

Crises and community: Catalan Jewish women and conversas in Girona, 1391–1420*

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Abstract. The article focuses on the experiences of Jewish women and conversas in the city of Girona after the cataclysmic violence of 1391 up to the economic crises the community faced during and after the Disputation of Tortosa. Through the lens of marriage, family, and economic activity in the credit market, it argues for the im-

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portance of considering these events from the perspective of women as a means of nuancing and deepening our understanding of their impact on Catalan Jewish communities more broadly. We also emphasize the need to consider the experiences of Jewish women and conversas alongside Christian women in Catalonia, highlighting their shared experiences in a patriarchal society weathering the crises of the late medieval period.

Keywords: Jewish women, conversas, Girona, 1391, Disputation of Tortosa, marriage, family, credit market

Crisi i comunitat: dones jueves i converses catalanes a Girona, 1391-1420

Resum. Aquest article tracta de les experiències de jueves i converses a la ciutat de Girona després de la tràgica violència del 1391 i fins a les crisis a què es va enfrontar la comunitat durant i després de la disputa de Tortosa. Centrant-se en el matrimoni, la família i l'activitat econòmica en el mercat del crèdit, advoca per la importància de considerar aquests esdeveniments des de la perspectiva de les dones com un mitjà per a matisar i aprofundir la nostra comprensió de llur impacte, d'una manera més àmplia, en les comunitats jueves catalanes. També emfatitzem la necessitat de considerar les experiències de les dones jueves i converses paral·lelament amb les dones cristianes de Catalunya, subratllant llurs experiències comunes en una societat patriarcal sotmesa a la crisi dels últims segles de la baixa edat mitjana.

Paraules clau: jueves, dones jueves, converses, Girona, 1391, disputa de Tortosa, matrimoni, família, mercat de crèdit

Introduction

At the turn of the fifteenth century, a Jewish widow called Regina appeared in numerous notarial records in the city of Girona, with and without the help of a procurator. The business she conducted was exclusively related to the credit market: lending money to various Christians in the city and surrounding area, collecting debt payments, absolving debts owed, buying and selling credit instruments, and making payments. Regina's role in these documents was manifold. In September 1394, she confirmed that two Christian men had satisfied the *violari* that had originally been concluded with her husband, Mossé Falcó, stating that she was acting by her right of inheritance of

‘both the goods and the rights that were for my husband’.¹ A month later, Regina collected a debt payment from a Christian shoemaker from Girona in the amount of 100 sous, which was part of a larger debt that another Christian couple owed her. The shoemaker had acted as guarantor for that debt and was thus forced to make a payment when the original borrowers had not done so. The initial credit instrument had been concluded two years earlier between Regina and the couple.² A few years after that, in 1398, Regina received a payment of 55 sous from Nicola, the wife of a barber, which was part of a larger debt owed to her son Falcó Mossé. In this transaction, Regina was acting as guardian for her minor grandson Asmies, universal heir of his father’s estate.³ Regina would expand her role as guardian for her grandchildren over the next decade, acting together with her daughter-in-law Bonafilla for the children of her son Belshom Mossé Falcó and on her own for the heirs of another son, David Falcó.⁴ In dozens of notarial records from the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, Regina engaged in the credit market as heir of her husband, on behalf of her adult sons, and as guardian for numerous grandchildren. She did so against the backdrop of a Jewish community faced with repeated crises, including violent attacks in August of 1391 that resulted in the death of some Jews and the forced conversion of many more, and the financial chaos of the early fifteenth century that led to the conversion of many prominent Jews, some of whom were very likely Regina’s family members.⁵ The imprint that Regina left upon the notarial records from late medieval Girona is but one example of the ways that Jewish women and conversas were involved in the complex economic life of the city.

This study builds on the scholarship of historians, such as Irene Llop Jordana, Asunción Blasco Martínez, and Teresa Aleixandre, who have explored the

1. Arxiu Històric de Girona, Protocols Notarials, Girona 1 [hereafter AHG, Prot. Not.]: 144, Guillem Llobet (22/09/1394), f. 125v–127r. A *violari* was a form of credit in which the borrower sold the lender the right to receive an annual pension for a fixed length of time, usually one or two lifetimes.

2. AHG, Prot. Not., G1: 147, Guillem Llobet (29/10/1394), f. 13r–v.

3. AHG, Prot. Not., G6: 87, Francesc Vidal (30/07/1398), f. 128v.

4. For example, see AHG, Prot. Not., G6: 88, Francesc Vidal (12/09/1399), f. 4r and (27/10/1399), f. 107v–108r; AHG, Prot. Not., G6: 89, Francesc Vidal (22/05/1399), f. 128v.

5. The Jewish community of Girona has been studied extensively over the years. For the most recent study on the Jews of Girona see RIERA I SANS, *Els jueus de Girona* and *Els poders públics i les sinagogues*. For a recent survey of the events of 1391 that includes a chapter on Girona see GAMPÉL, *Anti-Jewish riots in the Crown of Aragon and the royal response, 1391–1392*.

experiences of women in the Jewish communities of the Crown of Aragon after the violence of 1391 alongside their broader examinations of Jewish society in this period.⁶ Specific to our research on Girona, Sílvia Planas i Marcé has published numerous works on Jewish women and conversas in Girona which have inspired our project. Her book *Na Blanca: Jueva de Girona* served as the basis of our initial archival research. These foundational scholars have examined various aspects of the lives of Jewish women and conversas, including marriage strategies, inheritance practices, economic activities, and communal relations. When women do appear in these studies, their specific experiences as women, the means by which they were affected by patriarchy, and the ways that gender impacted their lives (both positively and negatively) are less of a focus. Yet, such work complements a rich historiography that explores many different political, economic, and religious facets of medieval Catalan Jewish communities.⁷

Some scholars, however, have brought together a focus on women and gender within a broader examination of medieval Jewish communities to provide a more nuanced representation of the past. This is the case of the work of Anna Rich Abad on the Jewish community of Barcelona during the second half of the fourteenth century; Elka Klein on Barcelona in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; Rebecca Winer on Perpignan in the thirteenth century; and Sarah Ifft Decker on Vic, Girona, and Barcelona in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.⁸ But in the period after the cataclysmic violence of 1391

6. See, for example, LLOP, 'La fi de la comunitat jueva de Vic'; BLASCO, 'Las mujeres judías aragonesas y la escritura (siglos XIV y XV)', 'Mujeres judías zaragozanas ante la muerte', and 'Testamentos de mujeres judías aragonesas, 1401-1418'; and ALEIXANDRE, 'Dones jueves a la Girona baixmedieval'. Outside the Crown of Aragon, see also the work of Danièle Iancu-Agou and Andrée Courtemanche on Provence. See, for example, IANCU-AGOU, *Juifs et néophytes en Provence*, and COURTEMANCHE, 'Les femmes juives et le crédit à Manosque au tournant de xive siècle'.

7. The standard survey of the history of Jews in medieval Spain is still BAER, *A history of the Jews in Christian Spain*. While no general survey exists for the later medieval period, Yom Tov ASSIS' *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry* offers a comprehensive study of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Teresa Aleixandre, Prim Bertran, Jaume Riera i Sans, Eduard Feliu, Christian Guilleré, Irene Llop, Josep Llobet i Portella, Josep Madurell i Marimon, and Gabriel Secall i Güell, among others, have published numerous works on individual Catalan Jewish communities.

8. RICH ABAD, *La comunitat jueva de Barcelona entre 1348 i 1391 a través de la documentació notarial*; KLEIN, *Jews, Christian society, and royal power in medieval Barcelona*; WINER, *Women, wealth, and community in Perpignan, c. 1250-1300*; IFFT DECKER, 'The public economic role of Catalan Jewish wives'.

up to the expulsions of 1492, the experiences of women in the grander narrative of medieval Catalan Jewish history during a time of great crisis has drawn considerably less scholarship.

In this article, we argue that including the study of Jewish women and conversas in the narrative of medieval Catalan Jewish history can help to nuance and deepen our understanding of Jewish communities more broadly in this period. In some cases, looking at these communities from the perspective of women adds greater complexity to the existing historiographical arguments which tend to focus on the effects of stagnation and decline of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. At the same time, however, we also want to argue for the inclusion of Jewish women and conversas as part of the broader discussion of late medieval women's history in Catalonia and the Crown of Aragon. As Elisheva Baumgarten has argued, religious groups did not live in isolation from one another. They lived in the same place, were aware of each other, saw each other, and were influenced by each other.⁹ As Baumgarten states, 'the study of minority and majority women together has the potential not only of clarifying or describing specific aspects of women's lives but also changing the broader historical conception of processes that characterized medieval European life'.¹⁰ This kind of analysis is particularly important when looking at conversas, who often straddled the Jewish and Christian worlds and, as our research suggests, used whatever legal, economic, and social aspects of those communities worked to their advantage.

Using largely notarial records from the Arxiu Històric de Girona and royal letters from about 60 chancery registers kept at the Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, from 1390 to the 1420s, this article will explore how examining a Jewish community from the perspective of women can expand our understanding of Catalan Jews in a crucial period. At this point, our arguments are tentative as we are still completing our analysis of the notarial registers in Girona from 1391 to 1450. Thus, the evidence for this article comes from 181 notarial registers, and approximately 584 notarial records which feature Jewish women, conversas, and Christian women in various roles.¹¹ This evidence

9. BAUMGARTEN, 'A separate people?', p. 214. See also BAUMGARTEN, 'Gender and daily life in Jewish communities'.

10. BAUMGARTEN, 'A separate people?', p. 226.

11. Unlike other Catalan cities, Girona does not have *Libri Judeorum*, where all of the notarial documents involving Jews are collected into separate registers. For a discussion of such registers elsewhere, see ALEXANDRE (ed.), *El 'Liber Judeorum' ním. 90 de l'Aleixar (1344-1348)*.

demonstrates the active participation of Jewish women and conversas in the economy of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Girona and shows the crucial role that women played as economic actors during a time of increasing crisis. At the same time, it indicates that as wives, mothers, widows, and guardians, Jewish women and conversas worked to expand and protect the interests of their families, nurturing and solidifying networks within and across their communities. In these actions, Jewish women and conversas mirrored the activities of women across the Crown of Aragon during the later Middle Ages.

1. Context: the violence of 1391 and the Disputation of Tortosa

The period after 1391 was a turning point for the history of Jews in Iberia.¹² In 1391, riots erupted against Jews throughout Castile and the Crown of Aragon, leading to mass conversions and killings of Jews as well as the destruction of many communities. The wave of violence hit Girona on August 10, 1391. Girona had a population of 700–1000 Jews by the 1380s, making it the second largest Jewish community in Catalonia, behind Barcelona. At least 40 Jews were killed in the violence of 1391 in Girona. The bulk of the community survived by taking refuge in the Gironella tower, where they spent the following weeks until unrest subsided. Scores of Jews converted both on August 10 and in the weeks that followed as living conditions in the tower became more difficult.¹³ Yet, despite the well-known importance of these attacks for Jewish history and Iberian history, little work has been done to date regarding their impact on family and community.

12. On the pogroms of 1391 in Castile see SOIFER IRISH, 'Towards 1391: The anti-Jewish preaching of Ferrán Martínez in Seville'; VALDEÓN BARUQUE, *Los judíos de Castilla y la revolución Trastámara*; MONSALVO ANTÓN, *Teoría y evolución de un conflicto social*, p. 207–276; MITRE FERNÁNDEZ, *Los judíos de Castilla en tiempo de Enrique III*. In relation to the Crown of Aragon see the references in the note below and WOLFF, 'The 1391 pogrom in Spain'; MEYERSON, *A Jewish renaissance in fifteenth-century Spain*, p. 20, 22–26; RIERA I SANS, 'Los tumultos contra las juderías de la Corona de Aragón en 1391', p. 213–225; BAER, *A history of the Jews in Christian Spain*, vol. 2, p. 99–102; HINOJOSA MONTALVO, *The Jews of the Kingdom of Valencia*, p. 21–46; LLOP JORDANA, 'La fi de la comunitat jueva de Vic'; GAMPEL, *Anti-Jewish riots in the Crown of Aragon and the royal response, 1391–1392*.

13. For a detailed study of the violence in Girona and the political history of the community in the fourteenth century, see the works of RIERA I SANS, especially 'Els avalots del 1391 a Girona'; *Els jueus de Girona*; and *Els poders públics i les sinagogues*.

In the years after the violence of 1391, the Jewish community of Girona faced significant challenges. Although the community had survived the attacks, documentation from the following decades provides strong evidence for its decline. Almost immediately, its members had difficulty fulfilling their tax burden, with Queen Violant requesting that city officials reduce the amount of taxes they had to pay in 1392.¹⁴ Such interventions by the queen to protect the Jews of Girona from fiscal ruin continued over the last decade of the fourteenth century. In late 1394, she mandated that Jewish property in Girona could not be seized for unpaid debts.¹⁵ A few months later, she granted the *aljama* a delay on payment of taxes for two years, alongside the right to collect new taxes on various essential goods.¹⁶ But the financial difficulties of the *aljama* persisted into the fifteenth century and found the community requesting further protection from the mounting fiscal challenges they faced. Nearly two decades after 1391, the queen set up a special commission of leading members of the Jewish community to perform the difficult task of creating a plan to help the Jews fulfill their debts.¹⁷ Given the power to impose new taxes if needed, evidence from the 1420s and 1430s demonstrates that the commission was unsuccessful in reversing the fiscal fortunes of the community, which continued to shrink due to conversion and migration.¹⁸ As late as 1432, concerns about collecting appropriate taxes from the declining community were still on the royal radar.¹⁹

The antecedents to the difficulties that the *aljama* faced in the 1420s lay in the Disputation of Tortosa, which sparked severe crises for the community from 1415 to 1418. While the Jews of Girona did not experience widespread

14. 'Ita que hodie remanentes Judei in modica quantitate modum vivendi non habent immo ad solvendum onera quibus dicta *aljama* subest...' Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, *Registres de Cancilleria* [hereafter ACA, Canc., reg.], 2041, 70v-71r (16/07/1392); ACA, Canc., reg. 2041, 86v-87r (26/03/1393): Queen Violant orders that any requests or suits regarding money that the *aljama* owes to her court should be sent straight to her. ACA, Canc., reg. 2041, 103v-104r (14/07/1393).

15. ACA, Canc., reg. 2042, 221v-22r (07/11/1394).

16. ACA, Canc., reg. 2042, 185r-v (Barcelona, 20/08/1400); 186r-v (25/09/1400).

17. ACA, Canc., reg. 2033, 48v-49v (04/04/1409).

18. In a letter from March of 1422 dealing with the appointment of five Jews to the council of the *aljama*, Queen Violant made constant reference to the shrinking of the community: 'Com los juheus de *aljama* de Gerona sien en tanta disminució...' See ACA, Canc., reg. 2034, 132r (09/03/1422).

19. ACA, Canc., reg. 2583, 132v-133r (30/03/1432).

violence in this period, Jaume Riera has argued that it was as catastrophic for the community as 1391.²⁰ The outcome was another series of conversions alongside anti-Jewish papal legislation. The disputation began in February 1413 and rabbis from across the Crown of Aragon were mandated by papal order to attend. Its immediate result was the conversion of many rabbis and members of the Jewish elite from the Crown of Aragon, although such conversions did not initially include the Jews of Girona.²¹ It was not until 1415 that conversion began to affect the community in Girona, a result of ‘great vexations and inconveniences’²² Jews were facing due to papal restrictions on their credit transactions with Christians, increasing open attacks on their faith and its practice, and various other troubles they were subjected to by both ecclesiastical and local officials of the city.²³ The crises of 1391 and 1415–18 frame the context of our article as they had a significant impact on the lives of Jewish women and conversas in Girona. They led, in some cases, to the breakup of marriages as one spouse converted while the other remained Jewish. The death of many Jewish men in 1391 resulted in many women suddenly finding themselves the head of their household. At the same time, these late medieval crises also led to the creation of many mixed families as ties of blood proved harder to sever.

This article is divided into two parts. The first section will examine marriage and the family in this period of crisis. Here we highlight both the importance of using marital and family documents as a means of exploring the active role of Jewish and conversa women in successful familial strategies, as well as how such documentation can deepen our understanding of the social impacts the Jewish community faced as a result of these late medieval crises. The second section will expand from family life to women’s role in the economy by looking at their participation in the credit market of Girona. We will see that Jewish and conversa widows played a particularly significant role, of-

20. RIERA I SANS, *Els jueus de Girona*, p. 161–162.

21. RIERA I SANS, *Els jueus de Girona*, p. 162. The classic studies of the Disputation of Tortosa continue to be PACIOS LÓPEZ, *La disputa de Tortosa*, and RIERA I SANS, *La crònica en hebreu de la disputa de Tortosa*.

22. Quoted in RIERA I SANS, *Els jueus de Girona*, p. 163, from a royal letter dated August 21, 1414.

23. See RIERA I SANS, *Els jueus de Girona*, p. 162–165. For a discussion of the physical reduction of the size of the Jewish call as Jews increasingly sold property to local Christians, see CANAL *et al.*, ‘La forma urbana del call jueu de Girona’.

ten acting on their own. We will also highlight how paying close attention to the economic activities of such women can tell us much about the effects of the violence of 1391 and the Disputation of Tortosa on local Jewish families. The end of our article will provide some suggestions for future research, particularly regarding comparing the lives of late medieval Catalan Jewish and Christian women.

2. Marriage and the family

By far, the topics most studied for Jewish women and conversas in medieval Catalonia are marriage and the family. Indeed, regardless of religion, women appear most frequently in the extant documentation that deals with the family economy in various ways.²⁴ Contracting marriages in dowry contracts, acting as guardians and collecting inherited assets, negotiating service contracts for their children, donating assets to family members – notarial records provide clear evidence of the roles that women played within their families. As with Christian women, Jewish and conversa women were identified by their relationship to male members of those families in the documents. They always appear as ‘wife of...’, ‘widow of...’ or ‘daughter of...’. Thus far, we have found no Jewish women or conversas in the notarial records from late medieval Girona without such identifiers.²⁵ Across the religious spectrum, in the medieval period, women were legally, economically, and very likely socially, perpetually connected to either their marital or natal families.

In looking at the Jewish community in Barcelona during the late fourteenth century, Anna Rich Abad has argued that women remained in a per-

24. See RICH ABAD, ‘Família, patrimoni i individualitat’, p. 375, and *La comunitat jueva de Barcelona entre 1348 i 1391 a través de la documentació notarial*; PLANAS, *Na Blanca, jueva de Girona (s. XIV)* and ‘Una pretesa interculturalitat’; VINYOLES, *Les barcelonines a les darreries de l’edat mitjana (1370-1410)* and ‘Nacer y crecer en femenino’; WINER, ‘Elite ideal or popular practice?’; KLEIN, ‘The widow’s portion’.

25. On the whole, it is very unusual to see women of any religion named without reference to a man in notarial records from the Crown of Aragon. The few examples that Dana Lightfoot has seen in the notarial records of late medieval Valencia, for example, involve prostitutes. See Arxiu de Protocols del Patriarca de Valencia, Protocols Notarials, 11425, Bertomeu Batalla (18/10/1456), n/f.

petual state of minority because they were always tied to a male relative – whether father, brother, husband, or son.²⁶ Challenging scholars who purport that Jewish law designated women a domestic role that was equal in importance to the public role of men, Rich Abad states that in practice, while women might have some authority within the household, overall they were in a position of subordination to their fathers, husbands, and even, eventually, sons.²⁷ Avraham Grossman’s study of Jewish women across medieval Europe highlights the ideology upon which arguments for women’s subordination were founded. Grossman explores the negative picture of women presented by late medieval Jewish philosophers which, influenced by the Creation story, presented women’s role as secondary: ‘he is the significant one and she is a kind of vessel or tool to assist him.’²⁸ Emphasizing the destructive role of Eve, and likely influenced by Christian ideas, medieval Spanish philosophers noted women’s negative traits, such as lightheadedness, and their tendency to fall into temptation. Indeed, Maimonides commented that ‘the man is commanded to dominate and rule over his wife, such being the will of the Creator following the sin in the Garden of Eden.’²⁹ Such authors cautioned men about the danger of choosing a ‘bad wife’, emphasizing that many women suffered from defective characters. Grossman notes that, in contrast, ‘one searches in vain for a complementary discussion of the woman who suffers from a “bad husband”’.³⁰ Thus, Jewish ideology mirrors that of Christian society, denigrating wives and emphasizing the need to subjugate them to their husbands for the good of society.

As evidence to demonstrate the subordinate position of wives in medieval Judaism, some scholars point to marital practices that were distinct from those of Christianity, such as divorce, bigamy, and levirate marriage. Indeed, the use of these practices and their impact on women’s status are greatly debated in the historiography of medieval Jewish women’s history across Europe. Jewish law allowed for divorce and bigamy under specific circumstances, which Rich Abad argues were dependent on the reproductive capabilities of women. Husbands were able to get a divorce or take a second wife if their

26. RICH ABAD, ‘*Família, patrimoni i individualitat*’, p. 378.

27. RICH ABAD, ‘*Família, patrimoni i individualitat*’, p. 376–377.

28. GROSSMAN, *Pious and rebellious*, p. 10.

29. GROSSMAN, *Pious and rebellious*, p. 14.

30. GROSSMAN, *Pious and rebellious*, p. 18.

first wife was infertile for ten years.³¹ Rich Abad sees levirate marriage as reinforcing this importance of fertility; the practice mandated that widows should marry a brother of their deceased husband if they did not have children.³² Although she notes that the use of divorce, bigamy, and levirate marriage were not common in late medieval Catalonia, there is evidence that such practices were used by Jewish communities on occasion.³³ To Rich Abad and others, these traditions emphasize the status of wives as instruments of exchange, rather than actors within the kin group.³⁴

But, as Avraham Grossman reminds us, ‘one must not blindly accept the negative image of women as reflecting the actual attitude toward women in society and in the family. There is a profound gap between this image, which originates in the words of sages and poets, and reality’.³⁵ Much like in the study of medieval Christian marriage, it is important to emphasize the distinction between ideology and practice. We must consider the experiences of individual Jewish women through the use of documents such as notarial records. This evidence allows us to see how married women engaged in the family economy through dowry contracts, donation contracts, and documents detailing the management of familial assets. At the same time, looking at those records that primarily deal with marriage and the family can aid our understanding of the Jewish community in Girona during times of crises more broadly, providing another avenue to think about the connections between Christians and Jews during this period.

As yet, we have uncovered only twenty documents from Girona that detail the exchange of property at the time of marriage. But based on this small sample, mothers were closely involved in providing assets for their children to marry, both on their own as widows and alongside their husbands. In October of 1409, Cessua Alfrangi concluded a marriage contract with Astruga, the

31. Alexandra Guerson has shown that while in the thirteenth-century Crown of Aragon Jews were able to get licenses to marry a second wife without any reference to the infertility of the first wife, by the late fourteenth century the practice was limited to cases of infertility. See GUERSON DE OLIVEIRA, ‘Coping with crises’, p. 135–140; RICH ABAD, ‘Família, patrimoni i individualitat’, p. 377.

32. RICH ABAD, ‘Família, patrimoni i individualitat’, p. 378.

33. In 1415, for example, Caravida Vidal from Girona requested a license to marry a second wife because his wife had passed child-bearing age. See ACA, Canc., reg. 2034 (08/01/1415), 28r and (23/05/1415), 35v–36r.

34. RICH ABAD, ‘Família, patrimoni i individualitat’, p. 377.

35. GROSSMAN, *Pious and rebellious*, p. 31.

daughter of the deceased Jew Salamó Bonafós de Sohal of Puigcerdà. Astruga was marrying with the permission of her mother, Briona, who provided the 800-sou dowry.³⁶ Interestingly, this document does not indicate if these assets came from property Astruga had inherited from her father or if they belonged to her mother, Briona. Five years earlier, Taroç Deuslocrega and his second wife, Regina, provided a dowry of 90 pounds to his daughter Dolça at the time of her marriage to Leon Mossé Vives of Perelada.³⁷ Although Regina was not Dolça's mother, the contract indicated that she donated these assets to Dolça alongside her husband. In 1395, Salamó Saporta and his wife, Regina, donated a house to their son Vidal to act as a guarantee for the dowry of his future wife, Bonafilla. The document notes that Salamó and Regina can reside in the house for as long as they live (Salamó died three years later). The format that this contract is written in emphasizes the role of Regina in making this donation to Vidal, for it begins 'We, Regina, wife of Salamó Saporta and Salamó Saporta, her husband...'.³⁸ Every other contract we have looked at that involves married couples begins with the husband and then names his wife. Given the vast amount of documentation we have regarding Regina's involvement in the credit market as a widow, it is not surprising that she played an equal role in the donation of assets to her son, alongside her husband. Later evidence makes clear that she was very engaged in the economic activities of her family once widowed.

The involvement of Jewish mothers in the marriage contracts of their children in Girona, both with their husbands and as widows, is not surprising, given the scholarship of other historians who work on Jewish women in Catalonia. This is especially true for historians who also use notarial documents as their evidence, such as Elka Klein and Anna Rich Abad. In her work on the thirteenth-century Jewish community in Barcelona, Klein notes that there are distinct similarities between Christian and Jewish law in relation to the family. She highlights specific areas of comparison, including marriage and widowhood, the role of widows in the management of their deceased husbands' property, and women and marital assets. While Klein does demonstrate there were some differences, overall she argues that a shared notion of

36. AHG, Prot. Not., G11: 34, Joan Safont (19/10/1409), n/f.

37. See the three documents concluded on 09/02/1405 involving Dolça, her father and stepmother, and her new husband. AHG, Prot. Not., G6: 107, n/f, Francesc Vidal and G6: 105, Francesc Vidal (09/02/1405), n/f.

38. AHG, Prot. Not., G1: 147, Guillem Llobet (05/02/1395), n/f.

the family influenced similar practices.³⁹ A key aspect of Klein's argument is Jewish acculturation to Christian legal practices, where there was a 'permeable quality of the border between Jewish and non-Jewish jurisdictions'. Along this border, 'Jewish legal practice functioned in symbiosis with local custom', including in the area of family law.⁴⁰

Klein uses notarial documents, rabbinic opinions, and legal texts to analyze this 'permeable border' between Jewish and Christian practice in the area of family law. In our analysis of notarial records from late fourteenth and early fifteenth-century Girona, we find clear evidence of this acculturation, demonstrating not only a shared understanding of family law amongst Jews and Christians, but also a strong desire by Jews to use Christian legal practices, like employing notaries, to record familial arrangements involving only Jews. In some cases, these Latin documents are concluded alongside Hebrew ones. For example, the marriage contracts noted above all indicate that a ketubah contract had already been concluded in Hebrew between the families. In other cases, Jews request that Hebrew agreements be translated into Latin or Catalan, often for legal reasons. On August 16, 1392, Astruga, the wife of Mossé Saltell, came before the *iudex ordinarius* of Girona to ask that her ketubah contract be translated into Catalan or Latin.⁴¹ Astruga claimed that since the original document was in Hebrew and only people who were particularly learned in Hebrew could read it, it needed to be translated.⁴²

It was not uncommon for Jews to request that Hebrew documents be translated into Latin or Catalan for legal purposes. Nor was it unusual for Jews to use Christian notaries to write Latin contracts for matters involving Jews alone. Such practices had existed in Catalonia since the thirteenth century.⁴³ Yet the post-1391 context must be taken into account when thinking about the use of Christian notaries for concluding Jewish marital contracts and the translation of such agreements into Latin or Catalan. Four years after the cataclysmic violence of 1391, Regina and Salamó Saporta, leading members of the Jewish community in Girona and mentioned above, went to a

39. KLEIN, 'The widow's portion', p. 148.

40. KLEIN, 'The widow's portion', p. 148.

41. AHG, Prot. Not., G5: 400, Joan de Fontcuberta (16/08/1392), f. 163r-165r.

42. 'Et ex quo est scripta in ebrayco non posset legi non explicari Romanaler [?] per querumcumque jurisdictionem presidentem nec aliquam aliam personam nisi dum taxat personam in lettris ebraycis sufficienter eruditam et instructam...'

43. See discussion in BURNS, *Jews in the notarial culture*, p. 30-31.

Christian notary to have a donation contract between themselves and their son drawn up, at the time of his marriage. Almost exactly one year after the attacks on the Jewish community, Astruga, the wife of Mossé Saltell, requested the translation of her ketubah contract. While Astruga does not indicate whom she is referring to as not able to read the Hebrew of her ketubah contract, the fact that she requested a Christian legal authority have it translated, and that it was translated into Catalan rather than Latin, suggests that her intended audience included both Jews who had little or no Hebrew and non-Jews. In the first decades of the fifteenth century, we have other documents involving Jewish couples and widows who used Christian notaries to conclude various arrangements relating to marital property.

At a time when other evidence demonstrates growing tension between Christians and Jews throughout Catalonia, as local Christian officials in numerous communities, including Girona, started to harass the Jewish community in a variety of ways, we see Jews using Christian legal structures to draw up contracts that involved only members of their own community, including issues such as dotal agreements and marital donations that were supposedly governed by Jewish law alone.⁴⁴ Although we can only speculate at this point, we suspect that increasing numbers of Jews turned to Christian notaries to conclude Latin versions of Hebrew documents in the decades after the violence of 1391, in particular after the turn of the fifteenth century. Their choice to do so likely reflected a desire to protect their assets in the best way possible, perhaps understanding that they may eventually have to turn to Christian jurisdictions to that end, despite communal autonomy. At the same time, as Robert I. Burns has discussed in relation to Jewish wills, having a Latin version of a Hebrew document was ‘enforceable at law and thus doubly secured [the actor]’.⁴⁵ Burns also argues that the use of Christian notarial practices could help to achieve ends not prescribed by Jewish law, thus allowing Jewish wives, for example, to make use of the extensive protections that Roman law offered them in relation to dotal assets.⁴⁶

On April 22, 1415, Bonanasch Alfaquí concluded a contract of marriage with Bonafilla, daughter of Naçim Ferrer. As a dowry, Bonafilla brought

44. It should be noted that Jews used Christian notaries to draw up other types of agreements that involved only Jews, including documents related to the credit market.

45. BURNS, *Jews in the notarial culture*, p. 31.

46. For an analysis of the Roman law on dowries, see WESSELL LIGHTFOOT, *Women, dowries and agency*, p. 24–33, 153–155; KELLEHER, *The measure of woman*, p. 48–80.

4700 sous, donated by her father. This Latin contract indicated that the couple also had a Hebrew version of it drawn up on the same day.⁴⁷ Bonanasch received a donation from his parents, Jafudà and Estel·lina Alfaquí, on the occasion of his marriage to Bonafilla, including half of a house that they owned in the Jewish *call*.⁴⁸ We have already outlined some of the reasons why Bonanasch, Bonafilla, and their families likely chose to have Latin contracts drawn up by a Christian notary with the details of their marriage settlement; however, for this couple, access to Latin versions of their marriage contracts would prove especially useful in the coming years due to conversion. Within three years of his marriage to Bonafilla, Bonanasch Alfaquí had converted to Christianity and taken the name Lluís Joan Dala.⁴⁹ Thus far in our research, we do not know if Bonafilla also converted, but other members of Bonanasch/Lluís' family did convert, including his father, Jafudà, subsequently called Dalmau Dala, and his mother, Estel·lina (Elionor).

In thinking about the impact of conversion of Jewish families, we must make distinctions between the conversions which happened as a result of the violence of 1391 and the later conversions during the crises of the first couple of decades of the fifteenth century, particularly after the Disputation of Tortosa. One cannot dispute that mass conversion led to a reordering of familial life. In some cases, such families appear to have carried on normal kin relationships and actions, regardless of the fact that some family members were now Christian. Some such normative actions were performed by married couples where one spouse was Jewish and the other was a converso. We have a number of notarial instruments from 1391 to 1407 that demonstrate such activities. In one such document from July 1407, Salamó Samuel and his wife, Ester, both Jews, alongside Orfila, a Jewish woman, and her husband, Pere de Burdills, a converso, made a contract with a Christian carpenter to complete a series of renovations on a house the two couples owned in the Jewish quar-

47. AHG, Prot. Not., G11: 40, Joan Safont (22/04/1415), n/f.

48. Ibid.

49. We do not know the exact date of Bonanasch/Lluís' conversion, but in a series of documents from September 1418 he is named as Lluís Joan Dala, converso. See AHG, Prot. Not., G11: 41, Joan Safont (14/09/1418), n/f and AHG, G11: 41 (29/09/1418), n/f. As our article discusses, Jewish wives did not always convert/were not always converted with their husbands, especially in the violence of 1391; however, the conversions that happened in the 1410s tended to involve multiple family members, so it seems likely that Bonafilla did convert and that we have simply not yet encountered her as a conversa in the documentation.

ter in Girona.⁵⁰ While these somewhat formulaic documents, focused only on financial and contractual issues, make it difficult to determine the state of the marital relationship between Orfila and her husband, Pere, as noted above, notarial instruments were very careful to describe those involved in such contracts with as specific details as possible, making sure to always relate women to their husbands or fathers. In the contract, Orfila is referred to as a Jew and named as the wife of her convert husband; the Latin instruments do not use the word 'olim', once, to refer to her relationship but only 'uxor', wife. We can perhaps infer, then, that this couple, despite the fact that the husband was now a converso, had continued to live together and act as husband and wife; activities which included tending to the maintenance of their family home.

While evidence from the notarial archives in Girona demonstrates that a few couples remained together after conversion in the wake of the violence of 1391, we have considerably more documentation for such mixed couples after the Disputation of Tortosa in the second decade of the fifteenth century. As noted above, conversion did not begin to impact the Jewish community in Girona until after 1415, with most conversions happening from 1417 onward. There are a variety of reasons why these conversions were different from those which took place as a result of 1391; many happened as a result of fiscal pressures that the Jewish community was facing, for example.⁵¹ In the context of married couples, however, the central distinction with the post-Disputation of Tortosa conversions is that all of them initially involved husbands but not their wives. Indeed, our research has found that wives often did not convert until several years after their husbands, and in some cases it appears they remained Jewish, despite increasing pressure from the inquisition, the local bishop, and local secular authorities.⁵² One such example is Bellaire, the Jewish wife of Guillem Bernat Desmaestre, a converso from Girona. The son of the rabbi Bonastruch Desmaestre, Guillem converted in May of 1418. Yet in the months and years after his conversion, he continued to act on behalf of his Jewish wife in notarial documents, even serving as procurator alongside his father in administering debts owed to Bellaire by various Christians.⁵³

50. AHG, Prot. Not., G6: 116, Francesc Vidal (23/07/1407), n/f.

51. See RIERA I SANS, *Els jueus de Girona*, p. 161-174.

52. GUERSON and WESSELL LIGHTFOOT, 'Mixed marriages'.

53. For example, AHG Prot. Not., G7: 83, Antoni-Bernat Ferran (20/9/1418), n/f.

Such mixed families were not unusual in early fifteenth-century Girona and their presence served as a source of conflict between the king and local ecclesiastical and secular officials.⁵⁴

The maintenance of family homes alongside the management of economic assets provides evidence of the daily lives of mixed married couples in late medieval Girona. However, such normative behaviour is not just evident amongst spouses, but also within parent-child relationships, particularly in relation to dowry donation and inheritance. We have some examples of families where adult children were converted and parents were not. Such shifting of familial relationships raises questions of how issues like inheritance of family property would be dealt with if one or more of the heirs was now a convert. Unlike elsewhere in medieval Europe, in the Crown of Aragon secular law often protected the property rights of converts. King Jaume I issued a decree in 1243 protecting conversos' rights to their own property and to any property 'due to the convert by right of kinship'.⁵⁵ King Jaume's decree also protected the property rights of the converso's Jewish kin by determining that they may be able to claim what would have been their rights if the said converso had died a Jew.⁵⁶ Our notarial evidence shows many conversos carrying on property settlements as if nothing had happened. In March of 1399, Constança, a conversa and wife of Pere de Rexach, collected a debt owed by Pere Salera to her deceased mother's estate. This debt was worth 20 sous and was part of the assets that Constança inherited from her mother.⁵⁷ Five years earlier, in 1394, this same mother and daughter concluded a dowry donation contract. In that contract, Astruga (the mother), as the widow of Astruch Lo-

54. Guerson and WESSELL LIGHTFOOT, 'Mixed marriages' and 'Jewish families, conversion, and the creation of stepfamilies in Girona after the anti-Jewish violence of 1391'.

55. The statute of James I, dated March 12, 1243, was issued during an ecclesiastical council in Lleida. It is published in *Cortes de los antiguos reinos de Aragón y de Valencia y Principado de Cataluña*, p. 217–219, this passage on 217–218; the full text is also available in a letter from Innocent IV to the Archbishop of Tarragona published in GRAYZEL, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth century*, p. 254–257, doc. 105: 'He shall not, on this account, lose aught of the real or chattel property which was his before, but, on the contrary, shall have it and hold it wholly, securely, and freely, and shall, by our authority, possess himself of his patrimony and of property due to the convert by right of kinship. Moreover, the children and relatives of the said convert shall be able to claim nothing of his property while he is alive, and after his death only that which they would have been able to claim reasonably if he had died a Jew or a pagan.'

56. *Ibid.*

57. AHG, Prot. Not., G7: 72, Bernat Pintor (12/03/1399), n/f.

bell Gracià, donated a dowry to Constança on the occasion of her marriage to Pere de Rexach, a Christian.⁵⁸ Constança's dowry from her mother was 10000 sous, considerably higher than most women marrying in this period, on a par with the dowries of Jewish and Christian women from the wealthiest and most prominent families in Girona. Indeed, Constança's father, Astruch Lo-bell Gracià, was one of the secretaries of the *aljama*.⁵⁹ Her new husband, Pere, was also of high status as he was referred to as 'venerable' in the notarial instrument of donation.

In some cases, it was the parents who converted. We have found a number of contracts relating to Jewish children of converso parents. An example of such a mixed family is the Falcós, one of the most prominent Jewish families in Girona, who appear frequently in the notarial records. Some members of the Falcó family were converted in 1391, including Jucef Falcó and his wife, Astruga, who became Pere de Banyoles and Blanca.⁶⁰ But not all the Falcós converted in 1391 or even in the early years of the fifteenth century. Falcó Bellshom and his wife, Regina, converted in 1417, becoming Bernat Falcó and Blanca.⁶¹ The couple had at least six surviving children: five who had converted to Christianity and one, a son called David, who remained Jewish. While both parents included David in their wills alongside his siblings, leaving him his share of the family property, it seems that at least the father tried to encourage his son's conversion to Christianity. When he wrote his will, in 1428, Bernat Falcó appointed his wife his universal heir, leaving cash allowances for all his children. He noted, however, that if David converted to Christianity before his death, he would become his universal heir instead of his mother.⁶² That David did not convert is clear from his mother's own will in 1437, in which she makes no request for his conversion and leaves him the

58. AHG, Prot. Not., G5: 439, Bernat de Dons (10/02/1394), f. 45v–46r.

59. RIERA I SANS, *Els jueus de Girona*, p. 111–112.

60. Although we do not focus on her in this article, Blanca de Banyoles was the core of much of our early research into the impact of the 1391 violence on Jewish women. We have a large corpus of documents involving her actions as a widow (Pere died in 1392) and during her second marriage to the convert Ferrer de Montcada from Barcelona. In these documents, Blanca acts as guardian of her son Miquel and *usufructuaria* of her first husband's assets. See also PLANAS, *Na Blanca, jueva de Girona (s. XIV)*.

61. For a discussion of their conversion, and that of their children, see RIERA I SANS, *Els jueus de Girona*, p. 172.

62. PLANAS, 'Convivència, pervivència, supervivència', p. 460–462. See the will in AHG, Prot. Not., G4: 61, Bernat Ferrer Sasala (05/10/1428), f. 233v–234v.

same amount of money as his other siblings, with the exception of the oldest, who is named universal heir.⁶³ Examples of mixed families who carried on as before, such as those of Orfila, a Jewish woman married to a converso; of Constança, a conversa whose mother remained Jewish; and of Blanca, a conversa whose son remained Jewish, abound in the notarial registers and are not surprising. Mark Meyerson's recent study of the Jewish community of Morvedre in the years following the violence of 1391 has shown that many Jews felt deeply committed to supporting their former coreligionists.

While some married couples and kin groups were able to continue normative relationships and actions despite the conversion of some members, we want to make clear that there were also cases of conflict. Thus far our evidence suggests that tensions arose particularly within married couples where spouses were now of different religions. We have two such cases from the fall of 1391 in Girona involving married couples: Constança and Issac Rovén; and Tolrana, a Jewish woman, and her husband, Francesc Guillem de Vila-reig, a converso. In Constança's case, she was seeking the return of her dowry from Issac on the grounds that she was now a Christian and thus her marriage to him was no longer valid. Issac agreed that their marriage was annulled due to her conversion, but disputed her claim that this allowed the return of her dowry, stating that conversion to Christianity was not a valid reason for dowry restitution.⁶⁴ The situation of Francesc and Tolrana was somewhat different, as Francesc was seeking not the dissolution of his marriage to Tolrana, but the enforcement of it. Dated September 27, 1391, just over a month after the attacks on the Jews in Girona, and only a few days after the attack on the Gironella tower, the relevant notarial document states

63. PLANAS, 'Convivència, pervivència, supervivència', p. 460–461; AHG, Prot. Not., G4: 203, Berenguer Ferrer Sasala (17/04/147), f. 91r–92r.

64. AHG, Prot. Not., Castelló d'Empúries: 480, Pere Pellicer (28/11/1391), n/f. Constança is the same conversa we discuss above, who married Pere de Rexach in 1394. Given the donation by her mother, Astruga, for her dowry, it appears she was unsuccessful in regaining her original dowry from Issac. See also PLANAS, 'Béns de dones, llegats d'amor'. We do have examples from the post-Disputation of Tortosa period where Jewish women were successful in regaining their dowries from their convert husbands. In these cases, the couples remained married for several years after the conversion, only separating after the inquisition became involved. See GUERSON and WESSELL LIGHTFOOT, 'Mixed marriages'. For an example of a dowry restitution contract between a converso and his Jewish wife, see Prot. Not. G4: 79, Berenguer Ferrer Sasala, (21/11/1421), n/f. In this document, the converso Pere Joan Falcó restores a dowry of 3300 sous to his wife, Regina. The couple were married in 1409 and Pere converted in 1417.

that Francesc is requesting that Tolrana return to live with her husband, even though they were of different faiths.⁶⁵ At the time the document was concluded, Tolrana was still living in the Gironella tower; in fact, part of this notarial instrument was concluded on the steps leading to the tower. Tolrana refused to return to live with Francesc as husband and wife, and also indicated she did not wish to leave Judaism for Christianity.

The Christian authorities present at this dramatic scene on the steps of the Gironella tower were hopeful that Tolrana would return to her convert husband, expecting the couple's reunion would then lead to her conversion. This expectation underlay canon law precepts on the continuation of marriages between Jews and converts, although the status of such unions was debated by canonists due to the lack of scriptural clarity. St. Paul had discussed mixed marriages in 1 Corinthians but medieval canonists disagreed on how his words should be interpreted.⁶⁶

For some, Paul's comments argued for legal separation without the opportunity of remarriage,⁶⁷ while for others they justified dissolution of the union, thereby giving the right to remarry.⁶⁸ Canon law indicated that in situations such as that of Tolrana and Francesc, the convert could remarry when a Jewish spouse refused to convert or stay living with the Christian, thus nullifying their Jewish marriage. In the end, however, evidence from Girona supports David Nirenberg's point that divorce was not necessarily a 'foregone conclusion' in cases of conversion. In some cases, couples chose to remain together, functioning as they always had as husband and wife.⁶⁹ In others, conversion seemed to create a path from which they could not turn

65. ROMANO, *Per a una història de la Girona jueva*, vol. 2, p. 615–617.

66. BRUNDAGE, *Law, sex, and Christian society in medieval Europe*, p. 61; BRUNDAGE, 'Intermarriage between Christians and Jews', p. 28.

67. BRUNDAGE, 'Intermarriage between Christians and Jews', p. 28.

68. Gratian argued that mixed marriages should be dissolved, but later commentaries on this topic were gendered. Johannes Teutonicus stated that if a woman converted, 'she should leave her husband, lest he recall her to her former error.' However, if the husband was the convert, the couple should remain married, 'for women are more easily influenced by a man than the other way around.' Gratian did make a distinction between cases in which the non-Christian spouse left the Christian spouse and cases in which they continued to cohabit. If the non-Christian spouse left, the Christian spouse was allowed to remarry; if the non-Christian spouse stayed, the Christian spouse would be able to obtain a separation but could not remarry. See BRUNDAGE, 'Intermarriage between Christians and Jews', p. 244.

69. NIRENBERG, *Communities of violence*, p. 144.

back, driving an unpassable wedge between the couple. It seems likely that the circumstances and sincerity of the spouse's conversion played a role in the outcome of such marriages, although this point is difficult to prove given the extant sources.

Conflict over conversion did not only arise between husbands and wives, but also existed across broader kin groups. In 1419, a young orphaned Jewish woman named Tolrana approached King Alfons for help in converting to Christianity, claiming that she was being prevented from doing so by Jewish family members. Her father, Dalmau Benet, had converted on March 4, 1417, after offering to become a Christian in order to secure a pardon for a Christian convicted of killing a Jewish couple in nearby Caldes de Malavella.⁷⁰ By the fall of 1418, Dalmau had died, leaving Tolrana as his universal heir. Her appeal to the king for aid in 1419 was successful and she was placed under royal protection and given a new guardian, her maternal uncle Lluís de Cardona from Solsona.⁷¹ A few months later, Tolrana converted to Christianity, taking the name Francina. Soon after, she married another uncle, her father's half-brother Asbert Benet, also a recent convert.⁷² As Jews, the Benet family were extremely prominent in Girona, with various members retaining important posts in the governance of the community. Their fortunes improved upon conversion, even though not all the Benets converted to Christianity and evidence suggests there were some potential divisions within their kin group.

While the notarial archives of Girona are rich in sources that allow us a glimpse into the family lives of Jews and conversos at the turn of the fifteenth century, they are even more valuable for considering the economic roles that women played in this community. Indeed, these two aspects of Jewish and converso society are linked, as women were most often active economically in relation to familial property. The next section of our article will focus on the economic role of Jewish and conversa women in relation to the credit market of late medieval Girona.

70. See RIERA I SANS, *Els jueus de Girona*, p. 173.

71. ACA, Canc., reg. 2470 (15/02/1419), f. 1r and (04/03/1419), f. 6v.

72. GUERSON and WESSELL LIGHTFOOT, 'Jewish families, conversion, and the creation of stepfamilies in Girona after the anti-Jewish violence of 1391'.

3. Economic activity: Jewish and conversa women in the credit market

The credit networks of Jewish and Christian women in Girona were part of a much broader system of credit that played a crucial role in the late medieval European economy. Urban and rural men and women acted as both creditors and debtors as a means of investing assets and ensuring they could conduct the business of everyday life. Scholars such as William Chester Jordan have argued that women tended to loan money to one another, particularly for emergency needs. Jordan and others state that women, in general, engaged in smaller credit transactions, both as creditors and debtors, than men.⁷³ Evidence from across medieval Europe demonstrates the key role that Jewish women played in such credit transactions. Avraham Grossman highlights that Jewish women in northern Europe assisted their husbands and conducted business on their own as investors and borrowers, arguing that this was on a larger scale than Sephardic women.⁷⁴ A growing body of research by scholars working on medieval Spain, however, including that of Sarah Ifft Decker on Girona, Vic, and Barcelona in the early fourteenth century, Anna Rich Abad on Barcelona in the late fourteenth century, and our own work on Jewish women in Girona at the turn of the fifteenth century, is nuancing that argument, demonstrating the strong presence of Jewish women, as wives and especially widows, in the credit markets of Catalonia. While many of these women did engage in smaller credit transactions, we also have examples of Jewish women who managed dozens of investments, some of them substantial, involving both their own property and that of their husbands (as *usufructuraria*) and children. In contrast to Jordan's evidence for France, only a minority of the Jewish women in Girona engaged in credit transactions solely with other women. The vast majority conducted business with Christian men or Christian couples, some of whom lived in Girona, although most were from the numerous rural parishes surrounding the city. The networks that Jewish women developed with rural Christians were reflective of geographical shifts in the credit market of late medieval Girona, which saw a decreasing presence of Jews in urban transactions. While it is difficult, at present, to

73. See, for example, ANGELOS, 'Investment and credit,' p. 407–408; ANGELOS, 'Urban women, investment, and the commercial revolution of the Middle Ages', p. 257–272; JORDAN, *Women and credit in pre-industrial and developing societies*; Jordan, 'Jews on top'.

74. GROSSMAN, *Pious and rebellious*, p. 113. See also KLEIN, 'Public activities of Catalan Jewish women'.

draw definite conclusions on the impact of the violence of 1391 on the role of Jews in the credit market of Girona and the surrounding area, it does seem that in the months after August 10, 1391, Jews did engage in credit transactions of varying kinds with one another and Christians (largely from the countryside), with the extant documentation thus giving the impression that it was business as usual.

Although Jewish sages argued that women should preserve their privacy and modesty at all times – an injunction that ran contrary to the public demands of engaging in business – Jewish women throughout the medieval world played an active role in the economic life of their families. Avraham Grossman points out that ‘there is no reason to be surprised at the important role played by widows in commerce, in loaning on interest, and in managing the estates left by their husbands, nor in the willingness of the sons to allow them to continue in managing the affairs of their fathers. The wives were active in these businesses during their husbands’ lifetime, knew their commercial secrets, and in effect there was no substitute for them in terms of continuity of activity and their ability to collect money from debtors, especially non-Jews.’⁷⁵ Such activity, Grossman stresses, enhanced the public image of women and their role in the family. Among these women, widows were particularly active,⁷⁶ and in this sense Jewish women were not different from their Christian neighbours.⁷⁷

For Christian widows, the ability to continue their deceased husbands’ economic activities depended upon their socioeconomic status and the rights granted to them in testaments. In late medieval Europe, it was not unusual for the widows of Christian artisans to continue running the workshops of their husbands until they remarried or their sons came of age. For example, Teresa Vinyoles and Pierre Bonnassie have explored the essential role that wives played in artisanal workshops in fifteenth-century Barcelona, as well as the expectation that widows would run these businesses upon the death of their husbands.⁷⁸ As these women worked alongside their husbands while they were alive, artisan widows were seen as the best managers of their workshops upon their deaths (although it must be noted that this position was seen

75. GROSSMAN, *Pious and rebellious*, p. 112.

76. GROSSMAN, *Pious and rebellious*, p. 111–112.

77. GROSSMAN, *Pious and rebellious*, p. 115.

78. BONNASSIE, *La organización del trabajo en Barcelona a fines del siglo xv*, p. 103–104; VINYOLES, *Les barcelonines a les darrerries de l’edat mitjana*, p. 35.

as temporary; a stop-gap until a permanent male artisan could resume control). Testamentary practices in the late medieval Crown of Aragon also demonstrate that men felt their widows were more than capable of managing their estates. An analysis of testaments from fifteenth-century Barcelona found that more than a third of men gave their widows usufruct rights to their estates.⁷⁹ In some cases these women were also named tutors of their children. Similar evidence from Valencia indicates that such practices were widespread in the Crown of Aragon, particularly amongst those of lower and middling socioeconomic status.⁸⁰ Therefore, much like Jewish women, Christian widows were seen as potentially the best managers of their deceased husbands' property because they had worked alongside their husbands during marriage, and were more than capable of continuing their economic activities to the benefit of the family. A closer look at the economic activities of Jewish women and *conversas* in late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century Girona can tell us much about credit networks in a period of crisis, but also the roles women played alongside their husbands or in place of their husbands in this crucial period.

On June 27, 1398, Regina, the widow of Salamó Saporta, paid 65 sous to Nicola, the widow of Bernat de Bell-lloc, as an annuity for a *violari*. Five years earlier, another Regina, the widow of Mossé Falcó mentioned in the introduction to this article, received a payment of 55 sous from another Nicola, the wife of a local barber. These examples are only two of the many cases we have found at the notarial archives in Girona of Jewish and Christian women engaged in the credit market. What these two Reginas and two Nicolas had in common, other than their names, is the fact that they were all fulfilling terms of contracts originally created by their husbands. While we have a few examples of elite Jewish and Christian women lending money through various credit mechanisms, most of the women we have found were widows left in charge of their family's assets.

In the case of Regina Saporta,⁸¹ as a widow she had the usufruct of her husband's estate and administered it with her son, who sometimes appeared alongside her. It seems that having grown sons did not prevent widows from

79. EQUIP BROIDA, 'La viudez, ¿triste o feliz estado?', p. 33; also see p. 29.

80. WESSELL LIGHTFOOT, *Women, dowries and agency*, p. 87.

81. In the medieval period, women would not have used surnames as identification; however, for the sake of clarity, we are using them here to distinguish between the two Reginas.

managing affairs on their own. As we saw in the introduction, Regina Falcó had four grown sons when her husband died. Yet, she frequently appeared conducting transactions on her own. In March of 1399, she concluded a loan contract with Guillem Massana, Jr. from Vilablareix worth 61 sous, to be paid at the next feast of St. Peter and Felix.⁸² About a year later, she arranged a loan with Joan Costa, a wooldresser from Girona, and his wife, Bartolomeva, for 64 sous, due six months later.⁸³ Regina Falcó made numerous other credit transactions without the involvement of her sons in the years leading up to their deaths.

Although most of the Jewish women active in the credit market in Girona were widows, we do have some examples of married women conducting business with both Christians and Jews without their husbands. In February 1405, Amorettes, the wife of Jucef Astruch, sold a debt of 17 pounds 10 sous owed to her by a Christian couple to Mossé Belshom.⁸⁴ A year later, in March of 1406, Bonafilla, the wife of Bonet Vidal, created a loan (*mutuum*) agreement with Pere Franch de Serra from Ullastret and his wife. Bonafilla gave the couple 27 pounds 10 sous, setting a repayment schedule of 110 sous per year on the feast of St. Michael until the entire debt was repaid.⁸⁵ Amorettes and Bonafilla acted on their own in concluding these credit transactions and the contracts do not indicate where the assets they were using originally came from. Other notarial documents, however, provide clues about property held by married Jewish women outside of their marital assets. On March 4, 1404, Astruga, the wife of Vidal de Bases, and Bonafilla, the wife of Hasday Taroç, absolved a Christian couple and their son of debts owed to their deceased father, Naçanell Cerç, as part of a loan originally established between the family and Naçanell in 1392. The sisters, Astruga and Bonafilla, had each inherited half of their father's estate, which was considerable. Naçanell Cerç had served as *clavari*, or tax collector, for the aljama in the 1380s and 1390s.⁸⁶ He died early in 1400. The sisters appeared in many other documents, sometimes acting on their own, in other cases with their husbands, and in still others with one of their husbands as their procurator. Inheritance from paternal as well as maternal estates is one method by which Jewish women gained

82. AHG, Prot. Not., G7: 72, Bernat Pintor (24/03/1399) n/f.

83. AHG, Prot. Not., G6: 90, Francesc Vidal (19/05/1400), f. 58v–59r.

84. AHG, Prot. Not., G6: 107, Francesc Vidal (09/02/1405), n/f.

85. AHG, Prot. Not., G6: 110, Francesc Vidal (29/03/1406), n/f.

86. RIERA I SANS, *Els jueus de Girona*, p. 132, 135, 139.

the assets they used to engage in credit transactions. As Elka Klein has argued, Jews tended to divide their property among a group of heirs, which included married and unmarried children, and grandchildren.⁸⁷ Jews at the turn of the fifteenth century were still following that practice, as the example of Naçanell Cerç' estate mentioned above illustrates.

Perhaps more importantly for this essay, a closer look at the economic activities of Jewish women in Girona allows us to get a glimpse of the consequences of the anti-Jewish activities that marked the early fifteenth century. One clear example is that of Bonafilla, the wife of Bonastruch Desmaestre. In 1408, Bonastruch was listed among the five wealthiest Jews of the community, who were together entrusted with managing the economic affairs of the *aljama* of Girona.⁸⁸ As wealthy Jews, it is not surprising to find that both Bonafilla and her husband appear in scores of credit documents, both lending and borrowing money as well as buying and selling property, throughout the early fifteenth century. Bonafilla herself appeared in at least eleven documents between 1405 and 1423. What makes Bonafilla's example interesting is that a closer look at her activity shows that nine out of those eleven documents were issued between March of 1413 and April of 1415 and that during this period her husband was notably absent from the notarial records. We know that in February of 1413 Bonastruch Desmaestre was one of the rabbis required to attend the Disputation of Tortosa.⁸⁹ It is not, then, surprising to see Bonafilla appear as procurator for her husband in a credit transaction in March of 1413.⁹⁰ Most of Bonafilla's activities, however, are in 1415, when she acted in at least seven different contracts, lending money to local Christians or buying credit, all under her own name, without reference to her husband.⁹¹ It is unclear whose property she was managing in the operations she engaged in; what we do know is that in 1414 Bonastruch left the disputation without permission and in retaliation the pope ordered that royal officials not execute any debts Christians owed him.⁹² Bonafilla seems to have stepped in for her

87. See KLEIN, 'Splitting heirs', p. 49–71.

88. ACA, Canc., reg. 2033, f. 21v (09/07/1408).

89. RIERA I SANS, *Els jueus de Girona*, p. 162; see also Bonastruch Desmaestre's account of the disputation in RIERA I SANS, *La crònica en hebreu de la disputa de Tortosa*.

90. AHG, Prot. Not., G11: 38, Joan Safont (04/03/1413), n/f.

91. See, for example, the series of documents dated March and April of 1415 in AHG, Prot. Not., G11: 39, Joan Safont.

92. RIERA I SANS, *Els jueus de Girona*, p. 162.

husband to engage in investments herself while her husband sought a reprieve from Queen Violant. By 1416, Bonastruch was back in business, selling property in the Jewish quarter of Girona while his wife disappeared from the notarial records.⁹³ We find her again in 1423, when her husband was once again in trouble with local authorities.⁹⁴ In a period marked by increasing conflict between Jews and local authorities, Jewish women often found themselves having to step in to safeguard family interests.

The business that Bonafilla and other Jewish women engaged in involved Jews and Christians, men and women. This evidence is in contrast to that found by scholars such as William Chester Jordan for France. Of approximately 200 documents in which Jewish women or conversas appear dealing with loans or the buying and selling of credit instruments, only eight are contracts between two women, with no men involved. Of those eight contracts, nearly all (seven) refer to credit operations contracted by the woman's husband or father and inherited either by her or by her children. For example, the payment of 65 sous that Nicola, the widow of Bernat de Bell-lloc, received from Regina Saporta in June of 1398, mentioned earlier in this article, was an annuity for a *violari* first contracted by their respective husbands in April of 1391.⁹⁵ In August of 1398 Regina, the widow of Salamó Saporta, would make a payment to another Christian widow, Guillema, for a *violari* contracted between Regina's late husband and Guillema's, Ramon de Casanova. In other words, women were not seeking to do business only with other women. Nearly all the Jewish or Christian female lenders we have encountered lend to men, often directly. Bonafilla, the widow of Belshom Mossé Falcó, lent money on seven different occasions between 1399 and 1406 and in each case the debtor was a local Christian.⁹⁶ Estel·lina, wife of Jafudà Alfaquí, lent money to

93. ACA, Canc., reg. 2034, f. 52v-53r (03/07/1416).

94. In July and September of 1423 Bonastruch Desmaestre was at the royal court appealing various actions against him taken by the local bailiff. See ACA, Canc, reg. 2036, f. 3r (30/07/1423), and f. 5r-v (02/09/1423). While in Barcelona, he appointed his wife his procurator and she appeared in November contracting business in his name. AHG, Prot. Not., G10: 70, Berenguer Vidal (02/11/1423), n/f.

95. AHG, Prot. Not., G6: 87, Francesc Vidal (27/06/1398), f. 85v-86r.

96. See AHG, Prot. Not., G7: 72, Bernat Pintor (29/03/1399), n/f; from the notary Francesc Vidal: G6: 94, (29/11/1403), n/f; G6: 105 (13/11/1404), n/f; G6: 110 (02/01/1406), n/f and (02/03/1406), n/f; G6: 112 (06/08/1406), n/f.

the Jew Caravida Vidal in the amount of 45 pounds in 1415.⁹⁷ A few days later, she concluded another loan with a Christian man, Ramon de Manso, for 36 florins. A couple of months earlier, Estel·lina had bought a *censal* from another Christian man, Bernat Bous.⁹⁸ Both Estel·lina and Bonafilla are representative of the Jewish and conversa women we found engaging in the credit market of late medieval Girona, who frequently conducted business with Jewish and Christian men as well as other women.⁹⁹

Jewish women and conversas, however, did not always act alone. They also relied on the help of procurators in conducting business. On July 31, 1392, a Jewish widow called Desiyada sought a notary in the city of Girona to officially appoint her son, Astruch Vidal, her procurator to act in her name in cases of debt owed to her or to her late husband, Vidal de Claramunt.¹⁰⁰ Desiyada gave her son broad powers to file petitions, start legal actions, swear oaths, execute debts, enforce decisions; in short, to do anything legally necessary to manage the credit owed to her and/or to her late husband. A little over a month later, at the beginning of September, another Jewish widow, Astruga, would appoint her son Naçim Ferrer as her procurator. Unlike Desiyada, Astruga wanted her son to take care of very specific business – representing her in the sale of a particular piece of land.¹⁰¹

Desiyada and Astruga were not unusual in their use of procurators. Both Jewish and Christian laws allowed the use of agents in business transactions. Procuratorships had been recognized in Jewish law since ancient times due to the importance of commerce in Jewish society. The Talmud had it enshrined that ‘a man’s agent is as himself’ and in Jewish law an agent could even contract marriage or divorce as a representative for one of the parties (although an agent could not represent a principal during a betrothal). The only requirement in terms of who could be appointed was that the two sides enjoy legal capacity. This stipulation disqualified the deaf, the mute, and minors.

97. AHG, Prot. Not., G11: 39, Joan Safont (05/07/1415) and (15/07/1415), n/f.

98. AHG, Prot. Not., G11:40, Joan Safont (02/05/1415), n/f.

99. While the majority of Jewish women and conversas engaged in the credit market were from the elite families of Girona, there are some cases involving women from less wealthy families. For example, in 1406, Pandina, the widow of Astruch Bonnasim of Girona, engaged in a series of credit contracts with Christian men from the surrounding countryside. See Prot. Not., G9: 34, Pere Pinós (26/1/1406) and (29/1/1406).

100. AHG, Prot. Not., G5: 416, Francesc de Cantallops (31/07/1392), f. 82v–83r.

101. AHG, Prot. Not., G5: 400, Joan de Fontcuberta (05/09/1392), f. 182r.

Jewish law also prohibited the appointment of a procurator who was not Jewish to perform legal acts such as buying and selling.¹⁰² The contracts we deal with in this paper, however, were concluded under Roman civil law since they were drafted by Christian notaries.

As in Jewish law, procurators under Roman civil law fulfilled a variety of functions, acting on behalf of clients in legal transactions. They could represent clients in civil trials or act as general managers of their clients' businesses and affairs.¹⁰³ Procurators could be appointed for future actions, under particular conditions (such as the absence of the client), indefinitely, or for specific times.¹⁰⁴ Only those able to act in a legal capacity could serve as procurators, thus, as in Jewish law, they must not be minors, deaf, or mute. Roman law did not bar Jews nor women from serving as procurators (although it did limit the ways in which women could act legally on behalf of others);¹⁰⁵ however, some Romanized medieval law codes, such as the *Furs de València*, did state women should not act in this capacity.¹⁰⁶ Yet notarial evidence from Valencia demonstrates that women were appointed as procurators, often by their husbands or other family members. In Girona, the laws of procuratorship followed those of the *Corpus iuris civilis* and thus provided Jewish widows with the ability to appoint Christian or Jewish men OR women to act on their behalf. Exploring the choices that Jewish widows made regarding their procurators and the reasons why they hired such people will take up the rest of our paper.

For most women, family members were the obvious choice to represent their legal interests. Many women employed their sons, as in the examples at the beginning of this paper, or brothers; some would employ their sons-in-law or brothers-in-law as well. Such was the role Hasday Taroç played – he appears as procurator for his wife and married sister-in-law as well as for his widowed mother-in-law.¹⁰⁷ Naçanell Cerç, mentioned earlier and an extremely busy moneylender who was also an active member of the aljama adminis-

102. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 1, p. 453.

103. *Corpus iuris civilis, Digesta* III-III-I (1–3).

104. *Corpus iuris civilis*, III-III-3; III-III-4.

105. *Corpus iuris civilis, Digesta* III-III-XLI.

106. *Furs de València*, vol. II, llibre II, rúbrica VIII, 1 (p. 181).

107. AHG, Prot. Not., G6: 90, Francesc Vidal (07/07/1400), f. 118v-119r.

tration, appears in 1394 and 1397 representing his mother and his sister.¹⁰⁸ We have found at least one case of a widow being represented by her brother.¹⁰⁹

While relying on one's male relatives was the most obvious choice, our evidence shows that it was more common for Jewish women to use the services of men unrelated to them by blood or marriage as their procurators. Of the cases we found to date, these men tend to either hold prominent positions in the *aljama* or be particularly active businessmen – and, thus, men who were routinely seeking notarial services. Taroç Deuslocrega, for example, represented 18 Jewish women as procurator. Although he does not seem to have occupied high positions within *aljama* administration, Taroç appeared often in the notarial registers at the time, either collecting debts owed to him by Jews or Christians, or as procurator for any number of people. In addition to acting as procurator for Astruga, widow of Astruch Ravaya; Bonafilla, widow of Abraham Ravaya; and her unmarried daughter Astruga, he also appears in our documentation representing Jewish officials of a nearby town who needed to pay the debt they had with a local Christian.¹¹⁰

Not only was Taroç Deuslocrega a frequent customer of the local *notaria* of Girona, but the women who hired him were among the most powerful of Girona. Bonafilla was the widow of Abraham Ravaya, a Jew who was a member of the *aljama* council for most of his adult life and served as a communal official for many years.¹¹¹ He was also an administrator for the only Jewish confraternity in Girona.¹¹² Indeed, the Ravayas were part of the oligarchy that had a stranglehold on political power in the *aljama* of Girona for much of the fourteenth century. Abraham Ravaya's ancestors had acted as royal officials in the thirteenth century, when Jews could still hold such pos-

108. AHG, Prot. Not., G6: 81, Francesc Vidal (02/04/1394), f. 86r and G1: 323, Pere Mut (03/08/1397), f. 57r. Other examples: Roven and Vidal Bonsenyor as procurators for their mother, Bonafilla, widow of Bonsenyor Samuel, collecting debt owed to her by a local Christian: AHG, Prot. Not., G6: 125, Francesc Vidal, (10/12/1411), n/f; Astruch Vidal as procurator for his mother, Desiyada, widow of Vidal de Claramunt: AHG, Prot. Not., G5: 416, Francesc de Cantallops (31/07/1392) f. 82v–83r; Nacim Ferrer as procurator for his mother, Astruga, widow of Ferrer Bonanasch: AHG, Prot. Not., G5: 400, Joan de Fontcuberta (15/09/1392), f. 182r.

109. Levi Jasquell as procurator for his sister Regina, widow of Mossé Cohen: AHG, Prot. Not., G5: 401, Joan de Fontcuberta (30/01/1393), f. 33r and f. 123r.

110. See AHG, Prot. Not., G6: 100, Francesc Vidal (1403), n/f.

111. RIERA I SANS, *Els jueus de Girona*, p. 108–118.

112. RIERA I SANS, *Els jueus de Girona*, p. 120.

itions above Christians.¹¹³ There is a great deal of extant documentation detailing the actions of Abraham Ravaya and his family. As yet, we know little about Bonafilla's natal family, beyond the fact that it must have been politically, economically and socially well-connected for her marriage to Abraham to take place.

Astruch Ravaya, Astruga's husband, was Abraham's brother and also appears in the records as a permanent member of the aljama council. In April of 1391 the brothers Astruch Ravaya and Abraham Ravaya were listed as part of the aljama administration, with Abraham being included in a list of fourteen permanent councillors.¹¹⁴ Both would disappear from the records after August of 1391. One month later, Taroç Deuslocrega was named procurator for Abraham Ravaya's daughter Astruga, who would later marry Benet Mossé Falcó, a member of the powerful Falcó family.¹¹⁵ In November of that same year the brothers' wives, Astruga and Bonafilla, appear as widows appointing Taroç as their procurator to administer the property of their late husbands, suggesting that their husbands might have died during the riots of 1391, leaving wives and daughters to administer their significant assets. Bonafilla would later appoint at least two more procurators to represent her, one of whom was a Christian (Guillem de Ravató), as we will see in a minute.¹¹⁶

It is worth mentioning that not all procurators were men. Women sometimes performed the role of procurators either for family members or other women. Astruga, widow of Ferrer Bonanasch, acted as procurator for her son and for Bonafilla, the widow of a Jewish man from Barcelona. Another Astruga, the widow of Belshom Falcó, acted on behalf of her sister-in-law. In common, both women had been married to men who held prestigious positions within the administration of the Jewish community. Ferrer Bonanasch had been both a councillor and a communal official in the years before 1391.¹¹⁷ Belshom Falcó was always listed as a member of the council that managed the aljama and yet another member of the very wealthy and powerful Falcó family. It is unclear what the relationship between Astruga and Bonafilla was and why the former was acting on behalf of the latter. Being from Barcelona,

113. MARQUÈS, 'Judíos de Gerona en el siglo XIII', p. 292.

114. RIERA I SANS, *Els jueus de Girona*, p. 145.

115. AHG, Prot. Not., G7: 69, Bernat Pintor (28/07/1396), n/f.

116. In 1395, Bonafilla appointed Issac Abraham, Jr. as her procurator. AHG, Prot. Not., G6: 83, Francesc Vidal (24/09/1395), f. 148r.

117. RIERA I SANS, *Els jueus de Girona*, p. 145.

it would make sense that Bonafilla would need a local representative to collect any debt she may have had in Girona. Perhaps the late husbands of these two women had owned this particular debt together or had done business together.

Based on our evidence, procurators were used to represent such women in a variety of legal ways, mostly in terms of collecting various debts owed. Since nearly all notarial contracts deal with the management of assets, whether this was the buying or selling of property or the lending and borrowing of money, it is not at all surprising that these were the activities that procurators performed for Jewish women in Girona. For example, on behalf of the Ravaya women and others, Taroç Deuslocrega collected payments owed due to various types of credit transactions, absolved and prorogued debts of numerous kinds, confirmed final payments of loans, and even settled a debt for Astruga, the widow of Astruch Ravaya, which she had with the local notary who wrote her late husband's inventory at the end of 1391 and beginning of 1392. In essence, procurators such as Taroç acted in whatever legal capacity these women required, including on their behalf in the great number of credit transactions they were involved in.

As discussed earlier, many of the credit operations of Jewish and conversa women were with Christian men. Were Jewish women resorting to procurators to represent them only in their deals with Christians? A closer look tells us that this is not the case. Jewish women were just as likely to act with or without a procurator in their business transactions with Christians in Girona and its surroundings. Bonafilla, the widow of Abraham Ravaya, for example, employed Taroç Deuslocrega to collect many of the debts owed to her or to the estate of her late husband by individual Christians in Girona. Nevertheless, she also appears regularly in the notarial registers on her own, be it granting an extension to the debt owed to her by a Christian, as she did in December of 1402 when Berenguer Canet requested a prorogation of his debt; paying debt she owed, such as to the Christian widow Nicolana in 1396; or receiving money owed to her by a local Christian, as in 1392, when she received 22 sous from Francesc Vidal.¹¹⁸ In other words, there are no discernible differences between the types of transactions widows employed procurators for and those in which they represented themselves.

118. AHG, Prot. Not., G1: 314, Pere Mut (03/05/1392), f. 150r-v.; G7: 70, Bernat Pintor (10/11/1396), n/f.; G6: 94, Francesc Vidal (13/12/1402), n/f.

The reason for the use of procurators may lie in the volume of transactions rather than in the type. Most of the evidence we have of the use of procurators comes from four women: Bonafilla, the widow of Abraham Ravaya; her daughter Astruga, who would later become the widow of Benet Mossé Falcó; her sister-in-law Astruga, widow of Astruch Ravaya; and Blanca, married first to Pere de Banyoles and later to Ferrer de Montcada. All four also appear on their own, managing their property and settling debts with both Christians and Jews. These women, therefore, seem to be making pragmatic choices about using procurators because of the volume of business they had to manage. Geography sometimes played a role as well. Of the widows who appear only once in the registers, some appointed procurators to conduct business with either a Jew or a Christian who lived in another city. This is the case of Alfaquina and her daughter, who appointed Astruch Benet to represent them in a case involving a Jew from Bisbal d'Empordà, a town 25 km southeast of Girona, where her late husband had property.¹¹⁹ Likewise, Preciosa, the widow of Bonjuha Alfaquim, a Jew from Perpignan, appointed Mahir Belshom as her procurator in Girona.

While the documentation allows us to come up with some preliminary conclusions about the appointment of procurators, there is very little we can say at this stage about the reasons for the dismissal of procurators. We have found three cancellations of a contract of procuratorship. Interestingly enough, they involve the same two women: Bonafilla, the widow of Abraham Ravaya, and her daughter Astruga, about whom we have talked so much already. On June 15, 1397, mother and daughter discharged Taroç Deuslocrega as their procurator after nearly six years of a professional relationship. The reasons for dismissing Taroç are not mentioned in the document.¹²⁰ In May of 1398, Bonafilla dispensed with the services of the Christian scribe Guillem de Ravató, who had been hired as her procurator sometime before.¹²¹ Her daughter Astruga would dispense with the services of Bonanat Domènec, a local lawyer, in October of 1399.¹²² In both these cases the women went by themselves to the notarial office and the dismissed procurators were noted as being absent. Both were later required to appear in person in front of the

119. AHG, Prot. Not., G6: 83, Francesc Vidal (22/09/1395), f. 147v.

120. AHG, Prot. Not., G6: 86, Francesc Vidal (15/06/1397), f. 64v.

121. AHG, Prot. Not., G6: 87, Francesc Vidal (17/05/1398), f. 21v.

122. AHG, Prot. Not., G6: 88, Francesc Vidal (30/10/1399), f. 113v–114r.

notary to confirm the dismissal. When the *conversa* Blanca, widow of Pere de Banyoles, dismissed her brother as her procurator, the document specified that the main reason was that Blanca's brother had fulfilled his obligations. The dismissals performed by Bonafilla and Astruga had no such clarification. It is possible that the trust that Bonafilla and Astruga had in their procurators had eroded for whatever reason. Further research into the Ravaya women will help us answer such questions.

The use of procurators by Jewish widows in Girona after the cataclysmic violence of 1391 was due to pragmatic choices which allowed these women to most effectively manage their familial assets. They were not influenced by ideological concepts of female modesty which emphasized that women should stay at home and refrain from engaging directly in business, nor were they trying to shift responsibility for fiscal decisions onto others due to lack of interest. Rather, as demonstrated by the examples of the sisters-in-law Bonafilla and Astruga, widows of Abraham and Astruch Ravaya, the sheer volume of business carried out by these women, as well as the geographically dispersed nature of it, meant that they had to make practical decisions to best protect the economic interests of their families. Using procurators to carry out some of these transactions shows the strong involvement of these widows and their desire to ensure their financial success.

4. Conclusions

On the whole, notarial records provide us with a rich understanding of Jewish and *converso* marriage, family life, and economic activities in late medieval Girona. On the basis of this documentation, we can explore questions related to the marital strategies of Jewish families, the dispersal of familial assets through dowry and marital donations as well as inheritance, the buying and selling of credit instruments, and the key roles that women played in these actions, as wives, mothers, daughters, and widows. But these records can also provide us with a window on far more than Jewish and *converso* marriage and family, particularly if we look at them in the context of the violence of 1391 and the crises surrounding the Disputation of Tortosa in the 1410s. Much of the scholarship which focuses on Catalan Jewish communities in the wake of 1391 highlights the difficulties that Jews and *conversos* faced as a result of this violence, as they struggled to confront a new reality in the face of death and mass conversion. Less work has been done as yet on the

impact that the Disputation of Tortosa had on these communities, although they were marked by increasing numbers of conversions and economic difficulties. Marriage and family documents demonstrate another layer to such tensions, as families negotiated the loss of members in the violence, as well as complications that arose due to conversion. The experiences of married couples such as Tolrana and Francesc Vilareig provide clear examples of such complexities. But at the same time, these documents demonstrate that the Jews and conversos in Girona did attempt to continue normative relationships against the backdrop of a very changed community. Jewish mothers provided dowries for their conversa daughters, mixed married couples tended to their property together, and converso parents included their Jewish children in their testaments.

In many ways, the violence of 1391 and the efforts to convert more Jews in the first few decades of the fifteenth century led to much re-alignment of communal and familial relations. The late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries were also difficult times for Christian communities throughout Catalonia, which still had not recovered from the economic downturn initiated by the Black Death and the bad harvests of the first half of the fourteenth century. While Philippe Wolf long ago made the point that we need to look at violence against Jews within the context of a wider social and economic crisis, much still needs to be done to incorporate the history of minority groups into the historical narrative of the Christian majority.¹²³ This is particularly relevant when studying women in the medieval past. Women of all religious backgrounds faced patriarchal ideologies that attempted to subjugate their position in society. Jewish and Christian women were subject to patriarchal structures that circumscribed their lives legally, politically, economically, religiously, and socially. At the same time, however, these women were clearly aware of how to manoeuvre within these systems to their own benefit and that of their families. As minorities living within a majority society, Jewish women had access to Christian and Jewish legal structures, and it is clear that they used both to their advantage. Although we have not discussed the means by which conversa women straddled both Christian and Jewish society in late medieval Catalonia here, we have elsewhere explored how these women made judicious choices regarding the legal structures they had at their disposal. Overall, we want to argue that more work needs to be done on comparing Jewish and Christian

123. WOLFF, 'The 1391 pogrom in Spain', p. 4–18.

women in late medieval Catalonia in order to understand fully how both communities weathered the crises of the late medieval period.

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