

The Trial of Leonora Nunes

Edgar Samuel

The Inquisitors, Ordinary and Deputies of the Holy Office etc. seeing these acts and the confession of Lyanor Nunez, New Christian, wife of Antonio Fernandez shoemaker, inhabitant of Carvalhal, accused prisoner who is present, because she showed that being a baptized Christian and obliged to have and to believe in our Holy Catholic Faith and Evangelical Law, she did the contrary, separating herself from it and passing herself to the Law of Moses and its rites and ceremonies after the last General Pardon having belief in it and she hoped to save herself in it, keeping Saturdays from work, avoiding work on them, fasting on the fast of *Quipur*, which comes in the month of September and other Jewish fasts without eating all day until night time, like a Jewess, and as such she did not believe in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ not having him as God and all the things she did as a Christian were to complement the world without having any belief in them, remaining in the belief of her errors and heresies for many years, until being taken prisoner by the Holy Office, and to confess them communicating them with other persons of her nation. Seeing all of which, with other acts they declare that the Accused was a heretic apostate from our Holy Faith and incurred major excommunication and further penalties in law established against such and the confiscation of all her possessions applied to the Fisc and Royal Chamber. And seeing that she has used salutary advice, confessed her faults, asking for pardon and mercy, they receive the said Lianor Nunez into

reconciliation and union with the Holy Mother Church as she asks and they order that she abjures her heretical errors in form and in pain and penitence for them they assign her to prison and perpetual penitential garment in which she will be well taught the matters of Faith necessary for the salvation of her soul and they order that she shall be absolved from the said excommunication *in forma ecclesiae*.

Leonor Nunes went out in the *auto da fé*, in the public square in Coimbra on 24th of July 1569, together with her brothers, sister, and their spouses. Five New Christians were burnt at the stake, namely:

Antonio de Coimbra, New Christian Merchant of Oporto -
inadequate confession

Francisco de Chaves, New Christian of the town of Pereira in this
diocese - inadequate confession

Antonia Rodrigues, unmarried of the City of Lamego – inadequate
confession

Isabel Fernandes, New Christian wife of Manoel Fernandes, Cutter
of

Lamego - inadequate confession

Antonio Fernandez, Carvalhal Grandmother,

Martha Rodrigues, New Christian, widow of Alvaro Nunes, trader of
Torre de Moncorvo- for denying her guilt

There is nothing exceptional about the trial of Leonor Nunes. After she went out in *the auto da fé*, she was instructed in saying the standard Catholic

prayers and returned to her husband, wearing the *sambenito* costume of a convicted heretic. It was no longer safe for them to remain in a small place like Carvalhal. The risk of being denounced to the Inquisition a second time was too great, and a second conviction for Judaism could lead to Antonio Fernandes's arrest, the confiscation of his property or to Leonor's execution. A move to Fundao with its larger New Christian population of cloth workers, would make it possible to resume a normal life with less risk of a re-arrest. Unfortunately, the names of her children are not stated in the Inquisition *processo*. If her three-year-old son survived, he would have been aged thirty-one in 1596, when Antonio Fernandes Carvalhal, alias Carvajal was born. Furthermore, if, as it seems highly probable, he was the grandson of Antonio Fernandes, the shoemaker of Carvalhal, then Leonor Nunes was his paternal grandmother.

Despite Leonor's conviction for Judaism by the Inquisitors, the tradition of secret Judaism persisted in the family and her grandson's loyalty to Judaism was manifested in his establishment of the synagogue in Creechurch Lane, Aldgate, in 1656, ninety-eight years after her arrest.

Samuel, Edgar, 'António Fernandes Carvajal's grandmother', *Jewish Historical Studies*, vol. 43 (2011): 51-57, DOI: 10.2307/29780145, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29780145>