

SEARCHING FOR THE SECRETS OF NATURE

THE LIFE AND WORKS
OF DR. FRANCISCO HERNÁNDEZ

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HERNÁNDEZ IN MEXICO

EXILE AND CENSORSHIP?

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The year 1570, when Francisco Hernández's expedition to the New World was about to begin, provided a brief spell of welcome relief from the series of economic and military crises suffered by the government and the people of Philip II's Spain. As Fernand Braudel puts it: "By a happy coincidence, all her problems were temporarily but simultaneously out of the way in these years 1570-1571. . . . [Even] the anti-Spanish policy skilfully engineered by Cosimo seemed to be in eclipse."¹ It was on March 1, 1571, that Hernández presented his title of *protomédico* at the palace of the viceroy in Veracruz before the High Court of Mexico.² In October of the same year the fleet of the Holy League crushed the Ottomans at the Battle of Lepanto, a victory that was surprising in many respects, but, according to Braudel, "if we look beneath the events, beneath that glittering layer on the surface of history, we shall find that the ripples from Lepanto spread silently, inconspicuously, far and wide."³

The Spain that Hernández knew suffered from internal conflicts that affected ideologies as much as government and external conflicts that affected the Atlantic as much as the Mediterranean. José Ignacio Fortea Pérez has unearthed a series of documents that help to explain the underlying

causes of the deepening crisis during the reign of Philip II. I am concerned here with the factors of that crisis that coincided with Hernández's time in Mexico: "On April 28, 1573 a royal memorandum was read to the provincial deputies, setting out the financial burdens upon the throne, which were a direct consequence of the necessity of having to make fiscal provision—by means of exchanges and contracts, at excessive interest and cost—for ever-increasing costs, charges, and expenses in such matters."⁴ One equally interesting fact here is that the corresponding memoranda presented by the ministers omitted any evidence or proof that the "politics of gaining control began with the deputies."⁵ A consequence of this situation was the pitiful financial support allotted to Dr. Hernández, and as for the alternative of "gaining control," there was little he could do, despite his impressive new title of *protomédico*, once he arrived in Veracruz: "The authorities found that the work of the *protomédico*, when it came to exercising his legal functions and medical duties, could damage their own interests. [Hernández] struggled with the High Court, fought with the viceroy, battled generally with every authority that tried to curb his prerogatives and powers."⁶ His precarious eco-

nomic situation, his near begging for funds, and the frankness with which he addressed Philip II leave a suspicion that it was not just the king but the administration as well that was punishing Hernández by granting him such wretched financial support and by doing nothing at all to help him satisfy his longing to be brought back to Spain.⁷

We should remember, too, that the state bankruptcy under Philip II opened the way for the municipal oligarchies to play a very active role in the distribution of revenues and the approval of ordinary, and extraordinary, services.⁸ The expedition of Francisco Hernández could be considered a required service, and as such, there could be no doubt that the Crown did not have sole authority over the project. Hence in the period of Hernández's expedition, "the viewpoints of the Cortes and the municipalities did not always coincide . . . [and] the main resistance to the royal policy statements did not come from the Cortes, but from the individual municipalities affected."⁹ Curiously, and perhaps not coincidentally, the agreement based on mutual concessions was signed in 1577, the very year of Hernández's return to Spain.

With this political context in mind, let us explore the ideological circles in which Hernández moved. In most of the studies devoted to him, four facts about his personal life are repeated: his probable Jewish origin; his established connections with the cradle of Iberian Erasmianism, Alcalá de Henares; his well-documented residence at the monastery of Guadalupe, the center of clandestine Judaism; and his steadfast friendship with one of the most prominent humanists or Erasmians of the sixteenth century, Benito Arias Montano, celebrated in the verse epistle that Hernández addressed to him.¹⁰ But naturally the stature of Hernández as a scientist attracts studies of him and his work that tend to neglect such political and ideological factors as irrelevant to his botanical accomplishments.

The purpose of this essay on Hernández is to try to clear the field and to emphasize the consequences that could be caused by his close contact with the most revolutionary ideology of his time, Erasmianism (in the widest-ranging sense of the term), and his connections with the most stigmatized creed in Counter-Reformation Spain: Judaism. Germán Somolinos noted years ago the need to follow this line of

inquiry and remarked on the disappointing lack of documentary evidence that might have cast light on some of these issues.¹¹

In my view, there is no doubt that Hernández himself felt that his extended sojourn in Mexico was an exile, as suggested by the evidence of his letters to Philip II, as we shall see. It is worthwhile to remember, as Rafael Chabrán has described above, that Hernández was educated at Alcalá, which supported two chairs of medicine, and that as far as humanism was concerned at Alcalá, "there seems to have been a profound correspondence between the welcome reception accorded to nominalism and that other novelty that characterized the theological school at Alcalá, the direct study of the Bible with the aid of the original languages of the Old and New Testaments."¹² In the enterprise of the Polyglot Bible, the leading philologist, Antonio de Nebrija, was thought more appropriate than a theologian to "cast light on the names of the plants and animals that appear in the Bible." As Bataillon puts it, "Almost all of the terms upon which Nebrija shone his philological light belong to what could be called the field of biblical *realia*."¹³ The effects of such a milieu on Hernández will be my focus from here on in as I develop my hypothesis that Hernández was possibly exiled and his work probably censored. These are my four points of departure: (1) parallels between the undertaking of the controversial Polyglot Bibles by Nebrija and Arias Montano and Hernández's enterprise in New Spain; (2) the implications of Hernández's spell at Guadalupe; (3) how the expurgation of the work of one who was considered a luminary in his own lifetime could be justified; (4) what could have caused Hernández's desire for repatriation to be refused.

Parallels between the Textual Projects of Nebrija, Arias Montano, and Hernández

Hernández went to New Spain with an exceptional scientific assignment: to name an unknown botanical reality. To all normal appearances there was nothing extraordinary about it, but the very act of naming is, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, an act of creation, as Hernández would have been continually reminded at Alcalá. Given the intellectual affinities of Hernández, the result of his identification and nam-

ing of the *realia* of the New World was likely to be a heterodox version of Spain's overseas imperial ambitions.

The nominalist theory to which Hernández had been exposed at Alcalá supposed that abstract ideas are nothing without rational beings; general ideas do not exist without general signs. This theory is opposed to linguistic realism, which maintained that abstract ideas do have a real existence, hence that universals do exist independent of the things in which they are made manifest. Partisan adherence to one or the other of these ideologies was no trivial question and had already undergone attacks by Erasmus in his *Praise of Folly*:

And then the most subtle subtleties are rendered even more subtle by the various "ways" or types of scholastic theology, so that you could work your way out of a labyrinth sooner than out of the intricacies of the Realists, Nominalists, Thomists, Albertists, Occamists, and Scotists—and I still haven't mentioned all the sects, but only the main ones.

In all of these there is so much erudition, so much difficulty, that I think the apostles themselves would need to be inspired by a different spirit if they were forced to match wits on such points with this new breed of theologians.¹⁴

Contemporary with Hernández was the grammarian Francisco Sánchez de las Brozas, who dispensed his wisdom at the University of Salamanca and had to face the Inquisition as a result, in 1584 and 1600.¹⁵ Brozas recognized Nebrija as his predecessor, the difference between them being that "Nebrija's approach consisted of *describing* the phenomena of language by relying on the authority of the classics, while Brozas focused on exploring the *causes* underlying those phenomena."¹⁶ Brozas has been called, with some justification, the precursor of linguistic rationalism and the school of Port-Royal.¹⁷ Hernández was closer to Nebrija's position in the study of "signs," but he allows us to glimpse a rationalist tendency founded in the priority he grants to the "use" of names.¹⁸ So, then, the role of language and the importance that Hernández attached to it arise from a conception of the world that departs from official Counter-Reformation presuppositions. There is therefore a contradiction right away between the spirit of the command given to Hernández

by his monarch, the champion of the Counter-Reformation, and the spirit that guided Hernández as he applied that command to matters of language.

Arias Montano partook of the same theoretical information as Hernández as far as language was concerned, and in the poem addressed to Arias Montano, Hernández confirmed the ideological affinity between the two men. The explicit appeal with which he begins the poem includes four commendatory phrases that I italicize here:

Montano, do not scorn *your old colleague*, who has
already docked at Jerez, who first saw
you in the land of Romulus and who has come, over the
years, to recognize in you
a rare miracle of nature, honor of your people,
an ornament of our time. I have come here now to see
you once more,
long after that retirement in which the nine Sisters
taught you, Montano, and filled your mind with the
causes of things.¹⁹

Thus Hernández addressed Arias Montano as a dear friend, "old colleague," and defined the uniqueness of Arias Montano as "a rare miracle of nature" and as the "honor of your people" and "an ornament of our time"; later in the poem he adds:

I will not say a word, O Montano,
concerning our private affairs, so that by my silence
you may know
how indebted to you are these writings of mine, and
how much
gratitude I owe you, and what glory awaits our
efforts.²⁰

Given that Arias Montano had had to face the Inquisition, this laudatory poem of Hernández as a declaration of an ideological affinity gives us grounds to presume that the court would not have taken kindly to the relationship between these two humanists. Basically, it was the role performed by Arias Montano in the edition of the Polyglot Bible (the *Biblia regia*, 1572–74) that was the reason for his brush with the Inquisition and with Philip II himself. In summary, Arias Montano and Hernández both took part in major projects with enormous linguistic, scientific, moral, and political significance; the Polyglot Bible project was destined to seek

the true interpretation of the Christian *book par excellence*, and Hernández's botanical compilation was—in a figurative sense—the literary equivalent of the Book of Genesis in Philip's empire.

Granted that it could not have been the scientific spirit of Hernández that was called into question at Philip II's court, it necessarily has to be this humanist's ideology that explains his enforced isolation from his country and the suppression and expurgation to which his work was subjected.²¹ As we shall see below, in the correspondence with Philip II, the king waged psychological warfare against the sick and weak Hernández in an effort to take his work away from him; it looks as if the king had lost confidence in his protomédico and wanted to separate the author from his work, that is, separate the creator from his creation.

José M. López Piñero mentions one facet of the era of Philip II that is relevant here:

The protomedicato succeeded in being converted into a *controlling organization* for the practice of medicine and measures in the interest of public health. . . . It promoted the *institutionalization* of the chemical laboratory and the "pharmacy" of the Escorial, as well as the botanical garden and the menagerie at Aranjuez . . . and the first modern scientific expedition, which researched Mexican natural history from 1571 to 1577 under the direction of Francisco Hernández.²² (My italics.)

In view of the narrowmindedness of Philip's era, which would want to turn the protomedicato into a "controlling organization," as López Piñero so rightly puts it, the censorship of the work of a protomédico with such close ties to Erasmianism and Judaism certainly falls within the realm of possibility. What is more, since royal intervention was a determinant in the saga of the Polyglot Bible on account of the exploration of its *realia*, it would hardly be strange if the same thing happened with the exploration of the *realia* of the New World.

Let us remember, furthermore, that the scientific discoveries made by Hernández cannot be separated from his mode of expression, especially at a time when everyone in his circle was attuned to Nebrija's work. As Francisco Rico says, Nebrija declared that "a knowledge of language . . . was . . . the foundation of our *religion* and the Christian

republic,' as much as 'law . . . medicine . . . the humanities . . . ' or 'the study of *Holy Scripture*'" (my italics).²³ Religion, law, Holy Scripture, and science are, in effect, the four pillars that propped up Philip II's convalescent empire. Francisco Hernández, just like Nebrija, gave precedence to the pragmatic and didactic functions of linguistic expression and would tolerate neither the isolation of science nor its treatment as "pure" science. These two great thinkers shared many interests that arise from the priority they gave to language as an instrument of power.

The immensely ambitious project that Nebrija brought with him from Italy to Spain was "to combat the barbarism of all the sciences with the weapon of grammar."²⁴ Although, to be sure, Hernández was no linguistic theorist, he did put Nebrija's theories into practice. Fernando Martínez Cortés observed that Hernández noticed shrewdly that "the names of medicinal plants are derived from the principal action for which the plant is known";²⁵ in other words, the king's botanist did not restrict himself to recording a name without digging into the etymological meaning and the reason for it—as Brozas stipulated in *Minerva*.

Erasmus expressed the need for care in linguistic expression and warned of its social power in *Lingua*, in which he declared that "the flesh has its tongue, but the spirit has a different tongue."²⁶ And in *Praise of Folly* he developed the theme of linguistic expression as an act of creation, or desecration in the case of sins committed against the word. With Nebrija and Erasmus of Rotterdam, Spanish interest in philology was aroused. According to Sáenz-Badillos: "It cannot be said that Spanish philologists received from Erasmus the impulse necessary to come close to the Bible. Nebrija was already doing this kind of work before the Dutchman felt he had the linguistic competence to undertake such a task. All the same, Erasmus is something of a convergence point, the one to which all our humanists turn."²⁷ Thus the impact of Nebrija, that of the linguistic theory of Erasmus, and that of friendship with Arias Montano are all aspects of the life of Hernández that we would be very unwise to underestimate in any search for answers to questions about his life. This is especially true considering that the unknown—the recently conquered paradise—was to be shaped by the words of Hernández. He would be the

new Adam going in search of curative plants and as such would be charged with the task of naming in credible words a new and incredible reality to present to the king.

At Guadalupe

Alcalá de Henares and Guadalupe were the two cultural nurseries in which Hernández was nurtured, and there was an active cultural interchange between them. Formal evidence of an affinity between the two institutions is a document published on May 3, 1503, that records the "receipt of the work of Homilías de Orígenes by fray Juan de Constantina who lends it to the monastery of Guadalupe to aid in the publication of the polyglot Bible."²⁸ The textual project of the Polyglot Bible was just one of many points of contact. Rafael Chabrán has explored the importance of Alcalá in our understanding of Hernández, and to understand the parallel importance of Hernández's spell at the monastery of Guadalupe, one should recall that "the internal life of the converted Jew (the *converso*) and his reactions to a hostile environment can be exemplified by what happened at the monastery of Guadalupe, where clandestine judaizing took place, and the prior, on one occasion, called upon the rabbis of Jerusalem to determine if they were following the orthodox rite."²⁹ Eugenio Sarraablo Aguares, Antonio Correa, and fray Arturo Alvarez say that documents have survived that refer to "the examination which took place in 1485 within the Monastery of Guadalupe against fray Diego de Marchena, Jew, and fray Diego de Burgos, Judaizer, and several other brothers of the order of Jerome."³⁰ Luis de la Cuadra, for his part, compiled a total of 1,337 documents that refer to the everyday life and running of this enclave, and he emphasizes its political, social, and cultural importance.

Half a century before the arrival of Francisco Hernández at Guadalupe, one man was exiled: fray Eugenio, "the pharmacist," who was banished for life by Hernando de Talavera, archbishop of Granada, in 1510. The reason was that Eugenio, with the support of the reputable fray Luis de Madrid, took part in the burning of a document issued by the General Chapter of the order of the Hieronymites and declaring that the lay brothers did not have the same privileges as ordained monks, except in matters involving the

rites of the priesthood.³¹ Neither was fray Luis free of all blemish despite being a member of the royal *protomedicato*. As Sicroff comments: "In curious contrast to the vague depositions . . . were the surprisingly specific recollections by some monks of events which went back many years. Fray Diego de Guadalupe, for example, was able to recall finding fray Diego de Marchena and fray Luis de Madrid talking together about eighteen years ago and hearing the former use the expression 'asi vos vala el criador,' an utterance apparently deemed Jewish."³²

As early as the fourteenth century, on Christmas Day, 1340, Alfonso XI granted a royal privilege "for the founding of the Church of Santa María in Guadalupe, and explained that he was mandating a much larger construction than the hermitage that was already there because it was virtually in ruins, and thanked Our Lady for the victory at Tarifa against the Moorish kings of Morocco and Fez."³³ This monastery was thus founded as a standard of Christianity and symbol of the belief in the superiority of one creed above others. From the first few years after its foundation, the monastery enjoyed royal and papal protection.³⁴ Under the reign of the Catholic monarchs, in 1479, a declaration of privilege confirmed by royal decree expressly required that the solemn feast of the Conception be observed in December every year.³⁵ On May 8, 1559, one year after Hernández had arrived at Guadalupe, Philip II himself issued a decree "ordering those of the Service of the Province of Toledo that this year 1559 they should not charge for service to the monastery of Guadalupe, and if any had been charged they should be reimbursed, and confirms the decree of the emperor Charles, given in Burgos on 2 June, 1542."³⁶

Guy Beaujouan, who emphasizes the long-standing importance of the monastery at Guadalupe in materia medica, mentions how the Catholic queen Isabella had a special liking for this monastery, choosing her personal and family physicians from there. The same author points to fray Luis de Madrid and to the renowned doctor Juan de Guadalupe, member of the tribunal of the royal *protomedicato* of Castile, in addition to Alfonso Fernández de Guadalupe, another examiner for the *protomedicato*; Dr. Nicolás de Soto, who practiced in Guadalupe from 1478 to 1483 and became physician to the royal family between 1487 and 1504; and

Dr. Juan de la Parra, a native of Guadalupe who practiced there from 1480 to 1488 and became the queen's physician in 1504.³⁷

One might emphasize that in the medical sphere Nicholas V, on August 2, 1451, "granted that the lay brothers who had studied medicine before entering the Order were permitted, under the authority of the prior, to practice and to cure the sick in the hospitals, etc., on condition that they did so free of charge."³⁸ The prestige of medicine at Guadalupe attracted qualified doctors to the monastery and prompted the expansion and improvement of the physical and cultural facilities at the whole site.³⁹

Beaujouan states that from the mid-fifteenth century the papacy authorized the monks at Guadalupe to study medicine and surgery, but, he adds, references to the controversial subject of dissections at Guadalupe are inconclusive. Yet some scraps of indisputable evidence do survive, one of which is the testimony of fray Gabriel de Talavera, who spoke in 1597 of "dissections which the surgeons were permitted to carry out by the indulgence of His Holiness."⁴⁰ Of the other two pieces of textual evidence cited by the learned Beaujouan, one is the famous account of Hernández and the chameleon he dissected during his time at Guadalupe, and the other is a well-known letter from Eugenio de Salazar, who describes meat-eating sailors "wielding the knife with the same dexterity they would have if they had spent all their lives practicing anatomy at Guadalupe or Valencia" (381). López Piñero states that Hernández "practiced dissections of human cadavers at Guadalupe in accordance with the principles of the movement spearheaded by Vesalius."⁴¹ Arana Amurrio adds information of great interest for the study of Hernández's ideological, cultural, and scientific development during his time at Guadalupe, from 1558 to 1562, noting that "students of medicine and surgery lived together[,] . . . from the foundation of the School of Grammar by the Catholic Kings at the end of the fifteenth century, with students of grammar."⁴² And as far as Hernández himself was concerned:

Of major importance for a possible understanding of the details of anatomical methods in Guadalupe are the references to what was going on at one time in the hospitals. In this context the work of Francisco Hernández makes

an extremely valuable contribution. . . . [He] was "doctor of the monastery and hospital" and "those who attended practicals in medicine, surgery, and dissection" practiced dissections with him. . . . Hernández generally refers to a group of doctors . . . and only rarely does he speak in the first person ("the autopsies or dissections that I performed while in Guadalupe . . .").

The anatomy performed by Hernández and Micó should be seen as inspired by Vesalius. . . . Thus when Hernández speaks of the uterus he says "Its shape (based on the evidence of the one I saw at Guadalupe where we anatomized the cadaver of a pregnant woman) was round but elongated, quite different from those of cows, goats, or sheep, contrary to the appearance in Galen."⁴³

Although we are fortunate to have this glimpse of Hernández performing dissections at Guadalupe, the task of tracing the humanistic works that he might have consulted at the school of grammar is unfortunately hampered because, when 8,260 volumes were transferred from the library at Guadalupe to Cáceres, a great number of them were destroyed on the orders of the Commission for the Sale of Church Lands of 1838—actually the result of a decree of October 1, 1820, that suppressed religious communities and mandated the seizure of their goods by the state.⁴⁴ Surviving biographical information and studies of the most renowned luminaries with Jewish connections—Arias Montano and Sánchez de las Brozas among them—are thus all the more valuable.⁴⁵

For Arana Amurrio it is still a mystery that "an order that had suffered such monumental scandal [at the hands of the Inquisition] should be . . . the choice of monarchs such as Charles I and, especially, Philip II, to run the monasteries most intimately connected to them personally: Yuste and the Escorial" (196). It is equally paradoxical that, when the Inquisition visited itself upon Guadalupe, doctors and surgeons were conspicuously absent. Arana Amurrio suggests that "a possible reason could be that the doctors, surgeons, and pharmacists of the Monastery of Guadalupe were utterly absorbed in their work, one of the most, if not the most absorbing of which involved the Hieronymites. . . . But even so, it is hard to imagine that they were totally unaware of the large population of crypto-Jews established right inside the monastery. There must be some other factor that could

explain this apparent immunity" (201). In sum, by the time Hernández arrived in 1558, Guadalupe must long have been a disturbing hotbed of ferment that, curiously, enjoyed extraordinary protection from the state and the church. This explains why, after his second voyage to the New World, Columbus should have taken "the first Indians for whose baptism there is documentary evidence" to be baptized at the monastery of Guadalupe, and it also explains why Queen Isabella of Portugal, wife of Charles V, had "ordered two of the eight Indians who came from the island of Fernandina to be taken to this sanctuary to be educated."⁴⁶

The last piece of evidence I want to mention connecting Hernández with crypto-Judaism at Guadalupe is that "the Jewish extraction of the Guadalupe doctors explains that, to them, medicine as it was practiced in the hospitals of the Puebla was quite technical and modern within a religious milieu."⁴⁷ Sicroff makes it clear that "to the indignation and frustration of the Old Christians of Guadalupe there was more than ample justification for the word that circulated among Conversos to the effect that 'it was prophesied that the church was going to come under the rule or governance of the lineage of the Jews, and that it was already being fulfilled because there were so many prelates and cardinals of that lineage, even within our order of St. Jerome.'"⁴⁸

So, then, in a period in which the hunting of suspects gave carte blanche to Old Christians and suspicion of others turned into a national pastime as well as a national paranoia, any suspect such as Hernández would have had good grounds to write what Somolinos calls "the most extraordinary of all his works," the *Christian Doctrine* in hexameters.⁴⁹ Let me add that "the definitive legitimizing of the statutes of pure blood by the Spanish monarchy took place in the reign of Philip II, when the High Church of Spain took the decisive step of proclaiming its own statute of purity," and "Philip ordered his ambassador in Rome to press upon the Pope the importance of these statutes in Spain, and to request him to establish a tribunal to examine the credentials of those who were elected to ecclesiastical prebends in Spain."⁵⁰ In 1547, not long before the arrival of Hernández in Guadalupe, the statute of the church of Toledo was proclaimed, in defense of the purity of blood. "It is curious to observe that as late as 1575, and again in 1608, important

works were dedicated exclusively to defense of the statute adopted by the Church of Toledo."⁵¹ Indeed, the *Christian Doctrine* is very much like one of these works, a boldly defensive argument justifying the "discovery" of correspondence that exonerated the Jews and their Spanish *converso* descendants from the charge of deicide. Among the other defenders of this "discovery" were intellectuals of the stature of Juan de Vergara and Arias Montano, who, according to Sicroff, actually had good personal reasons to maintain the myth of a "discovery" that recognized the innocence of "New Christians."⁵²

Expurgation of Hernández's Work

Hernández's attitude toward groups of people generally considered inferior or even thought to have no soul was philanthropic. Philip must have found this attitude just as intolerable as Hernández's revolutionary scientific thinking. In Hernández's vast botanical documentation of the New World were "*volumes in Náhuatl*," a language that Hernández had learned well enough to translate "*for the benefit of the native population*."⁵³ The fundamentally human dimension of his project, together with such consideration for the native people, would surely have struck a dissonant chord at Philip's court. What is more, the translation into Náhuatl does not chime with the disdain that Hernández expressed elsewhere for people living in "a savage condition . . . insincere, reluctant to reveal any of their secrets. . . . The Indians are for the most part feeble, timid, mendacious; they live from day to day, they are lazy, given to wine and drunkenness, and only somewhat devout. May God help them!" But at the same time Hernández recognized that "they have a phlegmatic nature and are notable for their patience, which enables them to master even the most demanding of arts, which we do not even attempt, and to make exquisite copies of any work, without any help from their masters."⁵⁴ It surely would make little sense to translate three volumes into Náhuatl if they were to be dedicated to Philip, and not much more if those volumes were written for people held in contempt. A third option, perhaps more viable, would be that Hernández wanted to make himself indispensable as an intermediary for making his work com-

prehensible and useful in New Spain. Interest in Náhuatl in Hernández's time was more economic and religious than scientific, as the works of Arenas and Alonso de Molina demonstrate.⁵⁵ In contrast, the interest that Hernández showed was more than scientific: it was political, too. Martínez Cortés shows that when Hernández was looking for information on the *chuprei*, the "king's investigator" said, "The natives consider this plant to be priceless and guard their knowledge of its properties with great secrecy, but with diligence and care I will manage to get it out of them."⁵⁶ No doubt the discovery of the secrets of curative properties would help to eradicate the beliefs in natural magic and the superstitions to which Ruiz de Alarcón referred when he said that "the Indians . . . lack this knowledge because of their small reasoning power and total ignorance of medicine" and so "consult some curer-sorceress of the sort called *tiçitl*."⁵⁷

Hernández, says Martínez Cortés, wrote his *Natural History of New Spain* because he was ordered to do so but also because it was a satisfying task that he was capable of accomplishing,⁵⁸ a comparison of this work with commentaries on superstition would also furnish evidence that could justify the censorship of Hernández, a subject that is worth a study to itself. Even though Recchi's abridgment certainly could be justified, at the expense of giving the impression that it was Hernández's complete work,⁵⁹ there were other factors in play, particularly the ideological differences that I have noted, that would certainly explain exile and censorship.

The omission of the name of Francisco Hernández is just as significant as his prolonged but reluctant stay in Mexico and the censorship of his work. It was not just his work but his actual name that was sometimes expurgated, in a "tradition" that lasted into the Franco era. For example, his name is surprisingly absent from the list of celebrated doctors given by Luis Alonso Muñoyerro, who extracted them from fray Quintanilla's *Archetipo de virtudes . . . Cisneros* (Palermo, 1653). But if we remember the ideology that Hernández embraced, then Muñoyerro's subsequent statement can perhaps be seen as a case of censorship: "Besides the influence of the college and university milieu, both well disposed to confirm students in the faith and foster piety, certain rules and practices existed precisely to achieve those ends."⁶⁰ And even more significant is the final paragraph of

Muñoyerro: "Let us bring this work to an end, then, and liken it to a Christian soul, in praise of the Lord, who is the knowledge and source of all things, who has granted us his favor in the beginning, the middle, and the end of this work" (296). Finally, let us note that Muñoyerro added as an appendix "The dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the most holy Virgin in the University of Alcalá de Henares" (299). This, without a doubt, points to the monastery of Guadalupe, since one of the weapons in the battle for crypto-Judaism practiced in the monastery was questioning of this very dogma. Arana Amurrio, as Sicroff pointed out in 1955, reminds us that in the monastery of Guadalupe, "the virginity of Mary, a dogma fundamental to Catholicism, was doubted on numerous occasions, and almost as often was the object of ironic or comic commentaries."⁶¹

Muñoyerro, who was bishop of Sigüenza, mentions that Dr. Fernando Mena—licensed in medicine in 1543 at the University of Alcalá—was personal physician to then Prince Philip. He then goes on to eulogize Dr. Juan Ramírez, who succeeded Mena on November 18, 1560, and who, he says, was protomédico to Philip II. There is no mention here of Hernández, even though Dr. Cristóbal de Vega is cited as royal doctor in the mid-sixteenth century. The name of Francisco Fernández, native of La Puebla de Montalbán, figures only once, in the list of bachelors for 1536. Another Francisco Fernández, from Torrejón de Arcolea, is similarly listed for 1554, and someone else with this name, from Agreda, graduated in 1565. With such scant mention the future protomédico would become the most revolutionary of them all, though he is given short shrift in one recent study of the University of Alcalá, a collective and ambitious work with a wide scope that incorporates virtually everything ever written about Alcalá up to the time of its publication. Curiously, and disappointingly, the section on medical studies merely redirects readers: "Everything about the professors, their appointment, salaries, etc. is fully treated in the work of Alonso de Muñoyerro," and continues: "The faculty of medicine enjoyed its own golden age in the sixteenth century; it was reformed several times, before falling into serious decadence in the middle of the seventeenth, when it was dominated by the dead weight of scholasticism, which got rid of its scientific and practical character, the basis of its study.

In this century the number of matriculating students was sparse, and the faculty never recovered the prestige of the sixteenth century, when Dr. Valles—well known as a divine—personal physician to Philip II, was professor at Alcalá.⁶² Thus, to cite the work of Muñoyerro as the primary source of information on the faculty of medicine is an indirect way of putting the name of Hernández on the censored list.

Finally, we know from the research of Georges Baudot that the work of Hernández—not the *Natural History* but the *Antiquities*—was to be censored in 1577, though not necessarily for the same reasons that I have outlined here.⁶³

Refusal to Repatriate

The letters from Francisco Hernández to King Philip make a very interesting contribution to the theory that the great botanist/physician was exiled. In his letter of September 22, 1572, Hernández thanked Philip “for Your Majesty’s memory of my works, that I am granted this favor. I will do what Your Majesty commands by sending whatever I do with great secrecy, leaving a copy in translation here, and thus I will send what I can when Our Lord pleases that the fleet sets sail.” It does seem somewhat incongruous that a doctor and botanist of such standing should tell the king that he is suffering from a “a long and serious illness from which at present the Lord as by a miracle has spared me, because my works remain to be finished, and Your Majesty to be served”; perhaps this peculiar phrasing comes from the same motivation that lay behind the *Christian Doctrine*.

Hernández was well aware of the importance of his own work and, betraying his strong philological background, says in his third letter that in the eight months since he began work on this project, he has written descriptions of more than eight hundred new plants, in Latin and Spanish, and “that there will be no need to bring to the Indies medicines from Spain, nor to Spain from Alexandria.” This letter affords fleeting glimpses of self-justification: “God knows that I speak true, that I am up all night every night thinking of ways to serve Your Majesty more successfully and speedily and less expensively, and thus I have conceived a thousand designs by which before my death this benefit to the

world may be placed in the hands of Your Majesty.”⁶⁴ The letters of Hernández constitute a cry of despair, as the next sentence in this letter demonstrates: “But all great and new things always provoke opposition and jealousy, and this work has not escaped either, and thus there is another work, which has robbed me of no little time in the service of Your Majesty, which is my continuing concern; for which reason, if it pleases Your Majesty that this project continues with the same felicity with which it began, it is vital that I be favored with your royal inspiration and encouragement.” One might say that these letters are dominated by four repeated themes: complaints and requests for more money; a desperate plea to return to Spain, most explicit after 1575; praise of his own work as a valuable text; and his intent to handle delivery of the work himself, in exchange for safe conduct on his way back to Spain.

There is no deception in these letters, since the third letter informs the king of the progress of the *Natural History* and how Hernández is following the king’s instructions conscientiously, but there surely is a strain of tension in them, prompting the suspicion that Hernández thought his sojourn in Mexico was a punishment and that now he had served his time.

On the other side of the Atlantic, in the comfortable ambience of the royal palace, King Philip felt entirely safe (but, one may ask, safe from what?) keeping Hernández so far away and officially barred from returning. Philip II wanted the work of Hernández but did not want Hernández, as we can learn from a note written on the cover of the next letter: “I have read this and written to the Viceroy telling him that this doctor has frequently promised to send these books, but he never does send them; he is to pack them up and send them on the first ship for safe keeping.”⁶⁵ We should note here the running feud between Hernández and the viceroy, which gives us a better taste of the implicit sentence passed by the king.

Conclusions

The throne did not act alone in the provision of funding. The power of the citizen oligarchies and the control to which I alluded earlier could be ranged for or against any given



project. The dissident ideology of Hernández was, as we know, enough to cause any citizen to be declared persona non grata, and Judaism was, as we also know, the worst stigma in Philip's reign, so it is easy to draw the conclusion that Hernández had two black marks against him when one alone would have been enough to guarantee exile.

Francisco Hernández was a humanist who drank in the philological theories advanced by Nebrija and Erasmus. He was aware of the act of naming and its implications and thus of the intrinsic relationship between things and their names. Like Arias Montano, Hernández undertook a textual project that Philip II sponsored without wanting to take responsibility for the consequences. The time Hernández spent in Guadalupe added to his prestige as a doctor and perhaps also intensified suspicion that he was a "Judaizer," a suspicion that hung on even into the Franco era in the work of Muñoyerro, the bishop of Sigüenza. His ethnographic work became subject to censorship, less spectacularly than that of Sahagún, which was confiscated, and anyway it was damaging in 1577 even to be associated with Sahagún. Lastly, the letters of Hernández to Philip II contain so many desperate pleas that alert the reader to a tension, a conflict between the botanist and his king that could not be openly expressed but must forever remain between the lines.

Consequently, if we can still not produce absolute proof that would place Hernández on the inquisitorial scaffold, I am certain that if any zealous inquisitor had wanted to, he could have gone so far as to bring together the arguments presented here to disgrace Hernández. The doctor's only hope of protection would have been the official state interest in medicine and recognition of his major contribution to the subject. The king's botanist/physician was more useful alive and far away from the court than he was sitting next to the king, and his work could be rendered as harmless as his royal patron desired—all the king had to do was give it to an obedient and innocuous subject such as Recchi.

NOTES

1. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 2:1105.
2. Somolinos, "Vida y obra," 1:161.

3. Braudel, *Mediterranean*, 2:1089. For some implications of Lepanto as the epitome of "all that was most glorious in the crusade against Islam [and] . . . a divine deliverance of Christendom from the power of the oppressor," see J. H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain, 1469–1716* (1963; reprint, Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1990), 241.

4. José Ignacio Fortea Pérez, *Monarquía y Cortes en la Corona de Castilla: Las ciudades ante la política fiscal de Felipe II* ([Valladolid]: Cortes de Castilla y León, 1990), 44.

5. *Ibid.*, 45.

6. Germán Somolinos D'Ardois, *El doctor Francisco Hernández y la primera expedición científica en América* (Mexico City: SEP, 1971), 29–30. On Hernández's problems in detail, see Somolinos, "Vida y obra," 160–93.

7. Hernández's salary of two thousand ducats may seem a large sum for a doctor (see Peter O'Malley Pierson, "Philip II," above), but it was inadequate for his task.

8. Philip sought to levy new sales taxes to pay for maintaining the regime of *encabezamientos*, which meant negotiating with the *cortes* and the municipalities. The latter, more accurately, were oligarchies that controlled the *regimientos* and were seen as threatening on too many fronts to accept passively what had to be demanded from others. They boycotted the *encabezamiento* of 1575, and, mobilizing the constitution—the mandatory concession of powers for the approval of ordinary and extraordinary services—they forced the Crown to review all the projects. In 1577 an agreement was drawn up based on mutual concessions. Admitting his own contradictions, Philip reduced his demands, and the municipalities prepared to agree to some taxes, which, despite all this, were considerably increased. See Fortea Pérez, *Monarquía y Cortes*, 509–10.

9. *Ibid.*, 512.

10. On Alcalá, see Somolinos, "Vida y obra," 108, and the comments in the essays by Rafael Chabrán, "Classical Tradition," and Simon Varey, "Renaissance Man," above. On the Guadalupe monastery, see Albert A. Sicroff, "Clandestine Judaism in the Hieronymite Monastery of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe," in *Studies in Honor of M. J. Bernadette* (New York: Las Américas, 1955), 81–115. An *Epistle to Arias Montano*, in *Mexican Treasury*, "Spain, 1790."

11. Somolinos, "Vida y obra," 98, 102, and n. 30.

12. Bataillon, *Erasmus y España*, 1:21–22.

13. *Ibid.*, 1:39.

14. Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, trans. Clarence H. Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 90.

15. See Antonio de Tovar and Miguel de la Pinta Llorente, *Procesos inquisitoriales contra Francisco Sánchez de las Brozas* (Madrid: CSIC, 1941).

16. Francisco Sánchez de las Brozas, "El Brocense," in *Minerva*, ed. Fernando Riveras Cárdenas (Madrid: Cátedra, 1976), 6. A preliminary text of *Minerva* appeared in Lyon in 1562, but what is usually taken as the first edition is the expanded version, Salamanca, 1587.

17. For a convenient text, see Antoine Arnauld, *The Art of Thinking: Port-Royal Logic*, trans. James Dickoff and Patricia James (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964). Arnauld's hugely influential treatise, *La logique, ou l'art de penser*, was first published in 1662.

18. We should note that for Brozas "use arises from reason [and] authority from use. . . . These levels coincide completely. Anything that does not admit reason cannot be in use" ("Brocense," 18).

19. *Mexican Treasury*, "Spain, 1790."

20. *Ibid.*

21. Philip II and his successors alike recognized the intellectual distinction of Hernández. The founding of the Botanical Garden in Madrid in 1755 and the corresponding politics of research lasted far beyond the end of the sixteenth century. Jacqueline Durand-Forest states that eighteenth-century interest in Linnaeus was a direct consequence of the "discovery" of Hernández's work ("Hernández y la botánica mexicana," *Caravelle: Cahiers du monde hispanique et luso-brésilien* 55 [1990]: 53–64). See Jaime Vilchis, "Globalizing the Natural History," below.
22. *Códice Pomar*, 13.
23. Francisco Rico, *Nebrija frente a los bárbaros: El canón de gramáticos nefastos en las polémicas del humanismo* (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1978), 49–50.
24. *Ibid.*, 55.
25. *Ibid.*, 287.
26. There is no English translation of *Lingua*. This quotation is translated from Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, vol. 4, pt. 1A (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1989).
27. Angel Sáenz-Badillos, *La filología bíblica en los primeros helenistas de Alcalá* (Estrella: Verbo Divino, 1990), 31.
28. Luis de la Cuadra, *Catálogo-inventario de los documentos del monasterio de Guadalupe* (Madrid: Dirección General de Archivos y Bibliotecas, 1973), 162.
29. Angelina Muñoz-Huberman, *La lengua florida: Antología sefardi* (Mexico City: FCE, 1989), 262.
30. *Ibid.*, 85.
31. Cuadra, *Catálogo-inventario*, 202.
32. Sicroff, "Clandestine Judaism," 95.
33. Cuadra, *Catálogo-inventario*, 7.
34. On October 10, 1475, Sixtus IV excommunicated "those who did any harm to the churches and monasteries, their goods and persons, reserving the right of absolution in those cases" (*ibid.*, 130), and on November 14, 1547, an "apostolic letter" declared that "Jacobo Unteo, apostolic auditor . . . prohibits the bishop and chapter of Avila from intervening in matters of tithing concerning the monastery of Guadalupe" (*ibid.*, 197).
35. *Ibid.*, 136.
36. *Ibid.*, 207.
37. Guy Beaujouan, "La Bibliothèque et l'école médicale du monastère de Guadalupe à l'aube de la Renaissance," in Guy Beaujouan, Yvonne Pouille-Drieux, and Jeanne Marie Dureau-Lapeyssonnie, *Médecine humaine et vétérinaire à la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris: Minard, 1966; Geneva: Droz, 1966), 379.
38. Cuadra, *Catálogo-inventario*, 320.
39. In 1520 a plan was conceived for "reform of new and old infirmaries; detailed description by Juan Torello, master of works at the convent, dated January 1520," and in 1516 the "College of humanities and grammar at Guadalupe" was designed. Plans for "the rectangular cloister for the infirmary" were drawn up perhaps about 1528, while similar plans for the infirmary's outbuildings date from 1532. "Plans for the new and old infirmary, by Antón Egas and Alonso Covarrubias," date from February 6, 1525. See Cuadra, *Catálogo-inventario*, 374–76.
40. Beaujouan, "Bibliothèque," 381 n. 46, citing Talavera's *Historia de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* (Toledo, 1597).
41. *Códice Pomar*, 19. Somolinos, "Vida y obra," 105, points out that surgery at Alcalá was a serious academic enterprise, and López Piñero states that dissections were regulated and commonly performed all over sixteenth-century Spain.
42. José Ignacio de Arana Amurrio, *Medicina en Guadalupe* (Badajoz: Diputación Provincial de Badajoz, 1990), 158. On the subject of dissections Arana Amurrio comments: "As far as Iberian centers are concerned, the first to be granted a privilege of this type was the University of Lerida, which King John I authorized to perform one autopsy every three years on someone condemned to death. That was followed in September 1402 by Martin I granting Barcelona the right to perform two autopsies a year on human cadavers. Years later, in the second half of the fifteenth century, John II granted a privilege to the Guild of Surgeons and Barbers of Valencia to dissect cadavers (1447), and Ferdinand the Catholic in 1488 granted a similar one to the brotherhood of doctors and surgeons of Zaragoza for their activities at the Hospital of Our Gracious Lady" (165).
43. *Ibid.*, 168.
44. Eugenio Sarrablo Aguares et al., *Inventario del Archivo del Real Monasterio de Guadalupe (Cáceres)* (Madrid: Dirección General de Archivos y Bibliotecas, 1958), 14.
45. Other surviving biographies are those of Benito Montero, Calderón y Aguinaco, Carvajal, Donoso Cortés, Martínez Siliceo, Monroy, Moreno Nieto, Muñoz, Diego Sánchez, Sánchez de Badajoz. See "Legajo 15," in *ibid.*, 89.
46. Arturo Alvarez, *Relaciones entre el Emperador Carlos V y el Real Monasterio de Guadalupe* (Madrid: Instituto de Cultura Hispánica, Ciudad Universitaria, 1958), 1, 4.
47. Arana Amurrio, *Medicina en Guadalupe*, 213.
48. Sicroff, "Clandestine Judaism," 125.
49. Somolinos, "Vida y obra," 427, and see *Mexican Treasury*, "Mexico, 1571–1615." For the distinction between "Old" and "New" Christians, see Américo Castro, *The Structure of Spanish History*, trans. Edmund L. King (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954); Peter O'Malley Pierson, "Philip II," above; and Somolinos, who notes that most petitions to the king seeking royal favor or reward conspicuously paraded a phrase to the effect that the petitioner was an Old Christian, thus of pure blood, free of all taint of Jewish, Moorish, or *converso* blood. But, Somolinos adds, nothing like this appears in any surviving document by Hernández ("Vida y obra," 102).
50. Sicroff, *Los estatutos de Limpieza de Sangre: Controversias entre los siglos XVI y XVII*, trans. Mauro Armiño (Madrid: Taurus, 1985), 124, 176.
51. *Ibid.*, 191.
52. Sicroff, *Estatutos*, 215.
53. *Mexican Treasury*, Letter 9: March 20, 1575 (my italics).
54. *Mexican Treasury*, "Antiquities of New Spain," 1.23, and see David A. Boruchoff, "Anthropology, Reason," below.
55. The *Vocabulario* (1616) of Arenas enjoyed great popularity and went through five printings in the eighteenth century. It is interesting for two reasons: its awareness of the politico-economic power inherent in the command of a language and the possible existence of a public interested in learning Amerindian languages. The second edition added to the conversation guide a summary of grammar. This text was also translated into French. On the other hand, fray Alonso de Molina, as befitted his calling, compiled two Náhuatl/Spanish dictionaries for doctrinal purposes in 1569.
56. "La historia de las plantas de Nueva España: Aspectos médicos," OC 7:287.
57. Michael D. Coe and Gordon Whittaker, *Aztec Sorcerers in Seventeenth Century Mexico: The Treatise on Superstitions by Hernando Ruíz de Alarcón* (Albany: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, State University of New York, 1982), 223.
58. "La Historia," OC 7:268.



59. *Códice Pomar*, 21.

60. Luis Alonso Muñoyerro, *La facultad de medicina en la Universidad de Alcalá de Henares* (Madrid: Instituto Jerónimo Zurita, CSIC, 1945), 131.

61. Arana Amurrio, *Medicina en Guadalupe*, 192.

62. *La universidad de Alcalá de Henares*, ed. Carlos Bustos Moreno,

2 vols. (Madrid: Graficincio, 1973), 2:38 n. 59 and 2:39.

63. Georges Baudot, *Utopia and History in Mexico*, trans. Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano and Thelma Ortiz de Montellano (Denver: University of Colorado Press, 1995), esp. chap. 9.

64. *Mexican Treasury*, Letter 3: [November/December 1571].

65. *Ibid.*, Letter 9: March 20, 1575, note.