The Assimilation of Spain’s Moriscos: Fiction or Reality?

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Four hundred years ago, on May 19, 1611, a group of leading Morisco villagers from Villarrubia de los Ojos, a small village southwest of Toledo and north of Ciudad Real, in a region known as the Campo de Calatrava, wrote a petition to the king of Spain, Philip III, which was sent via the royal secretary, Antonio de Aróztegui. Two months previously (March 22, 1611), the King had published the decree of expulsion of all Moriscos from New and Old Castile, La Mancha, Extremadura and Andalucía; the two-month period that allowed them to sell their possessions and prepare for expulsion to France was almost up. The petition was a final throw of the dice, as far as they were concerned, to have the decree revoked or at least softened so that it would not affect them in particular. As such, it is one of the most remarkable documents having to do with Spain’s Moriscos and merits citing in full:¹

Pedro Naranjo and Alonso Rodríguez, priests, and Alonso Herrador and Lope Niño de Lira, university graduates and lawyers, citizens of the town of Villarrubia, on their own behalf and in the name of the rest of their neighbours, wish to state that it has come to their notice the decree which Your Majesty ordered to be published this year, which orders that all New Christians and Old Moriscos without exception must leave these kingdoms. And it is the case that those Moriscos of the said village of Villarrubia have resided there since the time of the Catholic King Ferdinand, of glorious memory, all of them held to be Old Christians and as such admitted to the honorable offices of the Republic, because they have been and have exercised the offices of mayor and alderman and other honorable posts in the Republic, from time immemorial to this day. And they are presbyters and priests, and graduates from the universities of this kingdom, and many are public scribes and apostolic notaries, and
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others have served and currently serve Your Majesty in the army with the rank of captain, ensign, sergeant and private...And the rest are married to Old Christians or live alongside them in peace and conformity as regards their daily communication and conduct, without there ever having been any division or separation between them; they have never lived nor live in a separate quarter but in the best and most principal part of the town; they have not paid the special Moorish tax, the fara, only the taxes that the rest of the Christians of Villarrubia pay. They have not differed from these in their speech nor their jobs, because their only occupation has been that of farm worker and cattle breeder. They have always been most Catholic and faithful vassals of Your Majesty and they have lived in the said town more than eight hundred years, even before it was populated with Christians.2

This, I would suggest, is the nearest we are going to find to a declaration of assimilation in this period: the letter says loud and clear, this is who we are, and we are no different than any other villager in Villarrubia. If you expel us, then you will have to expel everyone from the village, Old Christian as well as New.

In order to appreciate the real import of this document, we have to remember that Christian contemporaries of the Moriscos considered them inassimilable, and their failure to assimilate led, in the opinion of many, to their inevitable (and just) expulsion. Christian apologists of the expulsion, such as Jaime Bleda, Pedro Aznar Cardona, Damián Fonseca, Marcos de Guadalajara, all stressed their obdurate opposition to all the attempts to assimilate and Christianize them.3 These views were held by Spanish historians until the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as we can see in the works of Florencio Janer, Manuel Danvila y Collado, and Pascual Boronat y Barrachina.4 Only since the pioneering work of Henry Charles Lea, who was the first to question this monolithic and negative view of the Moriscos, and of more recent historians, has it become clear that the Moriscos were not incapable of assimilation, that some groups did assimilate, in different degrees, to the majority Christian culture, and that for many, expulsion was neither an inevitability nor a necessity.5 Nonetheless, despite these advances, based on a more thorough examination of the available documentary evidence, there are still those who believe that all Moriscos were, by their nature and upbringing, crypto-Muslims who neither would nor could ever assimilate.6 This paper sets out to demonstrate the reality of assimilation for one group, at least, of Spain’s Moriscos.

Given the nature of the letter and when it was written—the whole area was full of the King’s troops and commissioners sent to escort the Moriscos to exile in France—it would be foolish to accept its contents at face value. One thing is what
the Moriscos affirmed and believed; another altogether, the reality of their claims. So, let us examine the veracity and accuracy of their statement to the King.

Helpfully, the principal signatories give us their names: Pedro Naranjo, Alonso Rodríguez, Alonso Herrador and Lope Niño de Lira. The first two, they state, are priests, and the other two, university graduates in law. This is in fact true, and they were not the only members of an educated Morisco elite, as we shall see. They mention scribes and notaries to whom we can also affix names: the scribe was Pascual González and the apostolic notary was Juan Mellado, brother of Lope el Niño. Another memorial sent to the King in November 1611 also lists the most important Moriscos of the village, “among whom there are two clerics, two lawyers, an apostolic notary and a schoolteacher.” To those above we can now add Gabriel Peras, the primary school teacher in Villarrubia at this time. These families—Naranjo, Herrador, Niño, Peras—and others related to them, such as the descendants of Alí de Mariota, who changed his name to Pedro López de Mariota when he converted in 1502, exercised considerable power in a village whose population never exceeded 1000 households or c. 3,800-4,000 individuals during this period.

The petition also mentions posts held by Moriscos in the Town Council, such as “mayor and alderman and other honourable posts in the Republic.” These claims can also be checked and proven. Juan Herrador, father of the lawyer Alonso Herrador, was Mayor and Justice of the Peace of Villarrubia during the last years of the sixteenth century; numerous Moriscos held the post of alderman, as well as those of town gaoler, policeman, officials in charge of weights and measures and members of the group which controlled the town’s grain store. All were key posts in a small town or village, especially the officials in charge of the grain store, on which depended the good health and survival of the villagers in times of poor harvests and droughts. That these key posts were occupied by Moriscos, with the support of the rest of the villagers, is testament to the esteem in which they were held. Moriscos also acted as rent collectors for the local lord, the Count of Salinas, sometimes alone, other times in concert with a fellow Morisco or Old Christian. This involved paying the Count an agreed amount for the rent of a particular item (olive oil, grain, hemp, fruit and vegetables) via a public auction and then collecting the rents due, with a view to collecting more than the amount already paid and making a profit. The rent collector had to have the means and wherewithal to pay the annual rent or tithe in the first place. That many Moriscos of Villarrubia were able to do precisely this is evidence of their economic solvency; that they often acted as rent collectors in concert with an Old Christian is evidence of the complete lack of friction between the two communities, since one area where friction is close to the surface is when finance is involved.
One of the more interesting claims in the petition is that the Moriscos lived in the “best and most principal part of the town.” They lived in “Barrio Nuevo” (New Town), which was in the center of Villarrubia, next to the Church of the Virgin Mary. The Count of Salinas, their lord, used this fact to support their exclusion from the expulsion. He informed the governor of Villarrubia, Bonifacio de Almonacid, regarding the latest decree of expulsion, and that the Moriscos had obviously lived longer in the town than the other residents since they lived so close to the Church and to his palace, right in the center of Villarrubia.10

Another unusual claim is that they had lived in the area for eight hundred years, well before the Christians arrived. If true, this would mean that they had lived in the Campo de Calatrava from around the eighth century, soon after the arrival of Muslims in the Peninsula (in the year 711). Until recently this claim seemed improbable. The standard view was that after the fall of Toledo to Christian forces in 1085, the whole area between Toledo and Córdoba (La Mancha, Campo de Calatrava) became a sort of no-man’s land devoid of population, where raiding parties on both sides made human habitation all but impossible. According to traditional historiography, only after the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, which saw this vast area finally fall into Christian hands, did small settlements begin to spring up.11 I followed this view in my book on the Moriscos of Villarrubia,12 but recently a number of articles by Luis Rafael Villegas Díaz (himself a direct descendant of the Old Christian Díaz Hidalgo family of Villarrubia) and others have made a strong case for the presence of Muslim settlements throughout the entire period; that is to say, they did not leave New Castile as previously thought after the fall of Toledo but remained in scattered settlements or aljamas which survived right through to the fifteenth century.13 One such was Villarrubia and the Moriscos’ claim that they had lived there for some 800 years, well before the arrival of Christians in the thirteenth century, is correct.

Finally, they make a strong case for assimilation via intermarriage with Old Christians, living next door to Old Christians, paying the same taxes, and speaking, dressing and looking the same as everyone else. These claims can also be verified: there were cases of intermarriage, not many, but some and increasing with the years.14 For example, the two brothers, Lope el Niño and Juan Mellado, were the sons of Diego el Niño (Morisco) and María Mellada (Old Christian); Lope el Niño himself married an Old Christian, Ana García Portanueva. All the villagers of Villarrubia paid the same taxes and a visitor could not have differentiated between them by looking at their physiognomy or studying their dress, customs or speech. Even Pedro de Valencia, who wrote a long tract on the Moriscos in the first decade
of the seventeenth century with various scenarios, such as expulsion, mass murder, deportation to North Africa, castration or, less gruesome, a more spirited and determined effort at assimilation, noted that in most parts of Spain it was impossible to tell Moriscos and Old Christians apart: they dressed, spoke and behaved in the same manner. He even went so far as to say that, given the length of time they had been in the Peninsula, they were as Spanish as anyone else, and possibly more so (echoes of a claim made by the Moriscos of Villarrubia).\textsuperscript{15}

The evidence therefore supports the case made in May 1611 by the Moriscos of Villarrubia that they had assimilated to the majority Christian culture and thus should not be expelled as failed Catholics or as back-sliding crypto-Muslims, as many historians then and later believed them to be.\textsuperscript{16} The questions, therefore, are: How had this assimilation occurred and when did it begin?

We could begin with February 2, 1502, the date on which Isabel and Ferdinand promulgated the decree of conversion for all Muslims or, as they were called then, Mudéjares, of the kingdoms of Castile.\textsuperscript{17} The Mudéjares were given a choice, or rather a simulacrum of choice, as they had the option of converting to Christianity or leaving the country.\textsuperscript{18} Since almost all the country’s seaports (except those in the Basque country) and borders were closed to them and they could not take any belongings or money, the option of leaving was practically non-existent. For the thousands of Mudéjares living in small rural communities scattered across Castile, exile was simply not an option. They were as much a part of the landscape as their Christian neighbours. They had lived there for generations, lost all contact with Arabic and would not have survived in foreign climes, least of all in Muslim Africa, where they would have been seen as spies or agents of a Christian power and quickly slaughtered (as indeed was the case a century later, after their expulsion).

The Mudéjares of Villarrubia converted en masse between March and May 1502 and, we are told, willingly and happily.\textsuperscript{19} We need not believe the latter claim, but nor should we reject it out of hand either. Since they had no choice in the matter, better to convert willingly than reluctantly, especially when conversion brought them under the gaze of the Inquisition for the first time. Conversion also had benefits: not the least, an end to the social and economic apartheid that had existed in many towns and villages, whereby the Mudéjares were excluded from positions in local government and social improvement was nearly impossible. Now they could opt for posts in local government, take part in local elections, bear arms, leave their separate ghettos and live in other parts of town. Being a Christian in early sixteenth-century Spain had numerous advantages which many Mudéjares were quick to grasp.
The fact that this was so suggests that some form of assimilation had been taking place before the symbolic date of 1502. If conversion was not that traumatic, this must have been due to a gradual and perhaps almost invisible process of assimilation, not in itself surprising given the length of time that the two communities had been living side by side. To begin with, we note that in the conversions in Villarrubia, not one Mudéjar had a Muslim surname, they were all recognisably Castilian surnames such as Carretero, Castellano, Barrero, Herrero, Herrador, Naranjo, Peras, Niño, Nieto, López, Moreno, Raposo, Torredoro, and so on. Primarily, conversion meant changing their Muslim first names such as Alí, Hamete, Abrahím, Audulla, Mohammed, Mufarines, Yuza, Zoraida, Fátima, Xenci, Marien and using Castilian/Christian names instead, such as Alonso, Andrés, Lope, Fernando, Gabriel, Isabel, Pedro, Diego, Catalina, Juana, María.

What about the religious aspects of conversion? The little we know about the religious practices of the Mudéjares of Villarrubia suggests an impoverished set of beliefs. One of their mosques, in the heart of their aljama, became the Ermita de Nuestra Señora del Pilar, but was in such a bad state of repair that by the 1570s it had almost collapsed. They buried their dead in their own cemetery or maqabil well into the seventeenth century, but whenever the Inquisition examined these burials they could not find evidence of Islamic burial rites. By the mid-fifteenth century, the Mudéjares of Castile had lost all knowledge of Arabic, which, for a religion centered on the Arabic language, meant that they had almost no contact with the Koran or other writings of Islam. If the villagers of Villarrubia had religious leaders or alfaqies (a certain Cene Faquir listed in 1502 may have been one of them), they seem to have left the village either before or soon after the conversions, as none are recorded after this date. This made the conversion of the rest of the Muslim population much easier, as it left them without a religious elite, which we know from other areas was crucial for the Moors to retain their Islamic practices and beliefs. Without a religious elite to instruct them in Islam or tell them what to do in matters of belief and custom, the Moriscos of Villarrubia were much better placed to assimilate and, at the same time, to create their own, new elite based on social, political and economic status. As we shall see, this was essential in their final assimilation.

This process progressed throughout the sixteenth century, accelerating quite significantly in the second half. What we know of the 54 mudéjar families living in Villarrubia in 1502 suggests a community of farm laborers, with a small number perhaps working as weavers, dyers, cobblers, tailors, and the like. There is no evidence of any elite, and it is likely that they differed very little in their occupations from the
rest of the population. Apart from a priest or two, and a few officials who worked for the Commander of the Encomienda of Villarrubia (the town then belonged to the military Order of Calatrava) in organizing the local rents and tithes, everyone else was some sort of farm-hand. The rents and tithes show the importance of arable farming and fruit orchards to the local economy, supplemented by bee-keeping, small-scale cattle and pig farming, and the hunting of rabbits, hares and boars in the local hills.23

This situation barely changed during the first fifty years of the century. In 1552, Villarrubia, in a form of sixteenth-century privatization, was dismembered from the Order of Calatrava and sold to the Count of Salinas for the not inconsiderable sum of 93,483 ducats, the money going into the Crown coffers. In order to calculate the value of the town, every single rent and tithe, piece of land, mills, bridges, vineyards, orchards, animals and villager was listed and valued. This produces a mass of invaluable information for the historian on the life of a town or village in a specific time period. In 1550, a list was drawn up of every villager or head of house, where they lived and who lived with them. This provides the first reliable census of Villarrubia and the size of its population of between 480 and 500 households. We also learn what the villagers did for a living. The large majority of Moriscos were farm-hands and day workers, as at the start of the century, but a small number were involved in artisan trades including stonemason, carpenter, blacksmith, weaver, tailor, cobbler, dyer; rather interestingly, many had moved out of their earlier ghetto and lived all over the town, integrated with the Old Christian population. Villarrubia had a smattering of hidalgos (nobles on the lowest rung of the noble ladder), and a good number of priests and clerics, all of whom were Old Christians. There is no evidence of an educated Morisco elite, although the families that will later occupy that position are listed, such as the Yébenes, Herrador, Naranjo, Niño, Peras and Nieto.24

Clearly, the greatest change in the fortunes of Villarrubia’s Moriscos took place in the second half of the sixteenth century, once the town had passed from the Order of Calatrava into the hands of the Counts of Salinas and Ribadeo. Was this coincidence or a factor, and were other factors at work as well? The answer seems to be, yes, it was a factor, and yes, there were other factors at work too. Let us take the role of the Counts of Salinas. Diego Gómez Sarmiento, III Count of Salinas spent a small fortune buying Villarrubia (which left the family mortgaged to the hilt for generations) and needed to start recouping his investment as soon as possible. This meant making the village pay, and the best way to do this was to encourage the villagers to improve their agricultural practices, and for him to invest
in better roads, bridges and mills, and ensure that everyone shared in the increased prosperity. Increased prosperity led almost inevitably to larger families, since families controlled their birth rate in line with good or poor harvests, droughts, plague and typhoid fever, frequent visitors to the Campo de Calatrava. Between 1550 and 1590 the population doubled, from just under 500 to 1000 households. This was not only due to larger Villarrubia families; inward migration played a part as well, and successful villages attracted migrants from elsewhere in Spain, especially from nearby villages which did not have such enlightened lords. Many families moved to Villarrubia from other villages in the Campo de Calatrava, such as Almagro, Daimiel, Bolaños and Aldea del Rey, which, together with Villarrubia, formed the so-called confederation of the Five Towns (Cinco Villas). These villages all had large communities of Moriscos who had intermarried with each other to avoid the dangers of endogamy. Villarrubia, under the lordship of the Counts of Salinas, provided a welcoming environment for Moriscos during the second half of the sixteenth century and numerous Morisco families seem to have moved there. The Herrador family (whom we have already met) moved from Bolaños to Villarrubia sometime in the 1570s.

However, the biggest influx of Moriscos came with the deportation of some 80,000 Moriscos from the Kingdom of Granada in 1570-1572 after the failure of the Second Uprising of the Alpujarras (1568-1570). The root cause of the Alpujarras Uprising was the imposition of a uniform set of beliefs and customs on the Moriscos of the conquered kingdom of Granada by Philip II and his advisers. Although the pragmatic, intended to be implemented on January 1, 1567, only put into effect decrees passed in the 1520s, under the wiser rule of Charles V these had been allowed to vegetate and collect dust in order not to antagonize the Granadine Moriscos. It was hoped that a slow but inexorable process of assimilation would make them unnecessary; in the more strident times of the 1560s, this hope was no longer held by any in power in Madrid, hence the new pragmatic. Once the Uprising of the Alpujarras had been quelled, with terrible brutality and atrocities on both sides, the decision was taken to deport the Moriscos and spread them in small groups across the whole of the country, as far north as León. Of the 80,000 that initially left, some 30,000 died en route, of exhaustion, hunger and various illnesses, chief among them typhoid fever. The deportation took place in the middle of a particularly harsh winter, and many thousands of Moriscos were “parked” across La Mancha and Extremadura until the weather improved. This meant effectively billeting them on the local population, with so many Granadine Moriscos assigned per household. In those towns and villages with a Morisco population, this was not
a problem and the Granadines found shelter from the cold and rain. Many were welcomed in towns and villages without a native Morisco population. New Castile and Extremadura were areas of traditionally low population density and new hands were always welcome to till the fields. The majority of the Granadine Moriscos were skilled farm workers, experts in irrigation techniques and getting the maximum out of the land, which only made them more desirable to the local lords and town councils.\textsuperscript{28} How desirable in the long term they were to the rest of the population, Old Christians and Old Moriscos, remained to be seen.

Although the authorities in Madrid never intended that the Moriscos from Granada remain in La Mancha and Extremadura, which were deemed far too close to Granada and thus a permanent temptation for them to return, the soldiers in charge of the deportation, who were often moved by the terrible plight of their charges, were more than happy to leave them where they were. Once it became clear that they were unlikely to move, the local authorities began to send in petitions asking for contingents of Moriscos to be allowed to stay in their villages. In an effort to regain some control over the situation, those in charge of the deportations decided to let this happen provided they stuck to an agreed quota of Moriscos per town or village. On March 14, 1571, the Governor of the Five Towns, don Álvaro de Luna y Mendoza, sent an account of the population before the arrival of the Granadines, the number of parishes, the quota allocated to each town and the actual number of Granadines currently there.\textsuperscript{29} Needless to say, the expectations of Madrid were severely frustrated:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Households*</th>
<th>Parishes</th>
<th>Granadines+</th>
<th>Quota+</th>
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<tr>
<td>Almagro</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daimiel</td>
<td>1,733</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldea del Rey</td>
<td>380</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolaños</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villarrubia</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Households, not individuals.
+In this case, individuals, not households.\textsuperscript{30}

Evidently, there were far more Granadine Moriscos in the Campo de Calatrava than the number Madrid stipulated. It is also revealing to note the quota for Villarrubia: 40, against 50 for Almagro and 60 for Daimiel. These were much larger towns with approximately double the population of Villarrubia. Accordingly, the quota for
Villarrubia should have been no more than 25-30. Forty suggests that the Count of Salinas had specifically asked for more than the number originally allocated to the town. Even 40 pales into insignificance against the 212 actually there!

The central government quickly forgot about the problem of the Granadine Moriscos and their location. The original plan had not been implemented, but at least on paper, they were not in Granada, and that was sufficient for the time being. As for the towns and villages of central and southern Spain, most were heartily glad to have an influx of expert (and cheap) farm workers, even if they did dress, speak, cook and behave differently than everyone else.

The cultural differences, however, soon came to the fore and caused problems not just between Old Christians and Granadine Moriscos but between the latter and the Old Moriscos (the former Mudéjares) who had been living there for centuries. Most of the Granadine Moriscos still spoke Arabic, wore Arabic dress, and cooked with olive oil, unlike the inhabitants of La Mancha who wore Castilian dress, spoke Castilian and generally used lard or dripping (animal fat) to cook with. This was a clash between a Mediterranean diet based on olive oil, fruit, vegetables, rice, figs, dried nuts, raisins and honey, and a Meseta diet based on cereals, root crops, large amounts of meat (especially pork), and animal fats, all washed down with great quantities of local wine. The Granadine Moriscos clearly had what we consider to be the best diet, but this did not endear them to their new neighbours. Both the Old Christians and the Old Moriscos found the cooking habits of the new immigrants hard to handle.31

Not surprisingly, the Moriscos from Granada expected a warm reception, empathy and sympathy from the Old Moriscos of the Campo de Calatrava based on their former shared religion, Islam. For the Old Moriscos of the region, well along the road of assimilation to the Christian majority, this was the last thing they wanted. The arrival of the Granadines forced them, for the first time since the conversion of 1502, to ask themselves who they were, in fact, to face the reality of their assimilation. It did not take them long to come up with an answer: they were definitely not like the Moriscos of Granada, a past from which they were fleeing. Therefore they had to be like their Old Christian neighbours, a future toward which they were moving, and toward which they would now move more quickly. This all surfaced in 1577 when the leaders of the Old Moriscos of the Campo de Calatrava asked King Philip II to reconfirm their ancient privilege of 1502 which put them on par with the local Christians.32 Among the reasons they adduced was the fact that the local justices were confusing them with the newly arrived Moriscos from Granada and treating them as rebels. The signatories of the petition, 199 Old
Moriscos, underlined that they had been faithful vassals of the King, that many of them had married Old Christians, and that “in their speech, customs and conduct, they were fully converted into Old Christians,” an undoubted reference to the difficult situation caused by the arrival of the Granadines with their more Arabic customs, conduct and speech. They even reminded the King of their role in the War of the Alpujarras, in which many had served as soldiers and others had contributed money and weapons to the war effort.

The King reconfirmed and even strengthened their privileges, reminding the local justices that the Old Moriscos were to be considered as Old Christians with regard to carrying weapons, paying taxes and taking part in local elections. Alonso Herrador, the lawyer from Villarrubia, later underlined this latter point when he said that one of the privileges the Old Moriscos held in Villarrubia was to take part in elections in the group reserved for the Old Christians (the other being the nobles): “to these offices those who lived under the name of Moriscos from the Kingdom of Granada were never elected.” Despite this success, the Old Moriscos petitioned the King again in 1584, as a result of continued attacks on them by the local justices, and the King’s response was equally emphatic: “In effect, I declare you to be descendants of the New Christians of the Five Towns and as such to enjoy the exemptions and liberties which the New Christians of the aforesaid Five Towns enjoy, as contained in the privileges you have.”

The arrival of the Moriscos from Granada had forced the Old Moriscos to choose who they were and where they were heading; they had chosen the path of assimilation and were not turning back. From this point on, the process of assimilation in Villarrubia gathered real pace in several ways. To begin with, they were involved in a long court case regarding local elections in the town. For most of the sixteenth century, there were four estates: nobles, farm workers, merchants and “Barrio Nuevo” (i.e. Moriscos); from these came the voters and candidates for posts in local government. The problems arose not so much because there were four groups or that one of them was reserved for the Moriscos but from the way that the posts were allocated and filled. The solution they came up with was to reduce the number of groups to two—nobles and farm workers—and the problems ceased. We begin to note, from this point on, the presence of Moriscos among the local officials, occupying the whole range of posts, from gaoler and policeman to mayor, justice of the peace, procurator and alderman. For this to happen, the Moriscos needed the support of all the electors of the farm workers estate, since each year the heads of households combed the lists of voters to find appropriate candidates to recommend to the Count of Salinas. In other words, a Morisco mayor needed the support of
Old Christians and fellow Moriscos to be elected. 35 This began to produce an elite of Morisco families who regularly provided candidates for these posts.

A second area of assimilation can be seen in education. Having gained a foothold in local government, the Moriscos quickly realized the advantages of a good education, not just the need for reading and writing, but also instruction in civil and canon law, and a basic knowledge of mathematics. We do not know when Villarrubia gained a primary school, but it certainly had one before the end of the sixteenth century, as reference is made in 1592 to Pedro Gómez, a school teacher who was then 70 years old. This suggests that a school had existed in the town for perhaps as many as thirty or forty years. In the early seventeenth century, the school master was the Morisco Gabriel Peras. 36 Those who could afford it sent their sons from primary school to the local grammar school in Ciudad Real with a view to their continuing to university in Toledo or Alcalá de Henares. I have studied in detail the career of Alonso Herrador, son of Juan Herrador and María Gómez, who, in 1596, at the age of eighteen, went to Alcalá de Henares, the famous Complutense University. 37 He belonged to a well-educated family, with two priests among its members: Alonso Rodríguez, an uncle on his father’s side, and Pedro Naranjo, another uncle, the brother of his mother María Gómez, both of whom had studied at university. Alonso Herrador studied four years for an Arts degree at Alcalá between 1596 and 1600, receiving his degree of “Licenciado en Artes” on December 31, 1600. He was not the only student from Villarrubia at Alcalá during these years, nor the only Morisco. When he enrolled for classes in Canon Law in 1599, he found he was in the same class as the Morisco Juan Sánchez Conejero, close to completing his studies after six years: he was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Canon Law on June 18, 1600. Returning to Villarrubia, Juan Sánchez Conejero became a defense lawyer or procurador who acted in various cases in the following years. Another companion to Alonso Herrador in Canon Law in 1600 was the Morisco Alonso López Albacete. The Old Christian Roque Sánchez, who arrived in Alcalá in 1598, studied Physics and received his Bachelor of Arts in 1601.

Education was seen as the way forward, and not just by the relatively well-off, as we can see in the case of Cristóbal Díaz de León, son of the Old Christian Cristóbal Díaz de León and the Morisca Ana López. She was a widow (since at least 1615) and a cloth weaver, while Cristóbal’s father was so poor that in 1609 he claimed to be unable to pay the local council tax of two reals. This poor Morisco widow was as keen to see her only surviving son educated as was the wealthier María Mellada with her three sons, two of whom went on to university (Lope el Niño and Juan Mellado, encountered earlier). In 1628, Cristóbal Díaz de León studied in the Jesuit
school of Ciudad Real, continuing on to university before returning to Villarrubia as a university graduate or *licenciado*, where he soon became an important figure in the community. His upward rise was affected neither by his humble origins nor by the appearance of his mother before the Inquisition in 1628 who accused her of practising Islamic burial rites (she was absolved).

Other Morisco families who led the way in educating their children were the Peras (Gabriel Peras became a school teacher, Diego Peras a university-trained doctor and the town’s dentist) and the Naranjo (Pedro Naranjo became a priest, Francisco Naranjo a university graduate). The Moriscos of Villarrubia were so keen to see their sons succeed in the world that we find at least a dozen university graduates from their ranks in the first half of the seventeenth century, matched by an equal number of Old Christian graduates.38

As Mercedes García-Arenal shrewdly noted in a review of my book on the Moriscos of Villarrubia:

> The census of 1550 describes a community made up in the main of field workers, small artisans, fruit growers. Fifty years later it is a much more varied community in which we find notaries, graduates, bachelors, priests, a school teacher, a doctor, rent stewards, various soldiers. But even more surprising is the fact that it is a community that participates actively in the life of the village, holding the offices of alderman, mayor, procurator, policeman and gaoler, among others. This, in principle, is exceptional with regard what we thought we knew about the Moriscos. These constituted, therefore, what we might call a rural middle class and counted among their number a powerful group of leaders who would help them survive the decrees of expulsion. That is to say, a community in which new elites had been created totally devoid of a religious character, not constructed, for example, around the alfaiqui or spiritual leader. This point, in my opinion, is one of the most important of the many to be made manifest in this book.39

That the Moriscos of Villarrubia had fully assimilated into the majority Christian culture cannot be doubted, nor that they had done so willingly and consciously. The benefits of their decision, made during the sixteenth century (though probably beginning in the fifteenth), bore fruit during the harsh and bitter years of the expulsions, which affected them from 1611 to 1614. As full and active members of their local community, they were able to count on the support of most of the Old Christians of Villarrubia, who did their best to help their Morisco neighbours, hiding them from the soldiers sent to expel them, bringing them food, looking after their children, returning their property to them. Although the Moriscos of
Villarrubia were determined not to be expelled, in spite of three attempts to do so, they would not have been as successful without the help of their Old Christian neighbours. This was a collective opposition to unpopular decrees, an opposition supported throughout by their lord, the Count of Salinas. Thanks to the Count and to the Old Christians of Villarrubia, the Moriscos were able to remain and finally regain all their property and possessions. García-Arenal ends her review with the following, very pertinent questions:

Is it so exceptional to believe that communities of New Christians [i.e. Moriscos] assimilated, prospered, created their own new elites and participated fully in the majority society? Was it so exceptional that they avoided the decrees of expulsion or that those who were expelled were able to return en masse?...It is simply not possible that Villarrubia, this place in the Mancha, was a totally exceptional town.

The answer is of course no, none was exceptional. But if you do not expect assimilation, then you do not look for it, and what you do not look for you generally do not find. To imagine that Villarrubia was an exception is to deny the reality of assimilation that was happening in other parts of the Peninsula. How can we explain the following phenomena if not as a result of assimilation? The fire service of Valladolid was run entirely by Moriscos with the full support of the local town council; Moriscos in Blanca in the Val de Ricote ran the town council alongside their Old Christian neighbours; Moriscos in Ávila and other towns in Castile had instituted through their local parish churches “obras pías,” charitable foundations that provided funds for orphans, widows and young girls intending to join a convent; sons and daughters of Morisco families in Castile had entered the Church as presbyters and nuns; Moriscos from across Old and New Castile were sending their sons to study at grammar school and then university; many Moriscos from the Five Towns of the Campo de Calatrava had joined the Royal Army in 1568 to help put down the Second Uprising of the Alpujarras involving their supposed coreligionists, and there were Moriscos serving in the Tercios in Flanders. This was reality, not fantasy. It would be as wrong to claim that all Moriscos in Spain were assimilated by the early seventeenth century as it would be to claim that none were, to deny that numerous groups were assimilated or well on the way to being so. The process is complex and varied, with few obvious patterns to help us. One group of Moriscos in rural Castile or Extremadura might be assimilated while those a few kilometres away were not.

Early Modern Spain was a more varied and tolerant society than one might think. Not everyone supported the Inquisition or the decrees of expulsion, and
the Spanish state was nowhere near as absolute and all-powerful as it liked to be portrayed. Its reach did not extend far beyond the capital; without a standing army or a police force, and without the support of the nobility and the local authorities, there were times in which government decrees were not worth the paper they were written on. Many of the decrees of expulsion, with their escalating fines and punishments for wrongdoers and those who helped the Moriscos, provide a good example of this. Had they had the effect intended, there would not be so many of them, all repeating the same threats and punishments. Many Spaniards simply ignored them. Coexistence, assimilation, toleration and acceptance of difference, of the other, were possible even in the most hostile environment that early seventeenth-century Spain often was. Not all Moriscos were crypto-Muslims, nor were all Old Christians intolerant fanatics. Many had found a way to live together in relative harmony and peace. The Moriscos of Villarrubia de los Ojos show us just far this process of coexistence and assimilation had gone and prove that assimilation could be a reality and not the fantasy that too many have believed for far too long.

Notes
1 All translations from the Spanish originals are mine.
3 Fray Jaime Bleda, Corónica de los moros de España (Valencia: Felipe Mey, 1618); Pedro Aznar Cardona, Expulsión justificada de los moriscos españoles y suma de las excelencias cristianas de Nuestro Rey Felipe Tercero (Huesca: Pedro Cabarte, 1612); Damián Fonseca, Justa expulsión de los moriscos de España, con la instrucción, apostasía y traición dellos: Y respuesta a las dudas que se ofrecieron acerca de esta materia (Roma: Iacomo Mascardo, 1612); Fray Marcos de Guadalajara, Memorable expulsión y justísimo destierro de los Moriscos de España (Pamplona: Nicolás de Assiayn, 1613), and Prodición y destierro de los Moriscos de Castilla, hasta el Valle de Ricote (Pamplona: Nicolás de Assiayn, 1614).
4 Florencio Janer, Condición social de los moriscos en España: Causas de su expulsión, y consecuencias que esta produjo en el orden económico y político (Madrid: Imprenta de la Real Academia de la Historia, 1857); Manuel Danvila y Collado, La expulsión de los moriscos españoles. Conferencias pronunciadas en el Ateneo de Madrid (Madrid: 1889); Pascual Boronat y Barrachina, Los moriscos españoles y su expulsión. Estudio histórico-critico, 2 vols. (Valencia: Imprenta de Francisco Vives y Mora, 1901).
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6 This view is held in particular by Arabic scholars, such as in the work of Álvaro Galmes de Fuentes, “La conversión de los moriscos y su pretendida aculturación,” in La política y los moriscos en la época de los Austria. Actas del Encuentro, dirigido por Rodolfo Gil Grimau, Madrid: Comunidad de Madrid (1999), 157-174.; and Los moriscos (Desde su misma orilla) (Madrid: Instituto Egipcio de Estudios Islámicos en Madrid), 1993; and L. P. Harvey, Muslims in Spain, 1500-1614 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press), 2005.

7 Archivo General de Simancas (AGS), Estado, Leg. 235, reproduced in Dadson, Los moriscos de Villarrubia, 981, Apéndice II, doc. 57.

8 I use a coefficient of 3.8 for turning households into individuals for Villarrubia at this period; for a discussion of the different coefficients used by historians, see Dadson, Los moriscos de Villarrubia, 176-190.


10 AHPZ: Híjar, 1ª-36-62, reproduced in Dadson, Los moriscos de Villarrubia, 954-55, Apéndice II, doc. 28, dated May 21, 1611.


12 See Dadson, Los moriscos de Villarrubia, 39-41.

used to accepting the idea of just a relative Muslim depopulation as a result of the Christian conquest” [habrá que ir aceptando la idea de un despoblamiento musulmán solo relativo a raíz de la conquista cristiana]. “Acerca de la permanencia de población musulmana en el Campo de Calatrava,” 784.

14 This is a point made by the Count of Salinas, Diego de Silva y Mendoza, in his letter to Bonifacio de Almonacid: “Although it is called New Town it is not a distinct or separate quarter, even more so since its inhabitants are related and mixed through marriage with the rest of the citizens,” [aunque se llame Barrio Nuevo no es barrio distinto ni apartado, tanto más que las personas mismas han emparentado y se han mezclado por casamientos con los demás vecinos]. Dadson, Los moriscos de Villarubia, 955.

15 “Junto con esto es de considerar que todos estos Moriscos en quanto a la complexión natural, y por el consiguiente en quanto al ingenio, condición y brío, son españoles como los demás que habitan en España, pues ha casi novecientos años, que nacen y se crían en ella, y se heca de ver en la semejanza o uniformidad de los talles con los demás moradores de ella” (Pedro de Valencia, Tratado acerca de los moriscos de España, ed. Joaquín Gil Sanjuán (Málaga: Editorial Algazara, 1997), 78 and 81).

16 See above notes 3 and 4.

17 The Moors were known as Mudéjares in Castile before their conversion in 1502. Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada provides the best description of this term: “[the mudéjares were] Muslims who lived in lands outside Islamic control, subject to political powers whose religion was not that preached by Mohammed” ([los mudéjares eran] musulmanes que vivían en tierras fuera del dominio del Islam, sujetos a poderes políticos cuya religión no era la que Mahoma había predicado.) Los mudéjares de Castilla en tiempos de Isabel I (Valladolid: Instituto “Isabel la Católica” de Historia Eclesiástica, 1969), 15.

18 A copy of this decree can be found in Francisco Fernández y González, Estado social y político de los mudéjares de Castilla (Madrid: Imprenta a cargo de Joaquín Muñoz, 1866), 432-434.

19 This was the view expressed by members of the Morisco community of Villarubia some years after the actual event, when they related “how we all converted and became Christians and were baptised in the face of Holy Mother Church, and all the neighbours of this town, who converted from Moors to Christians, without fail went to receive Holy baptism and very willingly” (de cómo nos tornamos cristianos y fuimos bautizados en faz de la Santa Madre Iglesia, lo cual todos los vecinos de esta villa que de moros nos tornamos cristianos sin falta alguna y con muy buena voluntad fuimos a recibir el santo bautismo). Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid [AHN], Inquisición, Leg. 198, Exp. 23.

20 For a full list of the conversions in Villarubia in 1502, see Dadson, Los moriscos de Villarubia, 801-806, which reproduces a document from the Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid: “Testimonios de bautismos y listas de nuevos convertidos en las villas de Villanueva, Villarubia, Daimiel, Almagro, etc. Año 1530,” Inquisición, Leg. 198, Exp. 23.

21 Their knowledge of Arabic was in fact so poor that even their legal texts were written in Castilian. On this matter, see Ladero Quesada, “Los mudéjares de Castilla en la baja edad media,” in Actas del I Simposio Internacional de Mudejarismo (Madrid-Teruel: C.S.I.C., Diputación Provincial de Teruel, 1981), 349-390.

22 There is plenty of evidence from Valencia and Aragon of the importance of a religious elite in maintaining Islamic structures and beliefs. According to evidence from Aragon, in places lacking

23 Dadson, *Los moriscos de Villarrubia*, chapter 1 passim.

24 See Dadson, *Los moriscos de Villarrubia*, 89-124, and 807-831 (Appendix 1, Doc. 2) for the census of 1550.

25 On the population of Villarrubia during the sixteenth century, see Dadson, *Los moriscos de Villarrubia*, 176-190.


27 One of the leaders of the Moriscos of Granada, Francisco Núñez Muley, a descendent of the Nazarí Royal Family that had ruled Granada during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, presented the king and his officials with a Memorandum, which is unique in Spanish history and probably has no equal anywhere else in the world. The Memorandum unpicked the new decrees one by one, sometimes from a historical point of view, other times from a cultural point of view, and often from a superbly ironic perspective. As Vincent Barletta, editor and translator of the only version of the document in English, has noted, it is doubtful whether Núñez Muley ever held any hopes of its having an effect on the king, but it remains a valuable memorial to common sense and toleration. See Francisco Núñez Muley, *A Memorandum for the President of the Royal Audiencia and Chancery Court of the City and Kingdom of Granada*, edited and translated by Vincent Barletta (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

28 See, for example, the reaction of the Mayor of Almódovar del Campo: “and in all of these villages up to four hundred or five hundred Moriscos could easily be given employment, provided that they were distributed according to the needs of each village; some could be employed and sustained very well in the vegetable fields, others in the production of wool, of which there is a lot in this land and a great dearth of workers…and the local villagers would receive them very willingly” (y que en todos estos lugares se podrían muy bien entretener hasta cuatrocientos o quinientos moriscos, repartiéndolos conforme a la calidad de los lugares; podríanse entretener y sustentar muy bien unos en huertas de hortaliza, otros en el oficio de la lana que se labra mucha en esta tierra y hay mucha falta de oficiales…y los vecinos los recibirán de muy buena gana). AGS, Cámara de Castilla, Leg. 2160. As Jerónimo López-Salazar Pérez notes: “In contrast to other areas, which were very reticent towards the establishment among them of New Christians…the Campo de Calatrava, or at least its minority elite, received them with open arms. For the whole region there is an abundance of testimonies petitioning for their settlement” (A diferencia de otras comarcas, reticentes al establecimiento de los cristianos nuevos…el Campo de Calatrava, o al menos sus minorías rectoras, los recibieron con los brazos abiertos. En toda la comarca abundan los testimonios solicitando su asentamiento). “La población manchega en los siglos XVI y XVII,” *Revista Internacional de Sociología* 37 (1981): 7-31, (26-27).

29 AGS, Cámara de Castilla, Leg. 2160, fol. 57.

30 For the data, see Dadson, *Los moriscos de Villarrubia*, 142.
On these culinary differences, see Mercedes García-Arenal, *Inquisición y moriscos. Los procesos del Tribunal de Cuenca* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno, 1987), 75.


Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms Arch. Σ 130, item 18, fols. 325r-26r, reproduced in Dadson, *Los moriscos de Villarrubia*, 1178-1180, Apéndice III, doc. 6.

AHN, Ñordenes Militares, Archivo Histórico de Toledo, Leg. 44.888, petition dated 18 August 1584.

For a description of how local elections worked in Villarrubia, see Dadson, *Los moriscos de Villarrubia*, 124-130.


Valle de Ricote (Alicante: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Alicante, 2007); Isabel García Díaz y Santiago Otero Mondéjar, Documentos de los moriscos de Ricote y Ojós (1613) (Murcia: Editum, 2010).


45 See Dadson, “Un Ricote verdadero: el licenciado Alonso Herrador” and “Literacy and Education in Early Modern Rural Spain,” for the cases of Alonso Herrador, Alonso Rodríguez and Pedro Naranjo, who were all Morisco priests based in their native town of Villarrubia.


47 See Miguel Fernando Gómez Vozmediano, Mudéjares y moriscos en el Campo de Calatrava. Reductos de convivencia, tiempos de intolerancia (Siglos XV-XVII) (Ciudad Real: Diputación de Ciudad Real, 2000).