

My dissertation, *Cardinals, Counselors, and Conquistadors: The Converso Carvajal Family in Early Modern Spain and Colonial Spanish America*, exposes the late 14th through late 16th century generation of the *converso* Carvajal family of early modern Spain and colonial Spanish America. The *converso* Carvajales were created by the intermarriage of a lower noble Catholic military family with an elite family of Jewish religious leaders, courtiers, and merchants in the early 1400s. The genesis of *converso* families required religious and cultural compromise on the part of both Jewish and Catholic families—arguably unequal compromise—because Jewish families were asked to renounce their faith and distinct cultural identity, whereas Catholics needed to incorporate Jewish intellectual, religious, and cultural beliefs into their families. Most importantly, both parties were required to set aside their commitments to religious and cultural purity when family bloodlines were integrated. Overcoming these biases was especially difficult in early modern Spain where the Spanish Inquisition labored to enforce the separation of Catholics and Jews, and later aggressively pursued *converso* families suspected of being false converts to Catholicism. In spite of the real dangers posed by Spaniards' animosity toward *conversos*, the Carvajal family decided to transform itself, and its identity, from an "Old Christian" military family to a *converso* family that would field a new lineage of elite ecclesiastical leaders and royal counselors. Through its interlocking network of extended family relations from the mid-15th century forward, the Carvajal family expanded its control into critical religious and governmental institutions, such as the Castilian *Real Audencia*, the Bishoprics of Plencia and Burgos, the Papacy, and the Spanish Council of the Indies. Further, the extended family utilized its influence in Spanish royal institutions to strategically place family members and their associates into critical positions in the early conquest and colonization of colonial Spanish America. Unfortunately, the later 15th century became increasingly hostile toward religious minorities and *conversos* and

placed the Carvajal's cross-cultural and religious endeavor in serious jeopardy of failure. This Catholic animosity took the form of municipal blood purity laws ("*limpieza de sangre*") that systematically excluded *conversos* from public life, and later with the Spanish Inquisition, which targeted *conversos* that retained their Jewish faith or Jewish cultural vestiges. By the opening of the 1500s, elite *converso* families had, in essence, two options to ensure their survival. They could mask their Jewish ancestries and solidify their positions as Castilian Catholics, or two, to they could leave Spain. The vast majority of *conversos* chose to suppress their Jewish genealogies and cultural traits, but a small minority chose to initially conceal their predominantly Jewish identities and ultimately practice Judaism once outside the reaches of the Spanish Inquisition. My research documents the Carvajal family's difficult family choices in this transformed world.

My dissertation aims to reconcile how the Carvajal family and other interrelated families of early modern Plasencia, Spain, transformed themselves from separate arms of Jewish and Catholic families into cooperative mixed-faith descendent families, or *converso* families. No existing research on the Carvajals treats the family as a whole. My research will innovate by unifying two differing trajectories of scholarly thought on the *conversos* of Spain and Mexico. On one hand, scholars such as Y. Baer and B. Netanyahu, have superbly explored the lives of Sephardic Jews and Jewish *conversos*, yet they neglect their Christian *converso* familial and kin relations. Other scholars (I. Altman, R. Kagan, and C. and W. Phillips) have focused on the early modern Spanish imperial project with particular attention to its agents in the military orders, clergy, and royal administration. However, they rarely allude to the *converso* and Jewish ancestries of many of these agents. If historians are to flesh out the seismic social and religious shifts in this family, emblematic of early modern Spanish and colonial Spanish American families, additional research must amalgamate these seemingly inconsistent portrayals of the Carvajal family.