

# 694: The Accusation of Jewish Collaboration in the Records of the Seventeenth Council of Toledo

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**Abstract:** In the acts of the Seventeenth Council of Toledo (694), the Jews of the Visigothic realm were accused of having conspired against the king and the Christian order along with their North African co-religionists. Their punishment was dispossession and enslavement. The article investigates the living conditions of Visigothic Jews in the seventh century. These are considered both in the broader context of anti-Jewish measures in the wider Mediterranean and against the backdrop of the Muslim advance in North Africa.

## Source

Concilium Toletanum XVII (694), in: José Vives, *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos*, ed. José Vives, Tomás Marín Martínez, Gonzalo Martínez Díez, Barcelona, Madrid: CSIC, 1963, p. 524, 534–536, trans. Daniel G. König.

*[rex Egica] unde nostram gloriam summa ratio cogit valida illis intentione resistere, cum in aliquibus mundi partibus alios dicuntur contra suos christianos principes resultasse, plerosque vero iusto Dei iudicio a christicolis regibus interemptos fuisse; praesertim quia nuper manifestis confessionibus indubie invenimus hos in transmarinis partibus haebreos alios consuluisse, ut unanimiter contra genus christianum agerent praestolantes perditionis suae tempus, qualiter ipsius christianae fidei regulam depraverent.*

[King Egica] Hence, highest reason pushes our glory to resist them [i.e., the Jews] with firm intention, since it has been said that in other parts of the world some have rebelled against their Christian princes, and so many have been put to death by Christian kings through the righteous judgment of God. But above all, because we have lately ascertained beyond doubt from some confessions, that these Jews have advised the other Jews in the regions beyond the sea to act in unison against the Christian people, so that, in expectation of the downfall of their age, they may corrupt the order of the Christian faith as well as likewise corrupting the order of the Christian faith.

*[canon 8] (...) Et ideo quia plebs iudaeorum nequissima sacrilegi nota respersa et effusione sanguinis Christi cruenta ac multotiens iusiurandi profanatione noscitur maculosa, ut copiosa sunt eorum scelera, sic necesse est ut gravem sese incurrisse lugeant animadversionis iacturam, qui super talia sua scelera non solum statum ecclesiae perturbare maluerunt, verum*

[Canon 8] (...) And because it is known that the Jewish people have been defiled by sacrilege and stained by the brutal spilling of Christ's blood, as well as by repeated perjury and, moreover, that their crimes are numerous, it is also necessary that they [the Jews] should weep over the fact that they have deserved such terrible punishments, who, through their additional offences, have not only attempted to dishevel the stability of the Church, but have

*etiam ausu tyrannico inferre conati sunt ruinam patriae ac populo universo, ita nempe ut suum quasi tempus invenisse gaudentes diversas in catholicos exercerent strages. Unde crudelis et supertenda praesumptio crudeliori debet extirpari supplicio, et ita in eis ordinatum debet saevire iudicium quatenus usquequaque puniatur quod nequiter definitum praenoscutur.*

*Qua de causa dum in hac sancta synodo per aliarum causarum semitas dirigeremus cautissimos gressos, ex templo eorumdem infidorum conspiratio ad unionis nostrae pervenit auditus, eo quod non solum contra suam pollicitationem suorum ritum observatione tunicam fidei, qua eos per undam baptismatis induit sancta mater ecclesia maculaverint, sed et regni fastigium sibi, ut praemissum est, per conspirationem usurpare maluerint.*

*Quod infaustum facinus dum ex ipsorum professionibus noster plenissime nosset conventus huius decreti nostri sententia eos decernimus irrevocabili feriri censura, scilicet ut ex iussione piissimi et religiosissimi principis nostri Egicanis, qui zelo Domini accensus et sanctae fidei ardore compulsus non solum iniuriam crucis Christi vindicare vult sed et gentis suae ac patriae exitium, quod fore illi inferendum saevius decrevere, acrius stirpare intendit, suis omnibus rebus nudati, et ipse resculae fisci viribus sociatae tam eorumdem perfidorum personae quam uxorum eorum ac filiorum vel reliquae posteritatis a locis propriis exulatae per cunctas Spaniae provincias perpetuae servituti subactae, his quibus eos iusserit servituros largitae, maneat usquequaque dispersae: nec quoquo pacto eis in infidelitatis suae obstinatione durantibus ad ingenuitatis statum detur quandoque occasio revertendi, quos numerosa examussim facinorum suorum macula denotavit.*

endeavoured, with tyrannical lusts, to bring the fatherland and the entire people to ruin, to the effect that they worked towards the destruction of the Catholics, joyfully thinking that their time has now come. Therefore, this devious and astounding insolence must be punished with severe penalties, and in this way they should be duly condemned, so that what has been deviously concocted will be punished.

And while we in this holy synod, busy with other matters, were making slow progress, news suddenly reached our assembly of a conspiracy on the part of these unbelievers, so that by performing their rites, not only had they broken the promise they made when they put on the garment of faith with which Holy Mother Church had clothed them in the baptismal waters, but also, as we have just indicated, they wanted to seize the dignity of royal power through a conspiracy.

And after this our assembly learned of this terrible crime in every detail by means of their own confessions, we order that by virtue of our decree they shall suffer irrevocable punishment, as follows: according to the command of our most pious and religious prince, king Egica, who is inflamed with the zeal of the Lord and impelled by the ardour of the holy faith, not only to avenge the injustice perpetrated on the cross of Christ, but to prevent in every way the downfall of his people and his fatherland, which the latter have insidiously sought to bring about, they shall be deprived of all their goods and even their smallest possessions shall be given to the men of the fisc, just as the traitors, their wives, children, and descendants, shall be uprooted from their places, distributed among all the provinces of Spain, consigned to perpetual servitude, given into the service of those to whom the king assigns them, and remain dispersed for ever; and that those who have been completely stained by their numerous crimes cannot, under any pretext, shall not be given the opportunity to regain their status as free men while they persist in the stubbornness of their unbelief.

## Authorship & Work

[§1] This source passage is an excerpt from the acts of the Seventeenth Council of Toledo, convened in 694 by the Visigothic king, Egica (r. 687–701). In the time following the Visigothic conversion from a form of Gothic Arianism to Catholicism at the Third Council of Toledo (589), such councils had been held regularly, albeit at irregular intervals, in the capital of the Visigothic kingdom. In the post-Roman Frankish kingdom, Italy and Anglo-Saxon Britain, kings presided over councils only occasionally, as did, for example, the Frankish king, Clovis (r. 481–511), over the Council of Orléans (511). In the Visigothic kingdom of Spain, the council was always held in Toledo and, after 589, developed into an assembly where the king and the clergy interacted with each other in order to decide on the political and religious matters of the realm. In their degree of centralism, these Visigothic councils were unsurpassed in the entire post-Roman Latin West.<sup>1</sup>

[§2] As is demonstrated by the source under discussion, these councils began with a programmatic address by the king, which was recorded in writing in the council records. This was followed by the rulings of the bishops present. Divided into canons, these records respond to the issues raised by the king, confirming at least in part his demands or wishes. However, the councils should not be considered as bodies that merely rubber-stamped royal policies. Instead, the extant acts should rather be seen as the product of negotiations that had taken place between the ruler and the bishops on certain issues. In the case of the deposition of King Wamba (r. 672–680), for example, the bishops seem to have played an active role in legitimising the succeeding ruler Ervigius (r. 680–687).<sup>2</sup>

## Content & Source Context

[§3] A major part of the discussions at the Seventeenth Council of Toledo centred around the accusations that the Jews of the kingdom had organised a conspiracy against the Visigothic kingship and the Christian order of the realm. This was to be punished with extremely harsh penalties which included the expropriation and enslavement of all Jews living in the Visigothic kingdom.

[§4] It is important to consider this action against the Jews by reference to the broader framework of Visigothic religious policy towards people of other faiths in the period after the conversion of 589. Although the kingdom had enacted anti-Jewish legislation already before this event, it marks a threshold: from here on, measures that allowed for the deprivation of privileges, or even the forced conversion of Jews intensified. These measures are recorded in both royal legislation, and in the records of the Toledan general councils.<sup>3</sup> Particularly harsh action against Jews occurred during the reigns of Sisebut (r. 612–620), Chintila (r. 636–640), Chindasuinth (r. 641–652), Reccesvinth (r. 649–672), Ervigius, and Egica. These were supported by episcopal decisions at several councils, such as Toledo III (589), IV (633), V (638), IX (655), X (656), XII (681), and XVII (694).<sup>4</sup>

[§5] Research has yet to agree on the extent to which such statements and provisions allow scholars to assess the actual situation of the Jews in the Visigothic kingdom. For example, it is not clear how many Jews lived under Visigothic rule: were they a small minority, or what Aloysius Ziegler called “a powerful, aggressive body, propounding their doctrines, eager to

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<sup>1</sup> Collins, *Arab Conquest*, p. 6; on the councils: Ziegler, *Church and State*; King, *Law and Society*, pp. 15–16, 122–158.

<sup>2</sup> Concilium Toletanum XII (681), ed. Vives, pp. 381–388; Teillet, *Déposition*, pp. 99–113.

<sup>3</sup> Görres, *Rekared und das Judentum*, p. 293; Ziegler, *Church and State*, p. 189; Schäferdiek, *Kirche*, p. 231; Thompson, *Goths in Spain*, p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> For the individual measures, see König, *Bekehrungsmotive*, pp. 407–413; Dumézil, *Racines chrétiennes*, pp. 120–130.

proselytize,” by which Christians may have felt threatened?<sup>5</sup> The repeated re-issuing of the same provisions would seem to point to non-compliance and a discrepancy between the legal provisions and their implementation, even among clerics. This has led some researchers to claim that the measures taken did not necessarily find favour with the Christian population of the Visigothic kingdom.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the mere existence of these provisions allows us to agree with Raúl González-Salineró when he spoke of an “atmosphere of social aggression and hate towards the Jews.”<sup>7</sup> Anti-Jewish measures had also been enacted in the Merovingian kingdom under Dagobert (r. 623/629–639), and in Byzantium under Emperor Heraclius (r. 610–641). However, the Visigothic regulations find no counterpart, either in the Latin West or in the Byzantium of the seventh and eighth centuries, in terms of their sever and systematic nature.<sup>8</sup> Paul David King is probably correct to assert that the Visigothic elites largely identified *regnum* and *ecclesia* with each other after the confessional change of 589. As such, anti-Judaism can be described as a systemic component of Visigothic rule from this point onwards.<sup>9</sup>

[§6] At the Seventeenth Council of Toledo, the Jews of the kingdom were specifically accused of having cooperated with other Jewish groups across the sea (*in transmarinis partibus*) to overthrow their rulers, as had allegedly been done in other parts of the Mediterranean Christian world. Indeed, from around 694, a threat to the Visigothic kingdom from overseas certainly existed, or at least could be expected in the near future. In around 74/694, a new Muslim governor, Ḥassān b. al-Nu‘mān, was installed in North Africa. With the help of a large force of troops, he eliminated the last Berber and Byzantine resistance to the Muslim conquests in present-day Tunisia over the next ten years. In doing so, Ḥassān b. al-Nu‘mān created the conditions for the Muslims to advance to the Straits of Gibraltar under the governorship of Mūsā b. Nuṣayr, one of the future conquerors of the Iberian Peninsula (*al-Andalus*).<sup>10</sup> However, it is unclear what the Visigothic elite knew about these events in North Africa in 694, i.e. whether they drew a connection between the Muslim advance and their anti-Jewish policy. That king Wamba (r. 672–680) repelled an attack by a Muslim fleet, as is claimed in the ninth-century chronicle of Alfonso III (r. 866–910), is disputed in research.<sup>11</sup>

[§7] It is possible that king Egica had some knowledge of North African–Iberian relations: in a provision, he forbade Jews who persisted in their faith to go to the wharfs to engage in overseas trade.<sup>12</sup> That said, it remains unclear whether he had information on the Muslim expansion, whether he could even identify Muslims as a religious group distinct from Jews, or whether he connected his allegation of a Jewish conspiracy to the Muslim advance in North Africa.

## Contextualisation, Analysis & Interpretation

[§8] Egica was not the only ruler to have taken measures against Jews in response to an alleged threat to his rule. The so-called *Chronicle of Fredegar*, for example, reports that the Byzantine emperor, Heraclius learned through astrological readings that his rule would soon be overthrown “by circumcised peoples” (*a circumcisis gentibus*). This source reports that Heraclius identified this threat with the Jews. In consequence, he forced them to convert to

<sup>5</sup> Ziegler, *Church and State*, p. 197.

<sup>6</sup> Thompson, *Goths in Spain*, p. 316.

<sup>7</sup> González-Salineró, *Catholic Anti-Judaism*, p. 125.

<sup>8</sup> Thompson, *Goths in Spain*, p. 316.

<sup>9</sup> King, *Law and Society*, pp. 130–144, esp. p. 132.

<sup>10</sup> Dhanūn Ṭāhā, *Muslim Conquest*, p. 69–76.

<sup>11</sup> *Chronique d’Alphonse III*, ed. Bonnaz, chap. 1,3, p. 33. See Riess, *Narbonne*, p. 190.

<sup>12</sup> *Liber iudiciorum sive lex Visigothorum*, ed. Zeumer (MGH LL nat. Germ. 1), chap. XII, 2, 18: Flavius Egica rex: De perfidia Iudeorum, p. 427: “scilicet ut nec ad cataplum pro transmarinis commerciis faciendis ulterius audeant properare.”

Christianity in all the provinces of his kingdom, and also sent a request to the Merovingian king Dagobert that he should have all the Jews of his kingdom compulsorily baptised, a request which Dagobert is said to have fulfilled immediately.<sup>13</sup> Among the victims of the latter's coercive measures were probably Jews who had fled to Gaul to escape the forced conversions of the Visigoth king, Sisebut, which are mentioned in the acts of the Fourth Council of Toledo.<sup>14</sup>

[§9] It is recorded for the same period of the 630s and 640s that Jews were accused of collaborating with the Muslims as they slowly took control of North Africa. The monk Maximus Confessor (d. 662), residing in North Africa, criticised the forced baptisms ordered by Heraclius between 634 and 640—the order probably having been given in Carthage around 632. Nevertheless, he accused the Jews of welcoming and actively supporting the coming of the Muslims.<sup>15</sup> The *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*, a Greek text probably written around 634, allegedly by a Jew who had recently converted to Christianity, gives a similar account. It details the joy of certain Jews when Muslims murdered a Byzantine official, and claims that Jews identified the Byzantine Empire with the fourth beast in the vision of the Prophet Daniel. Furthermore, it emphasises that Muḥammad, who is described as an armed false prophet from the desert, could in no way be the Messiah, to the effect that the Jews would probably have to recognise Jesus Christ as the real Messiah after all.<sup>16</sup> In connection with the Iberian Peninsula, there are also indications of possible collaborations between Visigothic Jews and the Muslim conquerors of North Africa beyond the conspiracy theory of the Seventeenth Council of Toledo (694). According to the anonymous chronicle *Aḥbār maḡmū'a*, a source whose dating has been strongly disputed, the Muslims acted as follows after moving into Iberian cities:

“When they found Jews in a settlement, they brought them to the regional capital and left a group of Muslims with them, while most moved on. They did this in Granada, Elvira, but not in Málaga or Rayya, because they did not find any Jews there.”<sup>17</sup>

[§10] Set against a backdrop of forced baptisms under Byzantine rule, and the exceedingly harsh Visigothic legislation, most scholars consider it plausible that the Jews of both North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula, if not welcomed and supported the Muslim takeover, at least did nothing to actively prevent it.<sup>18</sup> It is only Norman Roth, who sees here a form of essentially anti-Semitic mythology, which—especially in nationalist Spanish discourses of later periods—attempts to lay the blame for the Muslim invasion of the Iberian Peninsula on the Jews.<sup>19</sup> In view of the Byzantine and Visigothic treatment of Jewish populations, a lack of resistance to the Muslim takeover and indeed collaboration with the new elites on the part of some Jews seems entirely understandable. Acts of collaboration are also recorded for numerous non-Jewish

<sup>13</sup> *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii scholastici*, ed. Krusch (MGH SS rer. Merov. 2), lib. IV, chap. 65, p. 153: “Cum esset litteris nimius aeruditus, astralogus effecetur; per quod cernens, a circumcisis gentibus diuino noto imperium esse uastandum, legationem ad Dagobertum regem Francorum dirigens, petens, ut omnes ludeos regni sui ad fidem catolecam baptizandum preciperit. Quod protenus Dagobertus empleuit. Aeraglius per omnea prouincias imperiae talem idemque facere decreuit. Ignorabat, unde haec calametas contra imperium surgerit.”; *Die Chronik Fredegars*, trans. Abel, pp. 36–38. These forced conversions are also documented in *Gesta Dagoberti I.*, ed. Krusch (SS rer. Merov. 2), chap. 24, p. 409. See Esders, Herakleios, pp. 239–311.

<sup>14</sup> Concilium Toletanum IV (633), can. 57, ed./trans. Vives, p. 210.

<sup>15</sup> Kaegi, *Muslim Expansion*, pp. 84–85, with quotations of primary sources in English translation.

<sup>16</sup> Edition and French translation by Dagron, Déroche, *Juifs et chrétiens*, pp. 17–248. For the source see Kaegi, *Initial Byzantine Reactions*, pp. 141–142; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 55–61.

<sup>17</sup> *Aḥbār maḡmū'a*, ed. Lafuente y Alcántara, p. 12 (AR): “wa-kānū idā alqū l-Yahūd bi-balda ḡammūhum ilā madīnat al-balad wa-tarakū ma'ahum min al-muslimīn tā'ifa wa-maḡā 'azam al-nās fa-fa'alū ḡālika bi-Ġarnāta madīnat al-Bīra wa-lam yaf'alū ḡālika bi-Māliqa madīnat Rayya li-annahum lam yaḡidū bi-hā Yahūdan (...).”

<sup>18</sup> Dubnov, *History*, pp. 524–527; Mu'nis, *Faḡr al-Andalus*, pp. 410–412; Thompson, *Goths in Spain*, p. 319; Ashtor, *Jews*, pp. 3–41; Kaegi, *Muslim Expansion*, p. 84.

<sup>19</sup> Roth, *The Jews and the Muslim Invasion*, p. 145.

groups, so that one can by no means assume solely Jewish support for the Muslim invasion. Among other explanations, Greek, Latin, and Arabic sources of various hues make it clear that, time and again, collaboration with the new elites was essential to the success of the Muslim expansion.<sup>20</sup>

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### **Edition(s) & Translation(s)**

Concilium Toletanum XVII (694), in: José Vives, *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos*, ed. José Vives, Tomás Marín Martínez, Gonzalo Martínez Díez, Barcelona, Madrid: CSIC, 1963, pp. 524–536.

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<sup>20</sup> On acts of collaboration during the Muslim invasion of the Iberian Peninsula, see König, 711: Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam; and König, 711–745: Ibn al-Qūṭīyya. On collaboration as a factor in Muslim expansion as a whole, see, inter alia, König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, p. 47. On various explanatory models for the success of the Muslim expansion, see Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests*, pp. 48–65; Noth, *Der Frühe Islam*, pp. 58–73; Donner, *The Islamic Conquests*, pp. 28–50; Collins, *The Arab Conquest*, pp. 5–7.

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