

**Primary Documents on Islam in Spain and the Reconquista**  
**selected by Devin Stewart**

**Text 1**

*This is an excerpt from a poem written in 1501 by the Moriscos of Spain to the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II, asking for his help. The Moriscos used Aljamiado, which is a dialectical form of Spanish written in Arabic characters. This poem was translated by Devin Stewart.*

A noble, enduring, and continual peace for my Lord, the best of Caliphs.

Peace be upon my exalted and glorious Master  
who forces the unbeliever to don the cloak of humility!

Peace be upon him whose reign  
God has blessed with victory over all regions!

Peace be with him whose capital  
Is the noble city of Constantinople!

Peace be upon him whose kingdom  
God has adorned with armies and peoples subject to the Turks!

Peace be with you! May God exalt your station  
And mark your reign over all nations!

Peace be with the judges, scholars, nobles,  
And important men who desire to emulate him!

Peace be with the men of piety and religion  
And with those counselors endowed with good judgement!

Peace be with you in the name of the believers who remain  
In al-Andalus, in the West, the land of exile.

Who are bordered by the Mediterranean  
And the unplumbed, deep, and tenebrous Ocean.

Peace be with you in the name of worshipers  
Afflicted by enormous calamity — how enormous it has been!

Peace be with you in the name of old men  
Whose white hair has been torn to shreds, after having known glory!

Peace be with you in the name of the faces forced  
To uncover themselves among barbarians after having spent a lifetime veiled!

Peace be with you in the name of old women forced  
To eat pork and meat not sacrificed according to the religious law!

We kiss the floor of your court  
And pray for your good fortune at all times.

May God prolong your reign and your life  
And save you from every evil and disgrace!

May he support you with victory  
And triumph over your enemy and keep you in His favor and care!

We complain before you, my Lord,  
Of the injuries, disgrace, and enormous misfortunes which afflict us!

We have been betrayed and converted to Christianity,  
Breaking with our faith; we have been oppressed, in dishonor!

When we had been weakened, they descended upon our territory,  
devastating it town by town.

Using great canons to demolish our fortresses impregnable walls,  
Laying siege to them, attacking them for days and months

For this reason, when our cavalry and infantry had perished,  
And when we saw that no help was coming to us from our brothers,

And that our food had decreased, making our situation truly dire,  
We submitted, against our will to their demands out of fear of further misfortune.

Fearing that our sons and daughters would be taken captives or cruelly murdered,  
On the condition that we be allowed to remain in a situation similar  
To that of the Mudejars before us, the inhabitants of the old Muslim territory;

That we would enjoy the right of calling to prayer and celebrating our ritual prayers  
And not be made to abandon any prescriptions of the religious law;

Whoever among us wished to cross the sea to the African coast would be permitted  
To do so safely, with all the belonging he desired to bring;  
And other stipulations, over one hundred and fifty in all.

Their Prince and Sultan told us then, What you have stipulated  
Is granted to you in entirety.

He showed us documents containing pacts and treaties, telling us,

This is my amnesty and my guarantee of protection.

By it shall you remain in possession of your belongings and your homes,  
As you were before, but without arms.

However, though we remained under his treaty,  
Treachery soon became evident: he broke the pact.

He transgressed the capitulations with which he had fooled us  
And made us convert to Christianity by force, with harshness and cruelty,

Burning books we had  
And mixing them with excrement and filth!

All the books which dealt with matters of religion  
Perished in the fire, amid mockery and ridicule!

They left not a single book belonging to a Muslim,  
Nor a single volume one could read in solitary refuge.

If it became known that someone fasted, or prayed,  
This person would end up in the flames.

Whoever among us stopped going to their place of dis/belief was punished by the  
priest  
Who would slap him on both cheeks, confiscate his belongings, and throw him into  
prison.

During Ramadan, they interrupted our fast,  
Forcing us to consume food and drink.

They ordered us to curse our Prophet  
And prohibited us from invoking him on occasions of happiness or misfortune.

We call to you, our Lord, by God and Pure One, the Chosen One, the best of men!

And by the most exalted of men, the family of Muhammad  
And his Companions — what noble companions they are!

And by Abbas, the uncle of our Prophet  
And by his white banner, the most venerable of all banners!

By all great men who recognize their Master  
And all upright men endowed with nobility!

Perhaps they will look upon us and what has happened to us;

Perhaps God, from his Throne, will rain down Mercy!

Since whatever you say is heard and what your order comes to pass,  
Whatever you command is done swiftly,

Particularly since the land of the origin of Christianity  
Whence it spread to other regions, is under your dominion.

By God, our Lord, deign to favor us with a piece of advice or a word of protest!

Since you possess the excellence, glory, rank, and power  
Whereby to save those devoted to God from all evil,

Ask their Pope, the governor of Rome,  
Why they permit treachery after having signed an amnesty?

Why they harm us with their deceit  
Though we are innocent of any fault or crime?

When their people, who had been conquered, were under the security of our religion  
And under the protection of our glorious kings, who fulfilled their promises,

They were not obliged to abandon their faith or their homes,  
Nor did they suffer any betrayal or dishonor.

Your missive arrived, but they took into consideration not a word of it.

It did nothing but increase their enmity and boldness against us,  
And their perseverance in all types of nefarious acts.

The Egyptian envoys arrived and were not treated with betrayal and dishonor  
But they told them that we had accepted their religion of unbelief voluntarily,

And that they did not impose upon us once defeated conversion to their idolatry.  
God is our witness that this is not true!

In saying this, they lied concerning us,  
With perfidious words and arguments.

It was fear of death and being burned which made us convert.  
We said what they forced us to say; it was against our intentions.

Alas for us! Our Lord, we plead before you,  
For that which afflicts us is the worst of exiles!

We could not possibly have given up our religion or our prayers,

As they swear we did before breaking the pact.

If not, get them to allow us to emigrate from their land to North Africa,  
The land of our loved ones, with our belongings.

For we prefer emigration over remaining amid unbelief,  
With power but without religion.

This is what we desire from the glory of your exalted station.  
May our needs be fulfilled through you!

From you we look forward to the end of our anguish,  
Our disgrace, and the humiliation that afflicts us!

You, may God be praised, are the best of our kings  
And your glory will rise higher than all other glories!

Therefore, we ask our Lord God to prolong your life in reign and glory,  
In good fortune and prosperity!

Peace in your dominions, victory over your enemies,  
Numerous troops, abundance and magnificence!

Lastly, may God's peace and mercy  
Be with you always and at every hour.

**[translated by Devin Stewart, from Mercedes Garcia Arenal, Los Moriscos  
(Granada: Univ. of Granada, 1996), 33-41.]**

## **Text 2**

### **Legal Responsum (fatwa) for the Moriscos, 1504**

*This response was written by a religious scholar in Algeria in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in order to help the Moriscos who were living in Spain during the Inquisition. The jurist's name was Ahmad ibn Bu Juma 'ah al-Maghrawi al Wahrani. The fatwa was probably directed specifically towards the Moriscos living in Granada, because the Muslims living in Valencia and Aragon still enjoyed mudejar status at this time and were not subjected to conversion until the mid 1520s. Al-Wahrani advises the Moriscos in ways to maintain the spirit of their Islamic faith while changing the*

*outward rituals so that they would not be detected as being Muslim by the forces of the Inquisition.*

Praise be to God and blessings and peace be on our Master Muhammad, his family, and his Companions

After sending greetings to you from the writer [of this responsum], the most humble of God's worshipers and the one most in need of His mercy and bounty, Ubayd Allah Ahmad ibn Bu Jum'ah of Maghrawa, then of al-Wahran, may God grant his Grace and Protection to us all, asking you, out of your loyalty in your exile, to pray assiduously for a good outcome and escape from the terrors of this World, and to be gathered with the pious believers whom God has blessed, entreating you to hold fast to the religion of Islam, and to ordering those of your children who have reached maturity to abide by it, unless you fear that evil may befall you should they inform your enemy of your inner convictions. Blessed are those in exile, who are upright while those around them are corrupt. The person who remembers God among those who ignore Him is like a living person among the dead.

Know that idols are merely cut wood and hard stone that can neither harm nor benefit and that all things belong to God. God did not take a son, and there was never any other god along with Him. So worship Him and endure in order to worship him. You should pray, even if by a gesture, and you should give alms, even if you pretend it is a gift to one of your poor or an act of ostentation, because God does not look upon your outward forms, but upon your hearts. You should wash away pollutions, even by swimming in rivers. If you are prevented, you may make up at night the prayer belonging to the day\_

If, at the time of prayer, they force you to prostrate yourself to idols, or to attend their prayers, then make firm your intention, and intend your legally required prayer. Face the idol which they face, while focusing on God, even if it is not in the direction of the *qibla*,<sup>i</sup> for the obligation to pray in this direction is dropped with respect to you, as in the prayer of fear, which is performed in battle. If they force you to drink wine, then drink it, but without considering it permitted. If they force pork upon you, then eat it while rejecting it with your hearts, holding to the belief that it is forbidden. Behave similarly if they force some other forbidden act upon you. If they marry their daughters to you, then this is permissible, because they are among the People of Scripture. If they force you to marry your daughter to them, then believe that this is forbidden were it not for their coercion. All the while, you should reject this with your hearts, and were you to dint power, you would change it. Similarly, if they force you to engage in usury or other forbidden acts, then do it while rejecting it with your hearts. Then, take only your capital and give the rest away as alms, if you are sincerely devoted to God.

Whatever is difficult for you, send a message concerning it to us and we will guide you, God willing, according to that concerning which you write.

I ask God to turn the wheel of fortune to Islam's favor, so that you may worship God in the open, by the power of God, without trials or tribulations, indeed through the victory of the noble Turks. We will witness on your behalf in front of God that you believed in God and accepted Him, and that it was my duty to respond to you. Peace be upon you all. On the date of the first of Rajab of the year 910 [December 8, 1504], may God recognize its goodness. May this message reach those in exile, God willing.

**[translated by Devin Stewart, Arabic text in Leonard Patrick Harvey, *Crypto-Islam in Sixteenth-century Spain*, in Actas: Primer congreso de estudios arabes e islamicos (Madrid, 1964): 163-183.]**

### Text 3

#### **Testimony in an Inquisition against a Morisco of Valencia (1556-57)**

This is an excerpt from the testimony given against Don Cosme Abenamir, a Morisco living in the town of Valencia. At the end of the trial, Don Cosme was fined two thousand ducats and was imprisoned for an indefinite period in Valencia. In 1578, eleven years later, he was released after another payment was made, maintaining that he was a good Christian and that the accusations against him were false. The next year, he was pardoned.

1<sup>st</sup>: A sworn witness deposed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March of 1556 and stated: That having been in certain houses of [the towns of] Benaguacil and Segorbe, in [the district of] Benaguacil for a period of three years, in said houses he fasted the month of Ramadan with certain persons whom he named, and did not eat all day until the night, and saw how they celebrated the Feast Days of the Muslims, wearing the best garments they had; which ceremonies they undertook thinking that they would be saved according to the sect of Muhammad; and among those persons was Don Cosme Abenamir.

2<sup>nd</sup>: Another sworn witness, who deposed in April of 1560, stated that a certain person, having a certain position in the town of Benaguacil for more than twenty years, heard and saw during all of said period that the Moriscos of that region are not Christians, nor do they live like Christians, but rather always act and live as Muslims; and now in these times are manifestly worse than ever. The only thing left for them to do would be to blow a bugle as they used to do to call the inhabitant to prayer, because they do business on Sundays and Holy Days.

3<sup>rd</sup>: Another sworn and confirmed witness, who deposed in the month of May of 1565, stated that Don Cosme and other persons whom he named are the pillars of Islam in this Province because, although they show on the exterior that they are good Christians, in their interior they are as Muslim as Muhammad. Thus, one day, said Don Cosme and said persons, in Benaquacil in about the year 1560, said to a certain person that they were amazed that he was not a Muslim, given that he knew the

Truth; and said person answered them with certain arguments, informing that their law was bad, and that Muhammad was like Martin Luther; and the above-mentioned persons disputed with him, claiming that their sect of Muhammad was better than that of Christians. This same man knows that the above-mentioned men have sent their sons to la Alfandiguilla so that they might learn to read and write in Arabic from a certain *alfaqui* [Muslim jurist or acholar] whom they named. The local Muslims hold in high regard the above-mentioned men, who are themselves Muslims, according to what is well known among the Moriscos. They told the witness that he should be a Muslim, and they were shocked that he, knowing so much, was not a Muslim. In the opinion of the witness, Don Cosme and the others have titles of brotherhood and are delegates of the Holy Office<sup>1</sup> more to make fun of the institution than for any other good intention or purpose.

4<sup>th</sup>: Another sworn witness, who deposed on a day in February of 1567, stated that he had seen that, in a certain village, Don Cosme and certain persons who had converted from Islam are held in high regard, and carry on a great deal of business with the Moriscos, who greet them in the grandiose fashion of the Muslims. They have Muslim names, and it is public knowledge that they live according to the sect of Muhammad and cause scandal by bearing arms.

5<sup>th</sup>: Another sworn witness, who deposed on a day in June of 1567, stated that a certain person, passing through Benaquacil and being in the street, seated on a bench, witnessed a man (Don Cosme) passing by, who took a seat by his side and asked this witness where he was from, whether his land was good, and what lands he had visited. This witness answered, to Don Cosme Abenamir, that he had been in certain regions of Barbary<sup>2</sup>, where there was very good land which gave abundant fruit in summer and winter. Don Cosme also asked this witness whether he knew the Qur an, and he answered affirmatively, reciting to him some of the things which this book contains, and Don Cosme observed that they were good.

6<sup>th</sup>: Another sworn witness, who deposed on a day of June in 1567, stated that he recalls that in Benaquacil Don Cosme and certain other persons live as Muslims, and that he has seen them fast during Ramadan and perform the prayer, and that they advised this witness that he should be a good Muslim and not be a Christian; and that Don Cosme had a sorceress named Nadarae come from Val de Elda and kept her in his house in order to find treasure and retrieve it from underground; and that the same Don Cosme was a renowned Muslim and had relations with persons of the sect of Muhammad, whose Qur an he used to read in front of other persons, telling them that that book was good and wonderful, written by Muhammad and worthy of their belief.

7<sup>th</sup>: Another sworn witness, who deposed on a day in June of 1567, stated that he has seen publicly that Don Cosme and other persons live as Muslims, keep the Feast Days of the Muslims, eat meat facing the *qibla* [direction of Mecca], and have Muslim names. The Muslims hold them in high regard. The witness suspects that certain

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<sup>1</sup> This is a reference to the Inquisition.

<sup>2</sup> North Africa

persons came to the Holy Office coerced or instructed not to say anything that would incriminate them.

8<sup>th</sup>: Another sworn witness, who deposed on a day in May of 1567, stated that a certain person had fasted in Ramadan in the company of Don Cosme and other persons, that they are Muslims, and that the local Muslims hold said persons in great esteem, and favor them a great deal, and that he has seen them keep Feast Days of the Muslims on the dates when they fall, slaughter animals to celebrate Feast Days, and recite their prayers of *alhandu*<sup>3</sup> and *coluga*<sup>4</sup>. This witness recalls having seen Don Cosme read in a copy of the Qur'an and in other Muslim books, and try to convince certain persons that they should be Muslims; and that when he used to read the Qur'an it was in front of certain other persons who listened to him; and Don Cosme and the said persons are those who do great damage to the Moriscos, because the common people hold them to be gentlemen and men of understanding and counsel, who are obeyed in all that they command to be done. They deceive the Christians, and if they are friends of the Holy Office, it is only in order to preserve what they have.

9<sup>th</sup>: Another sworn witness, who deposed on a day in June of 1567, stated that he knows Don Cosme and other persons in Benaguacil who live as Muslims, neither more nor less than the other local Moriscos, and they even encourage the Moriscos to be Muslims, according to what is said there publicly. This witness has heard that when the father of Don Cosme died, they sent for a Muslim jurist to divide the inheritance for them. The division was carried out according to the law of the Muslims. The jurist was going to take one tenth of the money to distribute between the ransom of Muslim slaves and alms for poor Moriscos, but the heirs did not consent to this because they did not want the great amount of money that had to be revealed, lest His Majesty take possession of it. Therefore, the jurist took for himself a certain quantity of money.

10<sup>th</sup>: Another sworn witness, who deposed on a day in July of 1567, stated that Don Cosme and another person were in Ribarrojas, adjacent to Benaguacil. When a certain other person went to live there, they threw him out, and said to him that they were throwing him out because a certain other person had said something against them in the Inquisition tribunal. Don Cosme and his brothers are Muslims and live as such, and the other Muslims hold them in great esteem.

11<sup>th</sup>: Another sworn witness, who deposed on a day in August of 1567, stated that he knows and has heard say by many people that Don Cosme of Benamire has fled from the Holy Office and is avoiding it, since they have arrested one of his servants.

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<sup>3</sup> A Spanish pronunciation of the Arabic word *al-hamdu*, meaning praise.

<sup>4</sup> A Spanish pronunciation of the Arabic phrase *qul huwa*, meaning say He