

Gabriel Rivera

His 114s

Dr. Dinan

14 April 2016

During the Spanish Inquisition purported heretics were forced to convert, tortured and executed. While these actions did occur, the perception of its severity is disputed by some historians, who have taken a revisionist approach regarding the Spanish Inquisition. Sara Nalle, professor of European History, in her book *Mad for God: Bartolome Sánchez, The Secret Messiah of Cardenete* offers a contrasting viewpoint of the Inquisition. In her book, Nalle presents a modern interpretation of tribunal transcripts chronicling the seven year trial of Bartolome Sánchez. By providing information from these transcripts Nalle intended to show the existence of inquisitors who invested time and effort to save a heretic's life by proving their innocence or insanity.

The sources that contributed to *Mad for God: Bartolome Sánchez, The Secret Messiah of Cardenete* are the tribunal transcripts from the trial of Bartolome Sánchez. The transcripts were recorded by the trial court secretary Ybaneta. This presents limitations as a source as the transcripts are written from the secretary's perspective. The interaction between Sánchez and the Inquisitors, as well as the proceedings of the trial are described within the contents of the transcripts. However, their personal feelings, and thoughts are excluded to a certain degree. Secretary Ybaneta divulged that when Sánchez engaged in rants, he stopped recording. The excluded information is necessary to create a complete and accurate depiction of Sánchez.

Furthermore, the transcripts have been translated at least three times. During that era transcripts would have been recorded in Spanish, then translated into Latin, and finally into English for purposes of the book. Because certain words have specific meanings in a particular language, translations tend to alter the meaning of words or phrases. Thus, the interpretation of the events become distorted.

Bartolome Sánchez was a poor wool carder from Cardenete, Spain who was convinced he was the Elijah Messiah sent by God to avenge the Inquisition and the church for their atrocities. Sánchez was outspoken in his criticism and recalcitrance against religious doctrine. As a result, he ended up in the court he believed he was sent to punish. In the days leading to his outburst in church, Sánchez's family indicated he had been acting strange. They did not understand why he was behaving in such a bizarre fashion, but suggested that he claimed to be suffering from an unexplained fear. After nearly two months of heretical acts, the village priest, Bachiller Barca, notified Inquisitor Pedro Cortes at the tribunal of the Holy Office in the city of Cuenca. Cortes directed the arrest of Sánchez on Lazarus Monday(March 2, 1553). Sánchez was incarcerated in the village jail, during which time Barca endeavored to acquire depositions against him from nine village men, many of whom Sánchez freely spoke to about his heresies. Though, he was aware of the dangers involved in professing his religious ideas, he believed that as the Elijah Messiah, God would protect him from punishment. Sánchez escaped from the jail when the village council and priest failed to feed him and his family. However, there was not much concern surrounding his escape. Thus, it did not seem Sánchez presented much of a threat. Finally in October, Inquisitor Cortes ordered Sánchez manacled, as a measure of better security. In addition, his measly property was confiscated to cover the costs of his incarceration and trial,

which as it turned out was minuscule. It took four days to transport Sánchez to Cuenca, where he was imprisoned in the Inquisition's secret prisons on Thursday, October 19, 1553. The next morning, Friday would be the first of many meetings Sánchez would have with Cortes. As was the custom, when a prisoner entered the courtroom, Sánchez was instructed to take his hood off and kneel in front of the courtroom's altar. The altar contained a crucifix and various statues and paintings of saints. Cortes also asked Sánchez to pray two Hail Marys as a way to cleanse himself and put him on a righteous road. He refused to do both. After stating his name, Sánchez proceeded to ramble through a heretical discourse. Rather than threatened or berate him, Cortes patiently explained to Sánchez the proper doctrine.

Instead of intimidating Sánchez, Cortes decided to expound the proper doctrine to him. After Cortes recounted the doctrine he stated "not to venerate the saints' image is a mortal sin."¹ Cortes's subliminal message was his attempt at telling Sanchez, that if he failed to agree with the true doctrine he would be forced to disseminate further punishment. This message expressed Cortes' desire to further penalize Sánchez. Cortes wanted to save Sánchez from additional torment. Sánchez stayed firm in his beliefs and refused Cortes. In response, Cortes recited the doctrine again to Sánchez. Cortes imparted a second warning to Sánchez stating "that for Christians to believe anything else was heresy, a grave error, one that if not laid aside would lead them to hell."² Cortes' second warning was more detailed than his first. The increased detail in the second warning demonstrates his efforts to impress upon Sánchez the ramifications of persisting with his current course of action. Additionally, Cortes advised Sánchez of the

¹ Nalle, Sara Tilghman. *Mad for God: Bartolomé Sánchez, the Secret Messiah of Cardenete*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001.

² IBID

consequences if he continued to deny the proper doctrine. Cortes's repeated explanations, and warnings seemed to imply that he hoped Sánchez would recant his heresies. Thereby, Cortes would not be forced by law to mete out harsh retribution required by law. At this point, Cortes is coming across as very patient and lenient, which is an antithesis of the perception of an inquisitor's persona. With an inflamed situation, that would inevitably elicit a potentially unfavorable outcome for Sánchez, Cortes made a decision to attempt to make him more comfortable. Thus, Sánchez would presumably be more cooperative.

Cortes desired to make Sánchez feel more at ease in the hope of winning him over. When Sánchez came down with a headache Cortes stated that "he would postpone the hearing."³ Cortes' clemency to a known heretic during his trial is unusual. Cortes displayed great restraint and patience with Sánchez to provide him more time and a greater chance of defending himself. During another meeting in which Sánchez is questioned about his vision, which he claimed was the cause of his heresy, Cortes again showed he wanted to help Sánchez. Cortes had to determine if the vision was good or bad. It was paramount for Sánchez's defense that the vision be deemed good. But as Sánchez spoke it became clear to Cortes that he would be unable to judge the vision as good. In response Cortes attempts to coach Sánchez's description of the vision by explaining his thinking more.⁴ Cortes is prompting Sánchez on the appropriate response regarding the vision. In all probability, Cortes judiciously aided Sánchez in his defense. For example, when questioned about his visions, Sánchez's responses were detrimental to his defense. Once again, Cortes intervened and expounded his explanation of an acceptable response hence, guiding

³ IBID

⁴ IBID

Sánchez in how to respond prudently. In addition, Cortes purposely extended the gap between meetings with Sánchez and the attorneys. He did this to allow Sánchez more time to ponder his circumstances and delay the progression of a guilty verdict.⁵ Basically, Cortes did whatever he could to provide Sánchez more time to prepare and perhaps come up with a feasible defense. The inquisitor's patience, guidance, and restraint are in contrast to the perception people held about inquisitors. As the trial progressed, Cortes desired to find a way to end the trial rather than let it continue.

As the trial moved forward Cortes sought a way to end it. Influenced by tribunal secretary Ybaneta and through his own observations Cortes decided to adopt a wait and see approach toward the trial. Nalle states that "Cortes, who already had his own suspicions regarding Sánchez's sanity, had never wanted to try the wool carder, and was just waiting for the evidence he needed to suspend the case."⁶ Cortes did not hold the judicial power to end the proceedings and free Sánchez without concrete evidence that merited this action. So, he did everything possible to shift the outcome to that end, thinning the boundaries of the law. It should be noted that most inquisitors, unlike, Cortes were not known for a sense of fairness. Let us take for example the case of the witches of Pareja, in which sisters Ana la Roa and Mari la Parra were accused of being witches. They denied the charges against them, but in order to get confessions, Licentiate Brizeño decreed they be tortured. Their attorney argued that none of the eighty witnesses failed to admit to any personal observations of actions by the sisters that indicated they were witches. Thus, there was no legal justification for the torture. Yet, the torture continued.

⁵ IBID

⁶ IBID

Rules of procedure followed by Inquisitors dictated the judges must determine a method and harshness of torture prior to its application. Brizeño disregarded these procedures and consecutively applied three forms of torture. Brizeño's actions were in contrast to those of Cortes. It should also be noted that it was extremely uncommon for a tribunal secretary to lean in favor of an accused heretic. It was believed that everyone involved in the legal proceedings during an inquisition were tainted in favor of the tribunal. Nalle further states that "he had stretched out the hearings, made a note of whatever Sánchez said of a theological nature that made sense and was indictable, and left out the rest."⁷ Cortes in an effort to exonerate Sánchez had gone as far as to stretch the confines of his power and the rules of the court. He unnecessarily lengthened the hearings to accommodate Sánchez and afford himself more time to find a way of freeing Sánchez. He kept an impartial record of the trial, which could potentially harm his career. An inference can be drawn that Cortes was so struck with Sánchez that he was willing to jeopardize his reputation. Cortes was not the only inquisitor to placate to Sánchez.

In Sánchez's second trial, Inquisitors Dr. Diego Garcia del Riego and Licentiate Miguel del Moral portrayed a sense of compassion similar to that of Pedro Cortes. This is observed during a hearing regarding Sánchez's return to heresy after his return to Cardenete. Riego and Moral asked Sánchez to state if he felt the influence of the devil within him, to which he responded no. Nalle writes that the tribunal records state that "the Inquisitors did not find Sánchez's performance very convincing, yet they too had fallen under the spell of this odd peasant. They ended the hearing by giving Bartolome a heartfelt lecture."⁸ Like Cortes, Riego

⁷ IBID

⁸ IBID

and Moral were not satisfied of Sánchez's innocence or insanity, and yet they continued to humor him. Indications that they engaged in a sincere oration with the goal of somehow turning him around are profoundly out of character for inquisition functionaries. Another testament to the inclination that they too wished nothing more than to save his life. Riego, Moral, and Dr. Vergara the bishop's ordinary who had been assigned to work with Sánchez in an attempt to rid him of his demons, all came to the conclusion that he was insane. They decided to push for his release to a mental hospital for treatment. This decision was made, even after many testimonials from witnesses to Sánchez's behavior who all stated they believed him to be sane. Nalle writes "they ordered the wool carder to be placed at one of three hospitals for the insane, not just so he could be confined but in order that, as they put it, the humor afflicting him could be removed and he could be cured of his insanity."⁹ The compassion demonstrated by and the tenacity on behalf of the tribunal officials, inquisitors, and court secretary to prove Sánchez's innocence and insanity in order to save him, was totally out of norm. Especially, given the perception that was widespread of the inquisition and its procedural requirements.

Sara Nalle presents a revisionist viewpoint regarding the Spanish Inquisition in her book *Mad for God: Bartolome Sanchez, The Secret Messiah of Cardenete*. Nalle's goal was to provide a fair representative of inquisitors. Her simplified version of Sánchez's trial in easy to understand first person language helped her present the facts in a way that prevented any confusion as to her purpose. The chronological order of events were helpful in grasping the intense effort by the inquisitors to save Sánchez. Nalle's inclusion of background information on Sánchez and Cortes were instrumental in manifesting the reality of the situation. Finally, she did not just focus on the

⁹ IBID

victim but rather included the many people who had a hand in Sánchez's fate. Her strong, yet simple presentation of the transcripts created an adequate representation of a revisionist viewpoint of inquisitors. Her book was important so that people would understand the true nature of some inquisitors and realize that although so many inquisitors were regarded as cruel and heartless, others were human and compassionate.