugeres;" and fol. 338^{r}: "y assi como porque San Benito nuestro padre, es padre y patron de la nobleza de España . . . llamamos por ironia San Benito al saco."

[21] Yepes, vol. 2, fols. 338^{v}–339^{r}.

[22] See, for instance, Bluteau, 7:463–64.

primarily to the scapular that was initially associated with the Benedictines but that, over time, ceased to be exclusive to this monastic order. The Inquisition adopted its use but introduced significant changes to both its appearance and significance, as Yepes made sure to emphasize. It continued to imply penitence, but now also signified "ignominy and affront to all" and was considered a "sad and opprobrious insignia."[23]

FROM RITUAL TO MEMORY

In its first life stages, the sambenito was a garment imposed as inquisitorial punishment in the context of the *auto de fe*.[24] Over time, these sartorial sambenitos were joined by a new type of artifact that carried the same name. The new sambenito was an image more than a garment, as it was perpetually displayed in churches and convents. Instead of inflicting infamy on the bodies of the individuals condemned by the Inquisition, it did so on their public images and memories. Yet despite the fact that the new function of the sambenito was the most important novelty introduced by the Iberian Inquisitions there were relatively few explicit regulations for it. Compendia of inquisitorial rules addressed the function of these objects, but they offered no detailed discussion of their form. The material from which they were made, their shape, and their collective spatial arrangement often depended on pragmatic solutions and local customs. This led to some differences in the appearance of sambenitos across the Iberian world, although their function as signifiers of infamy remained essentially the same.

In the earliest iteration of this new function, the Inquisition hung the sambenito garments on church walls. The basic form of these garments evolved slowly and unevenly. In the Middle Ages, the Papal Inquisition used tunics adorned with two or three embroidered crosses as penitential garments.[25] When the Iberian Inquisitions created the sambenitos, they adopted this format and developed it into a more complex form of punishment, conveying an entire system of meanings. However, their prescriptions for the format of the sambenitos focused almost entirely on the figure of the cross. In 1490, Torquemada ordered that reconciled penitents should wear a garment of black or gray cloth adorned with a red cross. Then, in 1514, the Inquisitor General, Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros (ca. 1436–1517), ordered that

[23] Yepes, vol. 2, fol. 339r. Covarrubias, n.p., *voz* "sambenito": "para el mundo sea ignominia y afrenta." Bluteau, 7:464: "triste, & oprobriosa insignia."

[24] On the *auto de fe*, see, among others, Bethencourt, 1992; Maqueda Abreu, 1992; Flynn; and Cañeque.

[25] Peña, 498.

sambenitos should be adorned with the *X*-shaped Saint Andrew's cross, to avoid insulting the cross on which Christ died.[26] Normally painted in red or orange on a light yellow background, Saint Andrew's cross became the established adornment of the sambenitos worn by the *penitenciados* and *reconciliados*—in other words, those who were sentenced to penitential, corporal, and pecuniary punishments but were eventually reintroduced into the Christian community. In some tribunals, those who committed relatively minor offenses (abjured *de vehementi*) would wear a sambenito adorned with half a cross instead.[27] There was much greater flexibility when it came to adorning the sambenitos of the *relajados*, or those who were deemed irreconcilable, expelled indefinitely from the church and handed over to the secular authorities for execution. Their sambenitos, as well as the shaming conical hats (*corozas*) they wore, were adorned with elaborate depictions of flames, demons, and human figures, evoking the iconography of the Last Judgment and of hell while also alluding to their execution by fire.[28] Such iconography was, to the best of our knowledge, never prescribed by a specific set of guidelines or visual norms but, rather, tacitly acknowledged by the Inquisition.[29] The only exception was the sambenito created for those executed "in effigy"—that is, substituted at the *auto* with an image since they were absent or dead. In this case, inquisitorial prescriptive texts stipulated that the sambenito should display the "signs and figure of the condemned," as well as an inscription stating their name.[30]

Though certain features of the sambenito remained constant across the Iberian world, there were also iconographic variations. In some cases, a more elaborate iconography was used to signal the degree of repentance of the condemned and, thus, the probability of their salvation. In Pedro Berruguete's *Saint Dominic Presiding over an Auto de fe* (1491–99), the sambenitos and *corozas* worn by the two condemned to the stake in the foreground are adorned with open mouths of hell exuding fire that engulfs what may be representations of their damned souls (fig. 2). These stand in contrast to the condemned, depicted in the left side of the scene as taking off his penitential cone. On that figure's cone, the flames are turning down, signaling the salvation of his soul. This motif, later known as *fuego revolto*,

[26] Lea, 1906–07, 3:162–63.

[27] García-Molina Riquelme, 2000.

[28] An attempt to make sense of this iconographic system can be found in Maqueda Abreu, 1992, 238–40. More broadly on the iconography of the sambenitos in the *auto de fe*, see Bethencourt, 1992.

[29] Páramo, 42.

[30] García, fol. 54r: "un sambenito, que tenga de una parte las insignias y figura de condenado, y de la otra un letrero del nombre del dicho fulano."

Figure 2. Pedro Berruguete. *Saint Dominic Presiding over an Auto de fe*, 1491–99. © Archivo Fotográfico Museo Nacional del Prado.

was widely used by the Portuguese Inquisitions. A Scottish Protestant who witnessed an *auto de fe* in Lisbon in 1682, described the sambenitos of the *penitenciados* as bearing "flames painted, with their Points turned downward, to signify them having been saved." Those condemned to death as heretics, he wrote, wore sambenitos adorned with flames pointing upward. To this was added "their picture"—namely, their portrait—which was rendered "with Dogs, Serpents, and Devils, all with open Mouths painted about it."[31] This system of signs was also used by the tribunal of Goa, as depicted in the renowned series of prints published in the 1688 Paris edition of Charles Dellon's *Account of the Inquisition of Goa* (fig. 3).[32]

The function of the sambenitos' diverse iconographic details was to communicate information and to make the "penitents well known and manifest to the eyes of all, whether friends or foes."[33] In cities across the early modern Iberian world, individuals wearing sambenitos roamed through the streets, squares, and neighborhoods, as the late sixteenth-century *View of Seville* suggests (fig. 4).[34] Public declaration of this nature undermined the social status of the individual in question, and its appropriateness as a punitive measure had been the subject of debate ever since the beginning of the Inquisition. Andrés Bernáldez, whose *History of the Catholic Monarchs* (1488) is a central source for the early days of the Spanish Inquisition, narrated how the victims of inquisitorial persecution sentenced to wear sambenitos were permitted to remove them, "so that the infamy would not extend across the land due to the sight of this."[35] This approach was soon to be discarded. In 1490, Torquemada instructed that those reconciled after trial should wear sambenitos for the rest of their lives.[36] However, this regulation was later modified and the sambenito was imposed for a variety of sentence lengths, depending on the gravity of the crime. In some cases, it was worn only during the reading of the inquisitorial sentence at the *auto de fe*, while in other cases it was worn for several years, and even in perpetuity. Such modifications did not signify laxity. Inquisitorial legislation imposed significant penalties for those who dared to throw away or hide their sambenitos and declared that only the central inquisitorial authorities could commute this form of punishment.[37]

[31] Geddes, 1:443.

[32] Amiel and Lima, 27–28, 32–35.

[33] Peña, 499: "ut poenitentes patentius & manifestius omnium oculis obiicerentur, sive adversi sive aversi essent."

[34] For Lisbon, see Bastos Mateus.

[35] Bernáldez, 1:132: "e después se los quitaron porque no creciese el disfame en la Tierra viendo aquello."

[36] Lea, 1906–07, 3:162.

[37] Simancas, fol. 230^{r}.

Figure 3. Cornelis Martinus Vermeulen after Pierre Paul Sevin. *A man that was exempted from fire thanks to his confession*. In Charles Dellon, *Relation de l'Inquisition de Goa* (Paris: 1688), unnumbered sheet between pp. 294 and 295. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

The imposition of the sambenito garment on individuals thus turned infamy into a common, embodied sight in Iberian cities. However, the Inquisition determined on extending this infamy beyond the period of punishment and

Figure 4. Attributed to Alonso Sánchez Coello. *View of Seville*, late sixteenth century. Detail. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. Photo by Cloe Cavero de Carondelet.

hung the sambenitos in churches, transforming them into mnemonic monuments. While the precise origin of this practice remains obscure, it is clear that it began almost simultaneously with the establishment of the first tribunals of the Inquisition in Spain, in the 1480s. By the late fifteenth century, for instance, the traveler Hieronymous Münzer wrote that he saw "more than a thousand" sambenitos displayed in a chapel in Valencia.[38] It was only in the sixteenth century, however, that the practice of displaying sambenitos was codified, legitimized, and regulated. Inquisitorial writs (*cartas acordadas*) concerning this matter were sent to the various tribunals as early as the first decades of the sixteenth century.[39] Subsequently, it was addressed in regulations published by the Inquisitors General and widely disseminated across the Iberian world in numerous editions. The 1552 *Regimento da Santa Inquisição* (Regulations of the Holy Inquisition, hereafter referred to as *Regulations*), written by the Portuguese Inquisitor General Cardenal-Infante Henrique, ordered that after an *auto de fe* the Inquisitors should hang the sambenitos in

[38] Puyol, 67: "habrá más de mil."

[39] Maqueda Abreu, 1992, 244–45. Also see Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid (hereafter AHN), Inquisición (hereafter Inq.), 4475, exp. 4, pliego 5 and fol. 4r.

cathedrals and monasteries, in places where they could be "seen by all."[40] The Spanish *Co[m]pilacion de las Instrucciones del Officio de la Sancta Inquisicion* (Compilation of the instructions of the Office of the Holy Inquisition, hereafter referred to as *Instructions*), published by the Inquisitor General Fernando de Valdés in 1561, went a step further by ordering Inquisitors not only to hang new sambenitos but to ensure that old sambenitos were renovated. Such actions were meant to guarantee that "the memory of the infamy of the heretics and their descendants will remain forever."[41] Later inquisitorial tracts echoed this idea, stressing how the display of sambenitos served to "perpetuate infamy through these signs and monuments of impiety," as well as to deter people from committing crimes through the "horrendous and dreadful spectacle of infamy."[42]

The inquisitorial regulations sought to standardize a preexisting practice. The Spanish *Instructions* clearly acknowledged that the practice of hanging sambenitos was a patent and established reality and, as such, should continue unaltered.[43] The Portuguese *Regulations* referred to the practice as customary, without citing an explicit legislative precedent.[44] Both references suggest that this practice had evolved before becoming subject to regulation, when the Iberian Inquisitions underwent their major institutional reform and procedural standardization in the mid-sixteenth century. It was in the wake of this reform that the first legitimization of this practice was published. In his 1569 edition of *De Catholicis institutionibus*, Diego de Simancas, who had played a key role in drafting the 1561 *Instructions*, added a key section that was not present in the previous edition, which bore the slightly different title *Institutiones Catholicae* (1552). In this new section, Simancas argued that the biblical episode of Korah's sedition against the authority of Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16) provided the authoritative model for the display of sambenitos.[45] The uprising ended with divine punishment for rebels, followed by Moses's order to Eleazar, the son of Aaron, to take the censers with which the rebels offered incense, hammer them into plaques, and affix them to the altar, as a sign for the Israelites not to challenge the priestly authority of the "seed of Aaron." Like these plaques, Simancas argued, the sambenitos in churches were a public

[40] The *Regulations* are published in Baião, 46: "pera que sejam vistos de todos" (capitolo 63).

[41] Argüello, fol. 38$^{r–v}$, here at fol. 38^{r}: "porque siempre aya memoria de la infamia de los hereges, y de su decendencia."

[42] Peña, 510: "ut extent in perpetuum ea signa e monumenta impietatis, et eo horrendo et formidando infamiae spectaculo homines a committendo tam gravi scelere avocentur."

[43] Argüello, fol. 38^{r}.

[44] Baião, 46.

[45] Simancas, fol. 230$^{r–v}$. On Simancas and his role in the *Instructions*, see Lynn, 2013, 88–139 (esp. 95).

sign of inquisitorial authority, a deterrent, and a way to perpetuate the infamy of the condemned as well as their descendants.

While official regulations and tracts such as Simancas's made the display of sambenitos a central aspect of the Inquisition's punitory regime, these normative texts were laconic in practical terms. Little instruction was provided about where sambenitos should be hung or the particular way in which they should be organized, which led to considerable variety from one place to another.[46] Inquisitors had to find spaces able to accommodate large numbers of sambenitos, while keeping them as visible and legible as possible. Typical choices were cathedral cloisters, but the interiors of cathedrals, collegiate churches, parish churches, and Dominican convents were also common. In terms of content, the Spanish *Instructions* ordered Inquisitors to ensure that the sambenitos on display included "the date of their condemnation and whether their crime was that of being Jews, Moors, or followers of Martin Luther and his new heresies."[47] Such concern for providing explanatory information was stressed even further in the Portuguese *Regulations*, which ordered that sambenitos should be displayed on a wall with a panel beneath them listing the names of the *reconciliados* and *relajados* to whom they belonged, so that "anyone could read them."[48] Neither document, however, provided guidelines concerning iconography.

An analysis of the two groups of extant sambenitos previously hung in Iberian churches reveals their dependency on the symbolic language of the sambenito garment yet also the particular problems of conservation they posed. The first group comprises fourteen sambenitos originally displayed in the cathedral of Tui in Galicia, near the border with Portugal. It consists of five pieces of canvas mounted on wooden frames, each of which displays two, three, or four sambenitos, painted in oil. All are adorned with Saint Andrew's cross and informative inscriptions, and two are accompanied by portrayals of the condemned (figs. 5 and 6). The inscriptions refer to trials against Judaizers in the 1610s, but, as we explain below, they were remade in the eighteenth century after a robbery. In fact, what visitors in Tui see today is an even more recent artifact. When these sambenitos were found in the cathedral's archive in 1987, most of their inscriptions were illegible and much of the painting had faded away.[49] Efforts to restore the sambenitos' original appearance have involved aggressive conservational interventions. A large part of the inscription we see today in the sambenito of Antonia Henriquez, for instance,

[46] Páramo, 42–43.

[47] Argüello, fol. 38r: "se ha de poner el tiempo de su condenacion, y si fue de Judios, o Moros su delito, o de las nuevas heregias de Martin Lutero y sus sequazes."

[48] Baião, 46: "que todos a possam leer."

[49] Iglesias Almeida; Casás Otero, esp. 6 and 13.

Figure 5. Sambenitos of Andrés Duarte (sentenced in 1619) and Antonia Gómez, eighteenth century or later. 146 x 71 cm. Museo Diocesano, Tui. Courtesy of Suso Vila.

Figure 6. Sambenitos of Antonia Saravia (sentenced in 1617) and Antonia Henriquez (sentenced in 1619), eighteenth century or later. 150 x 72 cm. Museo Diocesano, Tui. Courtesy of Suso Vila.

has been retrieved from archival sources, while her effigy is the product of the restorers' imaginations (fig. 6).[50] A second and practically unknown group of extant sambenitos is housed in the parish church of the small Castilian village of Coruña del Conde. It consists of six sambenitos dated between the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (fig. 7).[51] There are good reasons to consider the present form of these pieces as a result of much later interventive conservation. Information on their history is lacking, yet a visual examination

[50] See *Sefardismo en Galicia*, 31–39. For pictures of the sambenitos in their different stages of conservation, see Casás Otero, 17, 21, 25, 29, 31; and Vila, 129–35.

[51] Abad Zapatero, 110; Cadiñanos Bardeci, 70–72; Peribáñez Otero, 25–26.

Figure 7. Sambenitos of Juan Cirujano, Alonso de Soria, Andrés Alonso, Constanza Martínez, María la Navarra, and Pedro Núñez de Santa Fe (sentenced between 1490–1509), eighteenth century or later. 68.5 x 326.3 cm. Church of San Martín, Coruña del Conde. Photo by Cloe Cavero de Carondelet.

reveals that the sambenitos have been reframed and heavily repainted. This is most evident in the inscription recording a "Lutheran heretic" condemned in 1509—almost ten years before Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses on the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg!

Despite these evidently modern interventions, some general points can be made about the intended symbolism of the displayed sambenitos. In terms of iconography, these sambenitos demonstrate an attempt at simplification, intended to facilitate the viewer's identification of the condemned's sins. In Coruña del Conde, the sambenito of a man condemned for Judaizing in 1490 displayed nothing more than the head of what seems to be a dog, a wolf, or a dragon, all symbols of evil commonly associated with heresy (fig. 7).[52] Visual and textual evidence of other displayed sambenitos that are no longer extant shows similar attempts to simplify the iconography. In Córdoba, displayed sambenitos of the *relajados* were signaled straightforwardly with red and orange flames (fig. 10). The sambenitos of the *relajados* in Goa and Tui (in person and in effigy, respectively) displayed portraits of the condemned burning in flames (for Tui, see figs. 5 and 6).[53]

[52] The tradition of comparing heretics to wolves goes back to Matthew 7:15–20. Medieval Inquisitors often commented on this passage. See Bueno, 176–202.

[53] Dellon, 291. The same convention emerges in other parts of Spain, see Fleuriot, 2:87; and AHN, Inq., 3723, exp. 102, n.p.

Other sambenitos, however, exhibited a range of iconographies and remarkably elaborate scenes, despite their relatively small size and the paramount importance of legibility. The Dominican convent in Barcelona, whose cloisters displayed more than five hundred sambenitos, provides a good example. The English traveler Joseph Townsend, who visited the convent in the late eighteenth century, was "so much struck with the fantastic forms which the painters had given to their daemons and the strange attitudes of the heretics" that he decided to sketch some of them and print them in his book *A journey through Spain* (London, 1792) (fig. 8).[54] In this composition, the central motif is a demon embracing and starting to gobble the heretic's naked soul while both are surrounded by flames. Above this scene are two more representations of demons eating men's souls, surely taken from other sambenitos displayed in the cloister. Townsend's sketches are an extraordinary piece of evidence of the largely lost figurative culture of infamy that pervaded Iberian churches for more than three centuries.

Inquisition tribunals regularly relied on painters and other artisans to assist with the production and subsequent conservation of sambenitos.[55] The selection of painters for this task, it seems, varied greatly, as did the fees paid for their work.[56] Some tribunals chose painters of high social and artistic status. Antonio Vázquez (ca. 1485–1563) and Pedro Díaz Minaya (ca. 1555–1624), who painted dozens of sambenitos for both *autos de fe* and church walls, are a case in point; they were recognized artists in Valladolid as well as *familiares* of the Holy Office.[57] Other tribunals relied on less renowned artists for their patronage. This was the case with Francisco Oliver, a "painter of *ymagineria* and of the Holy Office of this city" who restored the sambenitos in the cathedral of Córdoba in the early seventeenth century.[58] In New Spain, according to one testimony, Indigenous painters were specifically selected to paint and restore sambenitos for the cathedral of Mexico.[59] Such a variety of artistic profiles indicates that each tribunal was free to hire the painters best suited to its needs and economic constraints.

The crucial role of painters and artisans in making and maintaining the sambenitos brings to light the central issue with which Inquisitors had to contend in keeping the memory of infamy alive. Made from sackcloth, sambenito garments were fragile. When hung on the walls of a damp church or in an open-air cathedral

[54] Townsend, 1:120–21.

[55] Maqueda Abreu, 1992, 237–38; Marcocci and Paiva, 268; Bustamante, 464–66.

[56] On prices, see Millares Torres, 3:85; Silva Herrera, 227; and Marcocci and Paiva, 268.

[57] Bustamante, here 464–66. More on painters who were also *familiares* in Scholz-Hänsel, 161–63.

[58] Archivo Capitular de la Catedral de Córdoba (hereafter ACCC), 5278, cuadernillo 5, fols. 46^{r}–48^{v}: "pintor de ymagineria y del santo oficio desta ciudad."

[59] See Silva Herrera, 227.

Figure 8. Sketch of sambenitos from the Dominican convent of Barcelona. In Joseph Townsend, *A journey through Spain* (London: 1792), vol. 1, unnumbered sheet between pp. 120 and 121. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid.

cloister, they were exposed to mold, dust, insects, sunlight, wind, and rain. Over time, the inscriptions would have become illegible and the fabric would have progressively deteriorated. To ensure that the sambenitos effectively commemorated their wearers' infamy, Inquisitors had to introduce practices of conservation, restoration, and substitution, which, in turn, implied constant adjustment and reorganization measures. Despite its intended function as a fixed monument of memory, the sambenito became an object under constant transmutation.

The need to regularly mend and replace degraded sambenitos led Inquisitors to develop a series of material innovations aimed at improving their durability as well as the legibility of the names and crimes of the condemned. Instead of replicating each sackcloth garment, they devised more functional arrangements. One frequently employed strategy was to replace the original garments with large pieces of canvas. Sometimes referred to as curtains (*cortinas*) or, especially during the eighteenth century, as blankets (*mantetas*), these pieces of cloth displayed dozens of sambenitos organized into rows.[60] On some occasions, the canvases were even framed with wood.[61] Churches and monasteries usually displayed several of these curtains, each of which grouped together the sambenitos used for a specific type of condemnation.[62] The sambenitos themselves appear to have varied widely in size. In one of the few instances in which concrete measurements are given, they were about 40 cm long and 30 cm wide.[63] In contrast, a 1613 sketch of a curtain in the old cathedral of Valencia suggests that they were much larger (fig. 9).[64]

[60] See, among others: AHN, Inq., libro 919, fol. 851^{r}: "una cortina grande de sanbenitos"; ACCC, 5278, cuadernillo 5, fols. 151^{v}–152^{r}: "sanbenitos escriptos y pintados en lienço sobre color amarillo en seis hordenes . . . y la division que ay de uno a otro sanbenito es con unas rayas de color negro"; AHN, Inq., 3730, exp. 395, N.1, fol. 1^{r}: "un lienzo de varios penitenciados."

[61] Toro, 70–71: "ciento y ochenta y un sambenitos, en quince pedazos de angeo . . . se pusieron, clavaron y fixaron en sus bastidores de madera"; AHN, Inq., 3726, exp. 173, fol. 2^{r}: "quedo pegado al marco un pedazo de lienzo de uno de ellos"; Millares Torres, 3:85.

[62] ACCC, 5278, cuadernillo 5, fol. 151^{v}: "todos los que estan en este sitio son de personas que quemaron"; AHN, Inq., 2956, n.p.: "un lienço de sambenitos de condenados relaxados impenitentes," "otro lienço de otros quemados pero no vivos que fueron reconciliados." This is also what emerges from a 1755 enumeration of Mallorca sambenitos: see *Relación de los sanbenitos*.

[63] See the preserved sambenitos in Tui and Coruña del Conde; AHN, Inq., 3723, exp. 102, fol. 1^{r}: "Que este pedaço era como de dos varas"; and ACCC, 5278, cuadernillo 5, fol. 151^{v}: "cada sanbenito ocupa de largo poco menos de media vara y de ancho una tercia poco mas o menos." A *vara* measured ca. 83 cm.

[64] AHN, Inq., libro 919, fols. 848^{r}–851^{v} (drawing in fol. 850^{r}). Maqueda Abreu, 1997, 184–85, incorrectly identifies this source as coming from Valladolid, 1633. Gonsalvius Montanus, 385, implies that the size of a sambenito could depend on the magnitude of the case.

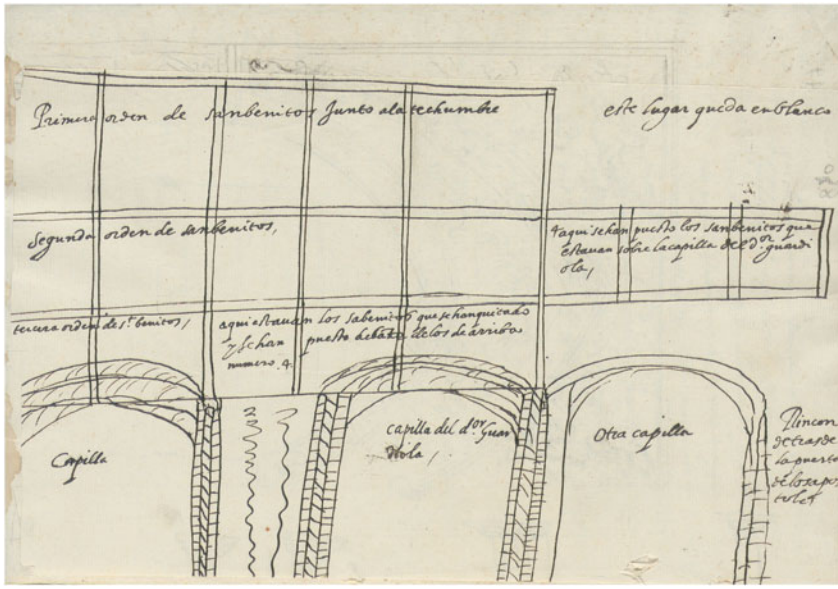

Figure 9. Sketch of the sambenitos displayed in the old cathedral of Valencia, 1613. Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte. Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid, Inquisición, libro 919, fol. 850r.

Using curtains made it possible to accommodate ever-increasing numbers of sambenitos in an efficient way. Year after year, *auto de fe* after *auto de fe*, the Inquisition filled the walls of Iberian churches and convents with sambenitos. By the late sixteenth century, even a small parish church such as that of Fregenal (Badajoz) displayed 599 sambenitos. Numbers were significantly higher in major cities. The cloisters of the cathedral of Córdoba exhibited around 4,000 sambenitos at the turn of the seventeenth century (fig. 10). The tribunal of Seville reported that its cathedral housed between 6,000 and 7,000 sambenitos in the late eighteenth century.[65] Given this volume, the renovation of sambenitos was often a laborious operation. For instance, the tribunal of the Canary Islands ordered that 212 sambenitos hanging in the cathedral of Las Palmas were to be remade in 1660.[66] In 1667, the tribunal of New Spain hung 400 new sambenitos in the cathedral of Mexico, half of them replacing old, deteriorated ones, while the other half corresponded to recent condemnations.[67] Throughout the early modern period, the Inquisition

[65] On Fregenal, see Lea, 1906–07, 3:167–68. Estimates for Córdoba are calculated from data in ACCC, 5278, cuadernillos 4 and 5. On Seville, see AHN, Inq., 4475, exp. 4, fol. 5r.

[66] Millares Torres, 3:85.

[67] Silva Herrera, 227.

Figure 10. Reconstruction of the sambenitos as they were displayed in the cloisters of the cathedral of Córdoba ca. 1620. © Matilde Grimaldi and the authors.

carefully crafted strategies to produce and maintain sambenitos, effectively creating archives of infamy. Displayed on the walls of churches and convents, rows and rows of sambenitos provided a visual register that propagated the memory of those who had been condemned for crimes against the faith.

THE VISUAL ARCHIVE OF INFAMY: USES AND ABUSES

The function of sambenitos as archival registers was intrinsically related to the discriminatory concept of purity of blood. Purity of blood was defined by both lineage and orthodoxy: in order to be considered pure, an individual had to be

"untainted" by Jewish or Muslim ancestry and also had to demonstrate that no family member had been convicted by the Inquisition. Official certificates were required for admission into corporations and posts that were regulated by purity-of-blood statutes. These documents were the result of institutional inquiries—inquisitorial or otherwise—that sought to verify that a candidate's background was free from any trace of heresy or "tainted" blood.[68] In this context, the fact that sambenitos were displayed publicly made them a key site of collective memory. Because they provided a visual record of lineage, institutions considered them to be a form of proof. The open nature of these archives stood in stark contrast to the Inquisition archive (referred to as *el secreto*), which was hidden from the public eye. As a public archive, however, sambenitos were exposed to the risk of unlicensed removal by those who suffered from being associated with infamy, in addition to being subject to damage by nature. The visual archive of infamy thus served as a resource for collective memory and legal discrimination but was also a target for discontent, criticism, and abuse.

The mnemonic and legal use of sambenitos is clearly illustrated by the case of Juan Rubio de Herrera, a Spaniard of allegedly New Christian origins. Rubio de Herrera's quest for social ascendency was halted by the presence of sambenitos. Born in Córdoba in 1579, he began working as an agent of the Spanish Crown in Rome in 1604. This position required him to carry out a variety of political and artistic commissions, and he kept it until his death, in 1641.[69] However, being an agent was not enough for Rubio de Herrera—he aspired to secure an ecclesiastical position in Spain. In 1619, his efforts bore fruit. In August of that year, Pope Paul V granted him a position of *medio racionero* in the cathedral of Córdoba.[70] A *medio racionero* was a low-ranking member of a cathedral chapter who had no right to vote in the chapter's assemblies. Such a position, in other words, had relatively little authority but carried with it a number of benefits, including a secure income. Perhaps even more importantly, the position of *medio racionero* was associated with the status of an Old Christian, as it was known that a requisite for joining the cathedral chapter was holding an untainted lineage. This precondition was established in the purity-of-blood statutes decreed in the cathedral of Córdoba in 1530 and authorized by Pope Paul III.[71]

[68] On purity-of-blood investigations, see Martínez, esp. 61–87. For Portugal, which had a slightly different history of regulations, see Olival, 2004 and 2016.

[69] Anselmi; Parisi.

[70] ACCC, 5278, cuadernillo 2, fols. 1^{r}–2^{r}. There is evidence that Rubio de Herrera had previously been appointed to a chaplaincy in Torremilano, Córdoba, around 1610, but its outcome is not certain: see ACCC, 5278, cuadernillo 2, fols. 25^{r}–30^{v}.

[71] Similar cases of men accused of Jewish origins seeking ecclesiastical positions from Rome can be found in Nelson Novoa; and Cavero de Carondelet.

Rubio de Herrera was well aware of this requirement and granted power of attorney to his brother and brother-in-law to present the papal bull in Córdoba and, if necessary, to swear that he was a baptized Christian, "clean of any bad race of Moor, Jew, or any other Pagan newly converted to our holy Catholic faith."[72] His declaration was by no means sufficient. Córdoba's cathedral, like other institutions regulated by purity-of-blood statutes, required an official investigation of candidates seeking positions in the chapter. A prolonged investigation then began, during which public opinion and visual evidence frequently intertwined. First, witnesses were asked for their opinions about Rubio de Herrera's identity and his and his family's reputation—what was known during the period as the "public voice."[73] Some signaled the existence of various sambenitos as incriminating proof of Rubio de Herrera's tainted lineage. For instance, Diego López Maldonado, a seventy-year-old presbyter of the church of San Andrés, declared that he considered Rubio de Herrera and his family to be "unclean *confesos*," as this was a common opinion of them in the city. He added that he also held this opinion because he knew of several sambenitos hung in the cathedral's cloisters that recorded the crimes of his ancestors. Maldonado explained that about thirty years ago, several old and well-regarded individuals showed him a sambenito in the cloisters' west gallery and told him that it belonged to Rubio de Herrera's great-great-grandfather, who was burned by the Inquisition. He further noted that Rubio de Herrera was "descended from yet another sambenito" placed in the north gallery.[74]

Maldonado's testimony demonstrates the extent to which sambenitos were the subject of conversation and were used as aide-mémoires. The information they contained and the oral circulation of that information played a powerful role in creating and sustaining public opinion about "impure" lineages. This "public voice" was deemed a fundamental form of proof in purity-of-blood investigations. At the same time, however, the sambenitos stood in their own right as an important form of visual testimony, and the judges conducting the inquiries did not overlook them. In the case of Rubio de Herrera, they summoned Francisco Oliver, a painter in the service of the Inquisition who had been responsible for the most recent renovation of the sambenitos in the cathedral's cloister. Oliver regarded Rubio de Herrera and his family to be *confesos*, because he had been told this and also because he had renovated the sambenitos belonging to Rubio de Herrera's ancestors. He underscored that his physical contact with these sambenitos, "through his hands," rendered his

[72] ACCC, 5278, cuadernillo 2, fol. 7$^{r–v}$: "cristiano bautizado limpio de toda mala raza de moro judio o otro pagano nuevamente convertido a nuestra santa fe Catholica."

[73] ACCC, 5278, cuadernillo 5, fols. 1^{r}–150^{v}, here at fol. 3^{v}: "pública voz."

[74] ACCC, 5278, cuadernillo 5, fol. 3$^{r–v}$: "confesos no limpios"; "tiene dezendencia de otro sambenito que esta en los dichos claustros junto a la puerta del caño gordo."

knowledge about Rubio de Herrera's tainted ancestry unquestionable.[75] The testimonies of Maldonado and Oliver joined six other testimonies in discussing in detail the existence of sambenitos related to Rubio de Herrera. These eight testimonies were a small group within the total of sixty-five witnesses, but the specific evidence they referred to had to be taken into account. In contrast to the persuasive yet immaterial nature of public opinion, the sambenitos constituted hard evidence that could be physically verified or refuted. Indeed, the cathedral's chapter did just that, and undertook an "inspection by eyesight" ("por vista de ojos") of the sambenitos.[76]

The practice of inspection by eyesight was an established legal procedure since at least the thirteenth century; it aimed to verify certain types of evidence presented to a court through an ocular examination conducted by a judge.[77] In the case of Rubio de Herrera, this ocular examination was conducted in September 1620, when two clergymen from the cathedral chapter, accompanied by a notary, went to the cloister to inspect the sambenitos in question. As they subsequently reported, the west gallery had many curtains of sambenitos, which were hung from the top of the wall in six rows and had black lines separating each sambenito from the next (fig. 10). The delegation paid particular attention to four sambenitos hung in the west gallery, one in the north gallery, and another in the east gallery. These six sambenitos, corresponding to individuals allegedly related to Rubio de Herrera, originated from the period of 1486–1504, a period known for the Inquisition's intense repression of Judaizers. They thus maintained the memory of crimes of heresy committed almost a century and a half before the investigation into Rubio de Herrera's purity of blood. The delegation made note of each sambenito's precise location on the wall by signaling its row and column.

Having seen the six sambenitos and indicated their precise location, the two clergymen gave orders for them to be copied by the painter Agustín de Borja. The degree of similitude between the originals and Borja's copies is impossible to ascertain, but it is clear that the painter adjusted the sambenitos' proportions (width: *media vara*, height: *tercia vara*) to those of an ordinary folio (fig. 11).[78] Each painting, which included all the main details of the inscription and the corresponding image, had a heading indicating its precise location and was

[75] ACCC, 5278, cuadernillo 5, fols. 46^{r}–48^{v}: "esta materia de sambenitos por sus manos a tenido noticia della y de los asciendientes del pretendiente."

[76] ACCC, 5278, cuadernillo 5, fol. 151^{r}: "por vista de ojos."

[77] On the inquisitorial use of inspection by eyesight, see, for example, Pereda, 143–78 (esp. 149–62); and Soyer, 60.

[78] These paintings were first mentioned in Avilés, 145, and then partially published, together with some transcriptions from the trial, by Gracia Boix, 243–54.

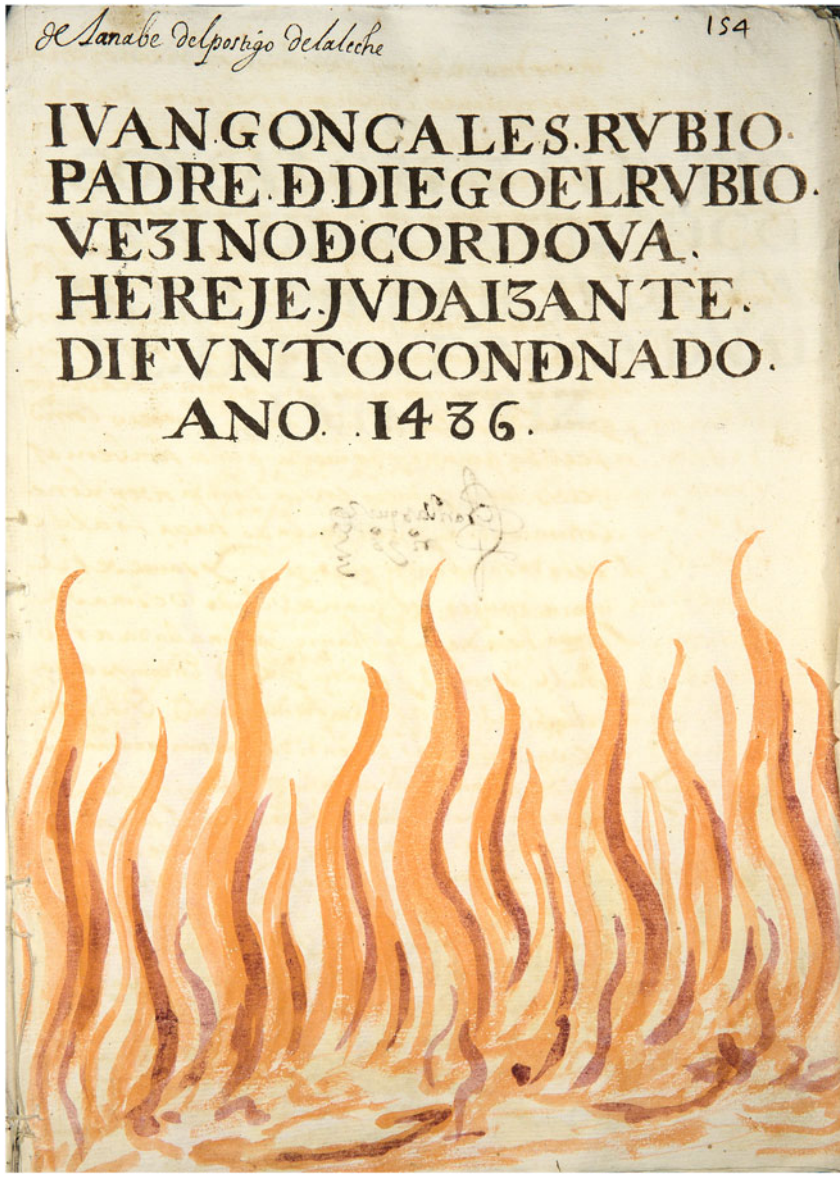

Figure 11. Agustín de Borja. *Sambenito of Juan González Rubio (sentenced in 1486)*, 1620. Archivo Capitular de la Catedral, Córdoba, 5578, cuadernillo 5, fol. 154r.

certified by the notary and the two clergymen on its reverse side. The paintings were conceived as legal evidence, visually substantiating the act of ocular witnessing and granting it an empirical authority.

While Rubio de Herrera's legal representative was summoned to attend the ocular inspection, he failed to show up. Rubio de Herrera used this as a pretext to challenge the validity of the inspection and to demand a new examination. The result was a series of further delays until, eventually, another round of inspections was conducted in 1625, almost six years after the beginning of the original investigation. The 1625 investigation revolved almost entirely around the power—but also the limitations—of the sambenito as a form of legal evidence. The investigators began by attempting to establish the existence of a tradition of displaying sambenitos in Córdoba. They then asked the witnesses if they were aware that the Inquisition was obligated to renovate sambenitos when "they became old, torn, or faded."[79] The interrogators continued with more specific inquiries concerning the six sambenitos related to Rubio de Herrera, trying to verify whether or not the names inscribed on them belonged to Herrera's relatives. Finally, questions were asked about sambenitos belonging to members of the cathedral chapter who had been accused of Judaizing in the early years of inquisitorial activity in Córdoba. These individuals had no relation whatsoever to Rubio de Herrera, but they were included in the interrogation because their trials served as a key justification for establishing the purity-of-blood statute in the cathedral chapter.[80]

After an examination of eighteen witnesses, the 1625 investigation identified up to fifteen sambenitos bearing importance to the case. In addition to the six sambenitos that had played a role in the previous inspection, six sambenitos of individuals presumed to be Rubio de Herrera's relatives and three sambenitos of past members of Córdoba's cathedral chapter were identified. The judges then conducted another inspection by eyesight to verify their existence and location and ordered Agustín de Borja to prepare a new set of pictorial copies (fig. 12).[81] In part, the new copies were meant to certify and correct, if needed, the previous copies of the sambenitos. The phrasing implies that Rubio de Herrera's lawyer concentrated on these copies in his contestation of the evidence presented by the judges. The careful certification of each copy indicates that the cathedral chapter's legal representative took care to follow procedure meticulously. Once again, Rubio de Herrera's legal representative was summoned to be present at the inspection, but, once more, he failed to attend. On this occasion, his evasive strategy proved ineffective and the judges ruled against Rubio de Herrera. His tainted lineage, it was decided, denied him the possibility of admission to the cathedral chapter.

[79] ACCC, 5278, cuadernillo 4, fol. 112^{r}: "si los dichos sambenitos se embegeçen o rrompen o deslustran."

[80] ACCC, 5278, cuadernillo 4, fols. 112^{r}–70^{v}.

[81] ACCC, 5278, cuadernillo 4, fols. 105^{r}–109^{r} and 176^{r}–192^{r}.

Figure 12. Agustín de Borja. *Sambenito of Isabel de Herrera (sentenced in 1504)*, 1625. Archivo Capitular de la Catedral, Córdoba, 5578, cuadernillo 4, fol. 182r.

Rubio de Herrera's case is arguably unique in terms of the visual documentation it left, but it is not singular. Numerous purity-of-blood investigations made recourse to sambenitos as a form of evidence, often with

perilous consequences for those seeking certain posts and admission into exclusive corporations.[82] The sambenito's function as an archive of sorts is also evidenced by the fact that Inquisitors often surveyed the extant sambenitos hung in local churches and compiled extensive inventories.[83] During this process, they sought to corroborate the evidentiary status of the sambenitos on display by comparing them to available judicial proceedings and testing them against local oral memory. All this was done in an attempt to ensure that people of tainted lineage did not enjoy privileges that were forbidden to them, as in the case of Rubio de Herrera. Yet even if the display of sambenitos had the power to shape popular opinion and to serve as a sort of documentary register for purity-of-blood investigations, this visual archive of infamy also had its limitations. For instance, in 1580, Hernando de Robles, an *oidor* of the Royal Audience and a *consultor* of the Mexican Inquisition—the latter being a position that required purity of blood—was found to have ancestors in Spain who had been convicted of Judaizing in 1484. The evidence was a sambenito of a family relative hung above the pulpit in the parish church of Alcázar de San Juan (Ciudad Real, Spain). This caused him to lose his post as *consultor* to the Inquisition but not his post as *oidor*, which did not depend on a proof of purity.[84] Indeed, sambenitos may have had a powerful effect on positions requiring purity of blood, but their legal scope was restricted.[85] Distance seems to have been a particularly important factor in limiting the influence of sambenitos. As a matter of fact, despite his rejection from the cathedral chapter, Rubio de Herrera continued to present himself as *medio racionero* of the cathedral of Córdoba in Rome until his death in 1641. His tomb, in the church of San Giacomo degli Spagnoli, left a lasting testimony to his years of service to the Spanish Crown and described him as a "cordvbensis ecclesiae semi portion" ("*medio racionero* of the church of Córdoba").[86] Thus, despite having the position denied to him in Córdoba, in Rome he could claim that this status had been granted to him, which was perhaps thanks to the papal bull he had received.

In addition to the question of sambenitos' sphere of influence, there were more practical limitations to their function as an archive of infamy. In

[82] For some cases from Seville, see Pike, 49, 73, 95, 104, 119, 124.

[83] See the inventories compiled in Tortosa (AHN, Inq., 598, caja 2); Daimiel (AHN, Inq. 120, exp. 38); and Mallorca (*Relación de los sanbenitos*).

[84] Sanchiz, 131.

[85] For a comparable Portuguese case, see Nelson Novoa, 235.

[86] See Parisi; Díaz-Rodríguez, 295–96. The sepulcher is now in the church of Santa Maria in Monserrato, Rome. The broader issue of evading or not fully enforcing purity-of-blood restrictions is discussed by Soria Mesa.

Seville, as part of an inquiry into a person seeking admission as a knight to the Order of Calatrava, a delegation of judges spent days searching for a particular sambenito among the thousands on display. Their efforts were in vain. The reason for their failure was that the sambenitos were placed in a poorly lit nave and, even by torchlight, could not be read clearly.[87] Likewise, in Corella and Tudela in 1641, the Royal Court of Navarra conducted ocular examinations of a series of sambenitos and a *manta,* a cloth sheet listing the names of individuals convicted by the Inquisition. Once more, these inspections failed due to the inscriptions being illegible, as they had worn away and were encrusted with dust.[88] The material state of preservation and the lighting conditions were thus essential for the proper functioning of this visual archive.

To serve their purpose, sambenitos needed to be visible. If they were relocated, covered, or damaged, the defamatory memory they conserved would vanish from public sight. In addition to being materially fragile and vulnerable on account of their public display, sambenitos were at constant risk of theft and vandalism. The functioning of the sambenitos as an archive therefore necessitated continuous vigilance. Inquisitorial legal manuals prohibited the removal of sambenitos, declaring that those who stole them from churches were to be punished, usually with flogging and exile.[89] Edicts of Faith published in Spain and Spanish America invited individuals to denounce those "who removed, or made others remove," sambenitos displayed by the Holy Office.[90] Of course, the need for such inquisitorial norms in the first place points to a significant amount of resistance to the display of sambenitos among members of the public.

Resistance varied in motive and form. In contrast to the established procedures through which individuals could have their penalty of wearing the sambenito commuted, usually in exchange for money or penance, there was no official mechanism for having a sambenito removed from church walls.[91] It is important to note that this topic—and, more generally, discrimination on the basis of lineage and past infamy—was subject to a heated debate within Iberian societies. For example, the Dominican friar Agustín Salucio, one of the foremost critics of purity-of-blood statutes, argued in 1599 that exclusionary measures against people of tainted lineages were harmful to Spanish society and should be amended

[87] Domínguez Ortiz, 1979. For a parallel case, see Pike, 23.

[88] Pérez Ochoa.

[89] Simancas, fol. 230$^{r–v}$.

[90] See the Edict of Faith published in Mexico in 1571, edited in Lea, 1906–07, 2:587–90, here at 588.

[91] On commuting the sartorial sambenito, see Lea, 1906–07, 2:401–13 (here 402 and 409–11); and Gonsalvius Montanus, 265–67.

and reduced. As part of this program, old sambenitos were not to be renovated after one hundred or two hundred years, as "our Lord does not want our punishments to be infinite."[92] Such calls for reform, however, did not lead to any official change of policy until the late eighteenth century. Before that date, the only legal option available to an individual wishing to remove a displayed sambenito was the submission of a special petition to the authorities. On occasion, such petitions were submitted in the name of an entire community wishing to clear its reputation. In late sixteenth-century Logroño, petitions made by the city led the local Inquisition tribunal to relocate the sambenitos of foreigners (*forasteros*) and to add inscriptions highlighting that they belonged to outsiders, thereby diminishing any taint on the city.[93] Similarly, after several petitions made by Castilian communities in the early seventeenth century, sambenitos belonging to Portuguese immigrants were marked with inscriptions that specified these individuals' foreign origins.[94] In both cases, even though a complete removal was not achieved, the *Suprema* recognized the harm done to the communities' reputations and implemented measures to distinguish between local and foreign infamy.

Of course, not every petition persuaded the *Suprema* to eliminate communal infamy. In 1555, residents of Fregenal (Extremadura)—a town in which many inhabitants were descendants of converts from Judaism—issued petitions against the Inquisition's plan to restore and replace the many missing sambenitos in a local church. In the end, their petitions failed to prevent the display of past convictions.[95] In other cases, petitions met with official refusal but still achieved partial success on account of pragmatic solutions. In the late sixteenth century, after a feud between local elites in Murcia and Lorca triggered numerous trials and punishments by the Inquisition, the families involved petitioned the inquisitorial authorities to clear their names from infamy. When they learned their petition had failed, they suggested hanging the sambenitos of their kin without the inscriptions of names. The *Suprema* refused to grant an exception, but the local tribunal found a solution: the sambenitos would be displayed on a little-visible wall, which kept them in compliance with the law while also satisfying the petitioners' desire to minimize their infamy.[96] It is important to

[92] BNE, MSS/5998, fols. 123^{r}–129^{r}, here at 128^{v}: "no quiere dios nuestro señor que los castigos sean ynfinitos." On this treatise, see Rawlings. More broadly on the debate on purity of blood, see Sicroff.

[93] Hergueta; Cantera Montenegro.

[94] AHN, Inq., libro 497, fol. 338^{v}.

[95] AHN, Inq., 4567, exp. 9; and Lea, 1906–07, 3:167–68. See also the failed petition of New Christians of Jewish origin to Charles V in 1519 in Bethencourt, 2009, 287n93.

[96] Contreras, 351–52.

stress, however, that the *Suprema* did not change its position—official permission to remove sambenitos was seldom granted.

Given the difficulty of obtaining official permission to remove displayed sambenitos, communities and individuals often chose to take matters into their own hands and defy the law. In Sicily, for example, popular riots in 1516 targeted sambenitos as an emblem of Spanish foreign rule. According to extant sources, from that moment onward, the Spanish Inquisition did not display sambenitos in churches across the island.[97] Such collective action, however, was rare. The removal of sambenitos was much more common in cases of individuals or families taking action against the consequences of infamy. The tribunal of Cuenca, for example, tried several individuals for removing sambenitos from a church and throwing them into a water wheel in 1559. In 1565, a man was tried for removing a sambenito and changing the name inscribed on it, as was another man, in 1575, for changing the location of his grandfather's sambenito; a sacristan, in 1626, for the theft of sambenitos from a church; and a woman, in 1632, for removing a sambenito from its designated display.[98] Such cases abound across the Iberian world.

Sambenitos were usually removed or damaged in attempts to clear an individual's or community's reputation, or to ensure the privileges granted to those considered to have pure blood. A case in Tui may be considered paradigmatic. In 1763, members of the cathedral chapter of Tui made a report to the tribunal of Santiago de Compostela that two sambenitos were missing from the cathedral. The investigation report indicates that the robbery had been prompted by an Old Christian family's opposition to the woman their son wished to marry, due to rumors that her family was of Jewish origin. The son's family had entered the church to copy the inscriptions of the sambenitos belonging to Antonia Saravia and Antonia Henriquez, who were supposedly connected to the woman's family and who thus provided evidence of her tainted status. Three days later, the sambenitos were stolen, leaving only a wooden frame with a "piece of cloth with no inscriptions whatsoever."[99] The robbery was clearly intended to erase the evidence of a tainted lineage and to pave the way to a marriage free from infamy.

The theft of the sambenitos in Tui failed to achieve its aim: the sambenitos were eventually replaced and their substitutes can still be viewed today (fig. 6).

[97] Páramo, 43. See, more broadly, Lea, 1908, 24.

[98] Archivo Diocesano de Cuenca (hereafter ADC), Inquisición (hereafter Inq.), 216, exp. 2632; ADC, Inq., 220, exp. 2703; ADC, Inq., 235, exp. 3027; ADC, Inq., 260, exp. 3553; ADC, Inq., 421, exp. 5909; ADC, Inq., 438, exp. 6172.

[99] AHN, Inq., 3726, exp. 173, fol. 2r: "quedo pegado al marco un pedazo de lienzo de uno de ellos sin escrito alguno." The history of the Tui sambenitos is reconstructed in Vila.

The church and the Inquisition thus managed to preserve the hereditary infamy of the local residents. Nevertheless, it is clear that sambenitos could become focal points in struggles between authorities and members of local communities. This is also evident in the cases of individuals who illicitly appropriated the form of the sambenito in order to shame their enemies. In the later sixteenth century, the Mexican Inquisition dealt with a series of cases concerning the display of makeshift sambenitos on church doors, church towers, and crosses in Tecamachalco and Guanajuato.[100] Here, sambenitos were weaponized in local struggles over reputation. Individuals and families not only tried to remove or damage sambenitos to erase the burden of infamy; they also sought to denigrate their enemies' reputations through the production of false sambenitos. Displayed sambenitos thus served as a potent visual archive for societies in which honor and position depended on public reputation and purity of lineage. Yet the sambenitos' accessibility, materiality, and connectedness to particular locations meant that this archive was also manipulable, vulnerable, and limited.

BETWEEN PURITY AND POLLUTION

In the early modern period, sambenitos were a quotidian sight, filling sacred space with images of infamy. One eighteenth-century French traveler wrote that instead of seeing paintings of "St Mary Magdalene, St Teresa or the Wedding of Cana" on high altars, "you see a pyre, you see a young girl, a child, an old man who dies in the flames."[101]

The dreadful sight of sambenitos within sacred spaces was disconcerting not only to the enlightened minds of foreigners but also to those of Iberian clergymen, who argued that they were unsuitable objects for church interiors. Such clerical concerns were underpinned by competing visions of how sacred space should be configured, as well as by conflicting ideas about how, where, and to what extent the memory of heresy should be maintained.

The contested place of the sambenito within sacred space was at least in part a consequence of its ambivalent status. While the Inquisition gave general indications about the types of churches in which sambenitos were to be placed—that is, the parish church attended by the condemned or the main church of the city in which they resided—it did not issue any instructions about where they should be displayed within the buildings themselves. In practice, sambenitos were often placed in cloisters and spaces near church entrances—places that churchgoers passed through constantly. Setting aside reasons of practicality,

[100] Corteguera; García-Molina Riquelme, 2010.

[101] Fleuriot, 2:87: "quand on croit voir sur le maître-autel sainte Madelaine ou saint Thérese, ou les noces de Cana, on voit un bûcher, on voit un jeun fille, un enfant, un vicillard qui expire dans le flammes."

these locations reveal the perception of sambenitos as liminal objects, neither profane nor strictly sacred, and evidently not entirely fit for display in the holiest areas of the house of God.[102] Similarly, panels displaying the names of the excommunicated were hung on church doors; it is thus possible to see these intermediary locations as defining the boundaries of the Catholic community.[103] Another element of the sambenito's ambiguity is the fact that, despite being an inquisitorial artifact par excellence, it was not meant to be displayed in the Inquisition's buildings but, instead, in churches and convents. To some extent, the display of sambenitos created enclaves of inquisitorial jurisdiction within spaces ruled by other ecclesiastical authorities, an overlap that gave rise to tensions. In a sense, the practice of displaying sambenitos could be seen to rest on a contradiction. As inquisitorial artifacts, they were publicized in an attempt to purify Iberian societies from heresy, which indicates a function as symbols of orthodoxy. At the same time, their presence in churches and monasteries tarnished the reputations of local communities by linking them with infamy. In this sense, they were pollutants that did not belong in the sacred space.

The stakes involved in the question of whether or not sambenitos should be displayed within a Catholic sacred space are demonstrated by the conflict between church and Inquisition in the cathedral of Granada.[104] This lengthy process of resistance and negotiation began shortly before Easter 1582, when the Inquisition of Granada made the unusual decision to move the sambenitos on display in the old cathedral to the main chapel of the new cathedral, which had been designed by the architect Diego de Siloé (ca. 1490–1563) and was still under construction. The new main chapel had white walls and numerous openings for stained-glass windows. It thereby offered a much greater degree of visibility than the old cathedral, which had formerly been a mosque, and was filled with rows of columns. Moreover, displaying the sambenitos in the cathedral's holiest space made a clear statement about the Inquisition's authoritative role in the religious community. These evident advantages notwithstanding, main chapels were an extremely rare choice for hanging sambenitos.

The church of Granada immediately contested the Inquisition's relocation of the sambenitos. The long dispute that ensued, first led by the cathedral chapter, later by Archbishop Pedro de Castro (r. 1589–1610), and brought to a close by Inquisitor General Bernardo de Sandoval y Rojas (r. 1608–18), shows how the conspicuous exhibition of sambenitos in the cathedral disturbed both clergy and community. A myriad of letters and two diagrammatic drawings unpack the church's main argument: the presence of sambenitos disrupted the divine

[102] On liminality and sacred space, see Coster and Spicer, 8–9.

[103] Castillo Gómez, 58–61.

[104] For an early study, see Domínguez Ortiz, 1977–79.

cult. A critical cause of concern was the unsought reactions of the faithful. The cathedral chapter complained that since the relocation there were people in the church inspecting the names of the heretics at all hours of the day. Even more troubling was the fact that, because of the sambenitos' location on the walls near the high altar, people had to turn their backs to the Eucharist in order to be able to observe them.[105] Popular fascination with this record of infamy appeared to overcome the appeal of the holy.

It was the sambenitos' impact on the liturgy that most troubled the church of Granada. The cathedral chapter issued a memorandum to the Inquisition in which it complained about the proximity of the sambenitos to the altar, which distracted even the priest officiating the mass.[106] Two drawings were produced to support the clergy's complaints.[107] The first is an architectural plan of the main chapel with a red line indicating the sambenitos' locations (fig. 13). The second is a freehand pen-and-wash drawing that includes handwritten observations about the sambenitos' visibility from the altar (fig. 14). One of these inscriptions states that "the edge of the canvas" of one set of sambenitos can be seen from the high altar, while another specifies that a second set "can be seen from the altar, although it is far."[108] In addition to disturbing the priest's sight, the obligation of perpetually exhibiting sambenitos restricted the display of tapestries and other adornments during religious celebrations. Instead of commemorating the Catholic Monarchs and the saints with tapestries, the clergy decried, the cathedral now housed the "memory of the heretics."[109]

The Inquisition's interest in ensuring the sambenitos' visibility was evidently at odds with the liturgical and devotional duties of the cathedral of Granada. What began as a disagreement evolved into a deadlock as both the Inquisition and the church refused to cede. The conflict came to a head in 1594, when Archbishop Castro decided to bypass the Inquisition and submit a complaint directly to Philip II, who in turn forwarded it to the Council of Castile.[110] As

[105] Marín López, 1996, 185–86.

[106] Marín López, 1996, 185–86.

[107] British Library (hereafter BL), London, Egerton 1509, fols. 342r–343r. Requena Bravo de Laguna attributes these drawings to the master builder Juan de la Vega, who produced another related drawing (see discussion below); however, the clear differences in hand raise doubts about this attribution.

[108] BL, Egerton 1509, fol. 342r: "En esta Pared ay sambenitos colgados que si los quieren mirar de el altar se pueden ver, aunque estan lexos"; "En esta pared ay sambenitos, que no se vee desde el altar, mas que la orilla de el lienço."

[109] Marín López, 1996, 185–86; and Marín López, 1998, 217–21: "en su lugar la memoria de los herejes" (220).

[110] Instituto Valencia de Don Juan (hereafter IVDJ), Madrid, Envío 8, 2ª parte (Caja 13), doc. 93.

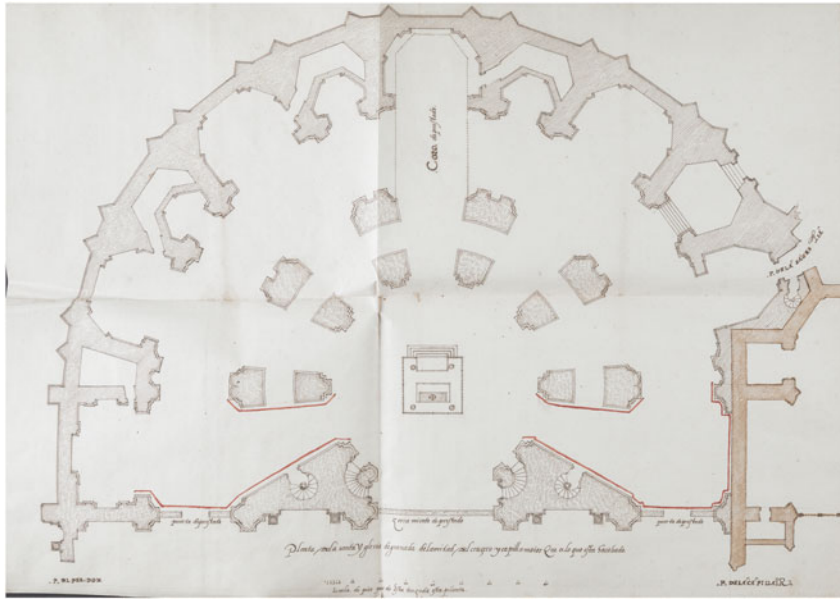

Figure 13. *Plan of the Cathedral of Granada*, ca. 1582. © British Library Board, Egerton 1509, fol. 343r.

part of the official investigation into the issue, Juan de la Vega, the *aparejador* (master builder) of the royal palace of the Alhambra, sent a report to the president of the Council of Castile in April 1594. This report listed the advantages and inconveniences of displaying sambenitos near the high altar as well as in other alternative locations within the new and old cathedrals. It was accompanied by a plan of the building with a small freehand elevation view of one of the arches in the ambulatory. Both drawings were marked with letters signaling possible locations for the sambenitos (fig. 15).[111] While Vega concurred with the church of Granada that the sambenitos should be removed from the high altar and its surroundings, his arguments differed from those presented by the clergy. Instead of focusing on liturgical matters, he concentrated on aesthetic questions. He claimed, for instance, that moving the sambenitos to the ambulatory would only worsen the problem, as the sambenitos would be even more visible, making this "beautiful building" look "even uglier than it is now." Vega was particularly worried that, if moved, the sambenitos would cover the statues of saints and the

[111] IVDJ, Envío 8, 2ª parte (Caja 13), doc. 93, n.p. This drawing was discovered and carefully analyzed by Rodríguez Ruiz. Traditionally associated with Archbishop Castro, an overlooked document in the same collection reveals that it was addressed instead to the president of the Council of Castile, Rodrigo Vázquez de Arce.

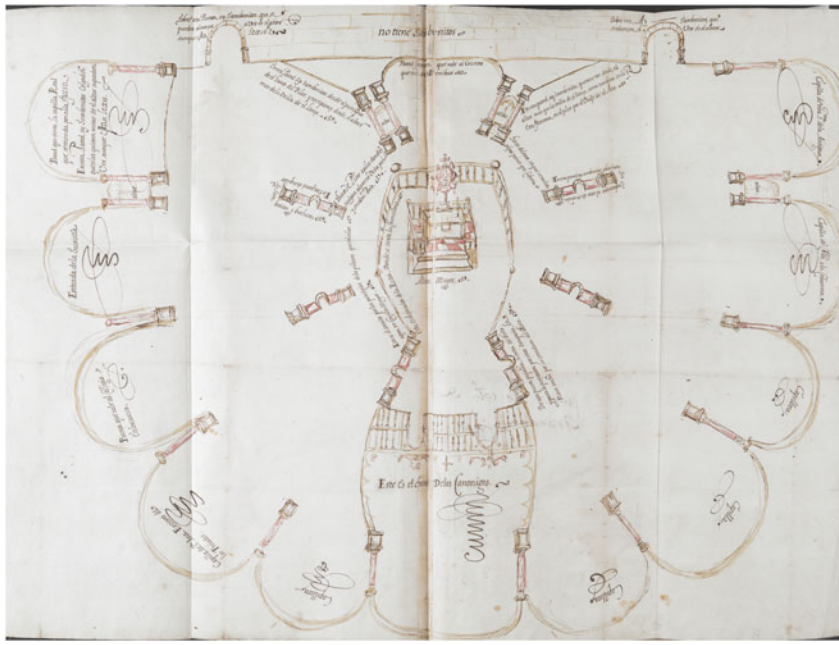

Figure 14. *Plan of the Cathedral of Granada*, ca. 1582. © British Library Board, Egerton 1509, fol. 342r.

columns, the latter being "the main parts and the beauty of all the building." He also raised some more practical objections. Hanging the sambenitos above chapel entrances, Vega argued, would bestow infamy upon the chapels, and no one would wish to purchase them.[112]

In the end, Vega's expert opinion had little impact. On 22 May 1594, Philip II rejected all the proposed locations for the sambenitos and instead dictated another one. The sambenitos were to be removed from the main chapel and placed in the cloisters of the new cathedral, a more conventional location that underlined their liminal status between sacred and profane. Until the cloisters were ready, the sambenitos were to be housed once more in the old cathedral.[113] However, Philip II's ruling was never enforced, partly because of delays in the construction of the cloisters (which were never built), but also due to internal debates between the Inquisition and the Granada church.[114] Like a stubborn

[112] IVDJ, Envío 8, 2ª parte (Caja 13), doc. 88: "seria lastima ver un edifiçio tan galano colgado de paños tan feos y quedaria la capilla y traschoro tan fea y mas de lo que agora lo esta"; "se tapan las columnas que son los miembros pricipales y la hermosura de todo el edifiçio."

[113] Bermúdez de Pedraza, fol. 264r. Also see Maqueda Abreu, 1997, 186.

[114] Bermúdez de Pedraza, fol. 264r; Marín López, 1998, 217–21.

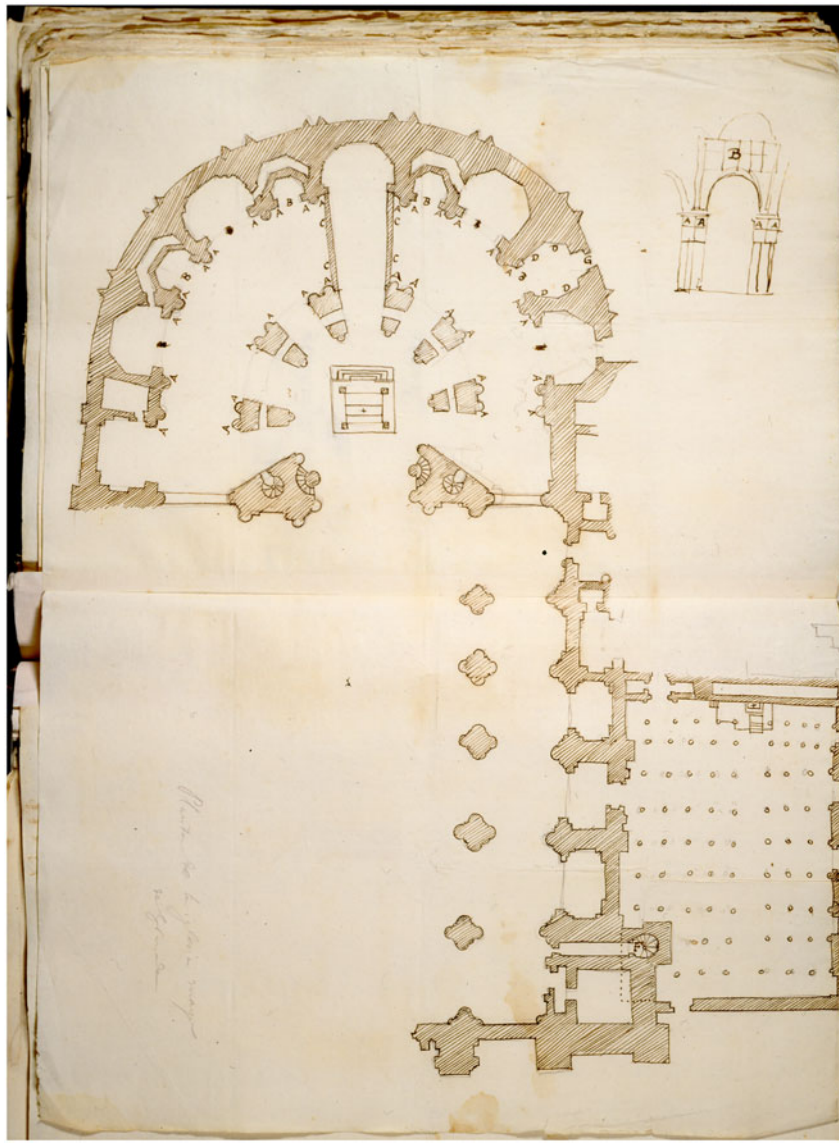

Figure 15. Juan de la Vega. *Plan of the Cathedral of Granada*, 1594. Instituto Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid.

stain that withstands any attempt at removal, the sambenitos remained in situ and kept diffusing the memory of infamy into the sacred space.

The final phase in the negotiations over the sambenitos held by the cathedral of Granada took place almost two decades later, within the context of a wider

debate about the Moriscos (Muslims forcibly converted to Christianity between 1502 and 1526, and their descendants). In the years preceding the expulsion of the Moriscos (1609–14), secular and ecclesiastical authorities discussed how best to deal with this large population, which was generally viewed as unchristian and potentially dangerous. Among those who favored further efforts to convert the Moriscos, there were calls for reducing the number of, or completely abolishing, sambenitos, as they were deemed an obstacle to assimilation.[115] After the expulsion, the debate about the Morisco sambenitos took a different turn. In much the same way that the Spanish communities discussed above sought to eliminate the display of sambenitos of foreigners, individuals began to question the necessity of exhibiting sambenitos corresponding to a group that was no longer present in Spain. This debate was relevant in Granada, where a large Morisco population had lived, and many sambenitos of Morisco convicts were still prominently exhibited in the cathedral.

In response to the growing concern over the display of non residents' sambenitos, the new Inquisitor General Sandoval y Rojas promoted a program of reorganization and renovation that included the removal of the sambenitos from the main chapel of the cathedral of Granada. As a first step, Sandoval ordered the hanging of all sambenitos that had not been hung in the cathedral since the beginning of the debate, in 1582. Regarding the Morisco sambenitos, his view was that they should be displayed separately in a diminished form.[116] The *Suprema* first proposed replacing them with a panel stating the number of convicts and explaining that the sambenitos of those expelled from Spain had been removed.[117] Following objections made by the Inquisition of Granada, however, the *Suprema* decided to continue the display of the sambenitos of the Moriscos and only use the signboard to list the convicts whose sambenitos were yet to hang.[118] In this context of compromise and rearrangement, Sandoval also ordered that all sambenitos—Morisco or otherwise—were to be transferred from the cathedral's main chapel to the parish church of Santiago, located near the Inquisition headquarters in Granada.[119] This solution brought an end to the long debate and paved the way for a redefinition of sacred space in the cathedral of Granada. Soon after, in June 1611, Castro—by then Archbishop of Seville—wrote to Sandoval and thanked him

[115] See, for instance, El Alaoui, 326 and 328.

[116] AHN, Inq., libro 586, fol. 452^{v}: "juntos y abreviadamente."

[117] AHN, Inq., libro 587, fol. 30^{r}.

[118] AHN, Inq., libro 587, fols. 43^{r} and 51^{r}.

[119] Domínguez Ortiz, 1977–79, 317. According to Bermúdez de Pedraza, fol. 283^{v}, only the sambenitos of the Judaizers were hung in the church of Santiago, while those of the Moriscos were hung in the Collegiate Church of San Salvador in the Albaicín.

passionately for "restoring [the cathedral's] ancient beauty and radiance," as well as "for turning that synagogue into a sacred temple" once again.[120]

What emerges from the letters and reports associated with the dispute in Granada is the view that sambenitos did not belong in the main chapel of a cathedral, as they were objects that polluted sacred space and blemished the reputation of the local Catholic community. Such a notion was not rare among members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.[121] The conspicuous sight of rows of deteriorating sambenitos inscribed with the names and effigies of the heretics visually competed with the sensory experience of the holy, thereby disturbing the liturgy and distracting the faithful. The debate in Granada reveals the potential for jurisdictional tensions between Inquisition and church over who had the authority to define sacred space. Such tensions, however, had to await the end of the Old Regime in order to be finally resolved.

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE SAMBENITO

The sambenito and the system of infamy of which it was both a symbol and an agent began to fade in a drawn-out process that involved material degradation, institutional atrophy, and increasing resistance from below. Already in the mid-sixteenth century, the Iberian Inquisitions expressed concern over possible negligence when it came to hanging new sambenitos and renewing those that had deteriorated. The Portuguese *Regulations* of 1552 and the Spanish *Instructions* of 1561 both specified that attending to the state of the sambenitos was a key responsibility of Inquisitors when conducting district visitations. Once every several years, writs ordering the maintenance of displayed sambenitos were sent to the tribunals, sometimes following disclosures that they had not been hung in the churches "with the necessary care and punctuality."[122] Spanish visitation instructions stated that any delay in exhibiting sambenitos was a "major hindrance"—not only because it delayed the administration of justice but also because the task of hanging the ever-increasing number of sambenitos could very easily become overwhelming.[123] In practice, however, official prescriptions were often not

[120] AHN, Inq., 2956, n.p.: "la a VSI vuelto, y restytuido su antigua hermosura, y resplandor, et abstulit opprobium, que la tenia tan afeada . . . . Agora edificara yo aprissa, y muy de buena gana lo que resta de la Iglesia en honrra y nombre de VSI que de sinagoga la a hecho templo sagrado."

[121] See also the comparable cases in Sardinia and Cifuentes: Lea, 1906–07, 3:168–69; Peña Díaz, 2019, 111–13.

[122] AHN, Inq., libro 497, fol. 243^{v}: "no se an puesto en las Iglesias y partes acostumbradas con el cuidado y puntualidad que conbiene."

[123] AHN, Inq., libro 497, fol. 271^{v}: "muy grandes inconbenientes."

followed. Despite orders in the Portuguese *Regulations* of 1640, for instance, that sambenitos had to be displayed not only in the parish church of the condemned individual but also in a church of the city where they had been sentenced, a Portuguese Jesuit wrote one year later that this practice had been abandoned, and that sambenitos were only displayed in Lisbon, Évora, and Coimbra.[124] In other words, the Portuguese Inquisition implicitly conceded that the regulations would not be enforced away from its centers of power and kept the practice only in the cities where the tribunals were located. In many places across the vast geography of the Iberian world, institutional constraints and downright negligence diminished the presence of sambenitos.

The decline of the sambenitos gained significant momentum during the eighteenth century. In Spain, Portugal, and their respective empires, reforms put some constraints on inquisitorial power and caused public *autos de fe* to become rarer.[125] The War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14) was a further factor, as many buildings were demolished, including churches adorned with sambenitos. A French traveler who visited the Dominican convent in Barcelona reported seeing a sign indicating that many of the sambenitos previously displayed in the church had been destroyed during the siege of 1713, when the convent was heavily bombarded.[126] There was also an increasing laxity toward displaying sambenitos that had survived the destruction of war. Cases of clergymen who independently decided to remove sambenitos from local churches multiplied. These clergymen often claimed their actions were related to church renovation projects, but evidence suggests they were also motivated by attempts to prevent local discord.[127] The inquisitorial authorities usually obliged these clergymen to rehang the sambenitos, but as the eighteenth century progressed, the tribunals increasingly chose not to hang new ones. The tribunal of Logroño came to this decision in 1719, while similar ones were reached in Zaragoza in 1735, in Barcelona in 1747, in Valencia in 1755, and in Llerena in 1761.[128]

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the Iberian Inquisitions officially changed their policy concerning the display of sambenitos. The change coincided with the apex of reforms targeting purity-of-blood distinctions in Spain and in Portugal. Portugal took a more radical approach. Reformists such as Father Luis António Verney (1713–92) pointed out that sambenitos displayed in churches were an "eternal monument of dishonor to our

[124] Quoted in Costa, 2:219; Fragoso, 2:502.

[125] Bethencourt, 2009, 308–10; Marcocci and Paiva, 263.

[126] Laborde, 1:38–39.

[127] For some examples, see AHN, Inq., 3728, exp. 125; and AHN, Inq., 3735, exp. 71.

[128] AHN, Inq., 4475, exp. 4. See the detailed discussion in González de Chávez Menéndez.

nation."[129] The Marquis de Pombal, who was the intended audience of those words, became the driving force behind abolishing the distinction between Old and New Christians in Portugal in 1773. A year later, Inquisitor General Nuno da Cunha decreed that no sambenitos of *relajados* should be hung in churches, since "the purity of our religion does not suffer images, or panels, to be placed in sacred spaces other than those to whom worship is due."[130] As demonstrated by the case of Granada, the view that sambenitos polluted sacred space had also been expressed in Spain. Yet the removal of sambenitos was slower there than it was in Portugal. Around 1772, the Spanish *Suprema* began instructing some tribunals not to restore degraded sambenitos, which constituted an unofficial change in policy.[131] However, it was one case in particular, along with the subsequent chain of events, that led to a broader change in Spain's relationship with sambenitos. In 1782, Charles III of Spain decreed that the *chuetas,* the descendants of Mallorcan Jews forcibly converted to Christianity in 1435, were not to be mistreated and that measures should be taken to make them fully equal citizens.[132] The *chuetas,* reacting to the king's decree, petitioned for the removal of sambenitos displayed in the Dominican convent in Palma de Mallorca. In response, the king gave orders to establish a special junta to examine and propose "the prudent way" to erase these "memories of defamation and anxiety."[133] The junta proposed to remove the sambenitos discreetly under the pretext of whitewashing the walls of the church, and then to burn them in secret. However, due to local resistance in Mallorca, the proposition was never carried out.

Not discouraged, the *chuetas* petitioned the king once again in 1788. This time, the Inquisitor General decided to submit a questionnaire to all peninsular tribunals, in addition to those of Mallorca and the Canary Islands, concerning the most prudent manner to "erase and undo" the sambenitos that were still on display in churches.[134] The responses to this questionnaire revealed that many of the tribunals had already stopped hanging new sambenitos, and that a significant number of them thought it was better not to continue exhibiting old sambenitos. The report from the tribunal of Toledo specifically stated

[129] Cited in Saraiva, 225.

[130] Cunha, 150: "por não soffrer a pureza da Nossa Religião, que nos Lugares Sagrados se colloquem outras Imagens, ou Paineis, que não sejam aquellas, a quem se deve Culto, pelo que representam."

[131] See, for instance, the letters regarding Valladolid in AHN, Inq., 3730, exp. 395, N.1.

[132] The following reconstruction is based on AHN, Inq., 4475, exp. 4. See also González de Chávez Menéndez.

[133] AHN, Inq., 4475, exp. 4, fol. 1r: "el modo prudente de ir borrando estas memorias de difamación e inquietud."

[134] AHN, Inq., 4475, exp. 4, fol. 1r: "borrar y deshacer."

that sambenitos served no good purpose and that the descendants of Jews should not be discriminated against when it came to allocating offices and honors.[135] Importantly, even among the tribunals that advocated for maintaining the practice of displaying sambenitos, many proposed to slowly do away with them in order to diminish the harms of infamy.[136] Despite this general desire to resolve once and for all the concerns raised by the sambenitos, which were now deemed an impediment to a monarchy under reform, local resistance hindered their total removal.[137] In Mallorca, the sambenitos that triggered the general inquiry continued to be displayed, provoking local discontent. In the early years of the nineteenth century, two *chuetas* tore them apart after being taunted for their infamous lineage.[138]

A series of international conflicts and liberal revolutions during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries gave the sambenitos their *coup de grâce*. During the Napoleonic invasion of the Iberian Peninsula and the ensuing Peninsular War (1808–14), many inquisitorial buildings and churches were damaged or completely demolished, taking with them, in all likelihood, numerous sambenitos.[139] In 1808, under Napoleonic rule, the Inquisition was abolished. In Cádiz, where the Spanish government-in-exile was situated, debates about the Inquisition, including discussions about the sambenitos, were key in the larger political conversation that would eventually lead to the Constitution of 1812. One of the prominent voices against the Holy Office, Antoni Puigblanch, wrote, for example, that while many places had long since stopped hanging sambenitos, there were many "placards" still on display, and these caused "disturbances" to families whose surnames appeared in them, including those who did not descend from Jews and were worthy of respect. For that reason, he demanded that these "registers of infamy, which more dishonor the temples whose walls they cover, than the condemned whose names they display" be definitively "removed from the sight of the people."[140]

After numerous debates, the Cortes of Cádiz (1810–14) finally reached a conclusion on the matter.[141] On 22 February 1813, they issued a general decree

[135] González de Chávez Menéndez, 2066.

[136] See, in that regard, the response of the tribunal of Barcelona: AHN, Inq., 4475, exp. 4, fols. 15r–18v (here at fol. 17r).

[137] See, for example, the complaint of residents of San Clemente to the Inquisition of Cuenca in 1794, ADC, Inq., 630, exp. 7860.

[138] AHN, Inq., 3723, exp. 102.

[139] This is the hypothesis of Lea, 1906–07, 3:172.

[140] Puigblanch, 191: "letreros"; "disturbios"; "Quitense de una vez de la vista del pueblo esos padrones de la infamia, que mas deshonran los templos que sus paredes cubren, que los condenados cuyos nombres llevan."

[141] For the larger context, see Lea, 1906–07, 4:385–471.

declaring the Inquisition to be incompatible with the Spanish constitution. Citing article 305, according to which no punishment can be transferred from a criminal to their family, the Cortes highlighted the problems caused by the public preservation of sambenitos, which "bring infamy" to families and even expose people with the same surname to "bad reputation." For that reason, they decreed that all "pictures, paintings or inscriptions" that provide details of punishments imposed by the Inquisition should be effaced or removed and destroyed within three days after receipt of the decree.[142] In some places, the decree had an almost immediate effect. The cathedral chapter of Las Palmas, in the Canary Islands, for example, received news of the decree on 31 March 1813, and decided to enact it on April 3. On the same day, the chapter reported back to Spain that it had burned all the remaining sambenitos, congratulating the Cortes for their "religious zeal in removing this stain from the Church of Jesus Christ."[143] But before long, the table was turned and monarchy was restored under Ferdinand VII. Ferdinand revoked the decision to abolish the Inquisition, and the Holy Office was reinstated in 1814. As a result, sambenitos began to reappear in some churches, yet on a much smaller scale. The debate about the Inquisition was still a focus for the struggles between liberals and absolutists in the Iberian world, especially in Spain, where during the Liberal Revolution of 1820 Inquisition buildings and symbols, including sambenitos, were attacked. These events brought a conclusive end to the display of sambenitos bearing the surnames of the *chuetas* in Mallorca.[144] In the wake of the so-called Liberal Triennium, the Spanish Inquisition was officially restored, but it was by then already moribund, and the sambenitos had completely disappeared from churches. With the definitive abolition of the Portuguese Inquisition in 1821 and the Spanish Inquisition in 1834, sambenitos become obsolete.

CONCLUSION

The destruction and disappearance of the sambenitos at the end of the Old Regime makes the presence of these monuments of infamy in church interiors and cloisters hard to imagine. Yet from the last years of the fifteenth century until the beginning of the nineteenth century, sambenitos were a common sight across the Iberian world. The Inquisitions in Spain, Portugal, and their overseas dominions regularly employed artists and artisans to make

[142] *Colección de los decretos*, 3:199–203, the decree on sambenitos in 202–3: "irrogan infamia"; "mala nota"; "quadros, pinturas o inscripciones."

[143] Millares Torres, 4:96–98: "sin dejar el más mínimo vestigio." A similarly rapid response occurred in Mexico: Medina, 455 and 461.

[144] Taronji, 257.

and renovate sambenitos, not only to impose on convicted individuals but also to exhibit in churches and monasteries. When on display, sambenitos served as a visible archive of infamy available to the public eye, and their presence had very real consequences. Inquisitors used them in order to deter future deviants. Corporations ruled by purity-of-blood statutes made recourse to them during investigations into those seeking admission to their ranks. Outside of the institutional sphere, sambenitos were subject to probing gazes and became a constant topic of gossip in societies deeply preoccupied with lineage and caste.

Indeed, sambenitos could cast a long shadow. During testimony in Rubio de Herrera's purity-of-blood investigation, a witness stated that he knew of someone who had asked Herrera why he decided against pursuing a career in Córdoba's cathedral chapter. Rubio de Herrera was evidently irked by the question, retorting that it was unreasonable to expect him to apply for a position in a cathedral since "there is a rag (*xiron*) that crosses my entire body!"[145] This rag, a colloquial term for the sambenito worn by Rubio de Herrera's ancestors, had a direct impact on Herrera himself—a constant thorn in his side and a vivid reminder to his contemporaries about his tainted lineage. The infamy of the past continued to be inflicted on Rubio de Herrera because it was within sight.

Yet for all of their potency, sambenitos were not without limitations. Natural degradation, human negligence, and poor lighting blurred the sight of these images of infamy. Collective memory was subject to lapses, and names and local genealogies were not always remembered. Clerical unwillingness to display sambenitos and proactive episcopal efforts to relocate or remove them–not to mention individual attempts to damage or steal them–presented constant challenges to the system well before it finally declined and fell at the end of the Old Regime. Finally, it is crucial to remember that the boundaries posed by purity-of-blood regulations were not an absolute impasse. Individuals associated with the stain of infamy could petition the authorities or simply seek their fortunes in places far away from where their reputations had been blemished. The sambenitos were thus a constant visual presence across the early modern Iberian world, but it seems that there were also ways to escape their wide reach, even before the Inquisition's system of infamy was finally unmade.

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[145] ACCC, 5278, cuadernillo 5, fol. 45r: "que quereis que pretenda pues tengo un xiron que me atraviesa todo el cuerpo."

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