

Frances Luttikhuizen

# Constantino de la Fuente (San Clemente, 1502 – Seville, 1560)

From acclaimed cathedral preacher to  
condemned “Lutheran” heretic



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Frances Luttikhuisen

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(San Clemente, 1502 – Seville, 1560)**

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Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

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## Foreword

One of the fascinating aspects of the religious changes in 16thC Europe is their apparent failure to take root in Mediterranean countries such as Spain. In reality, as diligent researchers have pointed out, there was no “failure”. In that generation, many educated people, among them Spaniards, were sympathetic to the early principles of the Reformation. At the Imperial Diet of 1521, when Luther had to defend himself publicly, one of the Spaniards who was present, the humanist Juan de Vergara, reported: “everybody, especially the Spaniards, went to see him.” “At the beginning everybody agreed with him,” Vergara went on, “and even those who now write against him confess that at the beginning they were in favour of him.”

The new trends were not of course “Lutheran”, even though the Inquisition in Spain found it convenient to pin that label on those who were seen to be dissenters. As in other countries, the Reformation released a chaos of ideas. There had also been other trends in Spain, such as the “illumunist” groups in Castile that the Inquisition suspected of heresy, and the impressive influence of Erasmian humanism among some intellectuals. Contact with Europe further promoted the spread of ideas, and the first Spaniards to come into contact with Erasmian teachings were those who accompanied the emperor to Germany. Among the Spaniards were clergy whom Charles V had chosen as court preachers, but who attracted the suspicion of the inquisitors. One such preacher was Alonso de Virués; another, a few years after him, was Constantino de la Fuente. The present study touches on the history of some of these Spaniards who shared the new trends and participated in the complex world of spiritual thinking in Reformation Europe.

Constantino de la Fuente was during his lifetime never formally denounced for his ideas, though he ended his days unhappily, in the cells of the Inquisition. The campaign denouncing him as a heretic began only after his death. Frances Luttikhuizen offers a reassessment presenting him not as a Protestant who sought to break with the Church, but as an “evangelical” who used the strategy of inward dissent (“Nicodemism”) to give expression to his spiritual views. A lonely man in his life and career, Constantino has remained almost unknown to posterity, unlike the Jeronimite friars from Seville who fled from Spain and its Inquisition and took an active part in the changes of the European Reform movement. This study helps bring to life an almost forgotten Spaniard who played an active part in the new role that his country was playing in the affairs of Europe.

Henry Kamen  
Barcelona, Spain  
10 March 2022





## Acknowledgements

It is impossible to remember, and much less credit, all the people I am indebted to for this study of Constantino's life and work. I must begin by thanking Rady Roldan-Figueroa for inviting me to participate on a panel he organized at the Renaissance Society of America conference held in Venice in 2010. I would like to thank the American professor who introduced himself to me after my talk as a specialist in the Spanish Golden Age but had never heard of an evangelical movement or persecution of protestants in sixteenth century Spain. Next my gratitude goes to Peter Lillback, who overheard the conversation, and turned to me and said, "Write a book. The English-speaking world needs to be better informed." This was a real challenge. Although I had attended the conferences organized by Emilio Monjo in Seville on the activities of the Inquisition in sixteenth century Spain, and he had named me international coordinator of CIMPE (Centro de Investigación y Memoria del Protestantismo Español), my academic background was applied linguistics and history of translation. Despite this, I found the need to put into the hands of English-speaking readers material regarding the arrival and suppression of Reformation ideas and practices in what many people considered a solid Catholic country too great to be disregarded. The outcome was the publication of *Underground Protestantism in Sixteenth Century Spain*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016.

*Constantino de la Fuente (ca. 1502–1560). From acclaimed cathedral preacher to condemned "Lutheran" heretic*, provides the English-speaking reader with another piece of Spanish history regarding dissident activity suppressed by the Inquisition. The reader will find the appended translation into English of Constantino's sermons on Psalm 1, together with the list of confiscated books, helpful for further study. For the publication of this volume, I again wish to thank Herman Selderhuis for his willingness to include my work in his Refo500 Academic Studies series, as well as the staff at Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, and especially editor Izaak de Hulster. I wish to extend a special thanks to Henry Kamen for so generously taking time out to write the Foreword. Last but not least, I must thank Juan Sanchez-Naffziger for allowing me to include his translation of Constantino's sermons in this volume. In sum, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to all of those who made this volume possible.



# Constantino de la Fuente (ca. 1502–1560). From acclaimed cathedral preacher to condemned “Lutheran” heretic

## 1. Introduction

Whereas the lives and works of those evangelical-minded men who fled Spain in the mid sixteenth century to avoid being imprisoned by the Inquisition are fairly well known, the lives and works of those who remained and were victims of the institution are less familiar. This volume is an endeavour to rescue from oblivion the memory of Constantino de la Fuente, one of the most accomplished and acclaimed sixteenth century Spanish cathedral preachers, condemned by the Spanish Inquisition as a Lutheran heretic.

The earliest information concerning Constantino de la Fuente is found in *Sanctae Inquisitionis hispanicae artes aliquot detecte* (1567), referred to hereafter as *The Arts*,<sup>1</sup> a first-hand account of the activities of the Spanish Inquisition with brief biographical sketches of several of the most prominent members of the sixteenth century underground evangelical movement in Seville. The book was immediately translated into English, French and Dutch, but soon forgotten.<sup>2</sup> Several hundred years later the Scottish preacher-historian Thomas M’Crie found a copy of *The Arts* in French, as well as a French translation of one of Constantino’s works in Jean Crespin’s 1608 edition of *Histoire des Martyrs*. Being a dissenter himself, M’Crie was especially interested in persecuted minorities. His *History of the progress and suppression of the Reformation in Spain in the XVI century* (Edinburgh, 1829) became the standard text in English-speaking Protestant circles regarding the Spanish scene until the American historian Henry Charles Lea produced his four-volume seminal work *History of the Inquisition in Spain* (1906–07).

The general public became aware of the activities of the Spanish Inquisition and its ban on things Protestant through the work of Juan Antonio Llorente, ex-secretary

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1 *Reginaldus Gonsalvius Montanus: The Arts of the Spanish Inquisition: a critical edition of the Sanctae inquisitionis Hispanicae artes aliquot (1567) with a modern English translation*, Marcos J. Herráiz Pareja, Ignacio J. García Pinilla and Jonathan L. Nelson (eds, trans), Leiden: Brill, 2019.

2 Excerpts from *The Arts* appeared in several re-editions of John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* as well as in Michael Geddes’s *Spanish Protestant Martyrology* (1705), Philipp von Limborch’s *The History of the Inquisition* (1731), Johann Lorenz Mosheim’s *Ecclesiastical History* (1782), Joseph Lavallée’s *Histoire des inquisitions religieuses d’Italie, d’Espagne et de Portugal* (1809) and John Joseph Stockdale’s *The History of the Inquisitions* [1810].

of the Inquisition exiled in France. Llorente, who had direct access to authentic Spanish documents, published his work in Paris, and in French, when he went into exile.<sup>3</sup> His work was immediately translated into Dutch, German, Spanish and English.<sup>4</sup> At about the same time some 30 crates of documents recovered by Andrew Thorndike when the Inquisition palace in Barcelona was stormed by the angry mobs in 1820 were sent to Boston. Several of these documents were translated into English and printed in 1828 under the title *Records of the Spanish Inquisition*.<sup>5</sup>

Following Thomas M'Crie's *History of the Progress and Suppression of the Reformation in Spain* (1829), John Stoughton published *Spanish reformers, their Memories and Dwelling-Places* (London, 1883), basically a "romanticized" travelbook rewrite of the information found in *The Arts* and in Llorente's work. By mid-nineteenth century researchers were beginning to have access to the National Historical Archives (ANH) in Simancas and more information became available thanks to the tireless efforts of Luis Usóz y Río and Ernst H.J. Schäfer.<sup>6</sup> Ernst H.J. Schäfer's three-volume *Beiträge* (Gütersloh, 1902),<sup>7</sup> in which he transcribed into German hundreds of trial documents found in the archives in Simancas, became source material for the American historian Henry Ch. Lea's four-volume seminal work *History of the Inquisition in Spain* (New York, 1906–07).

Though all of the above-mentioned works add to our knowledge of the doings of the Spanish Inquisition, information regarding Constantino de la Fuente did not go

3 Juan Antonio Llorente, *Histoire critique de l'Inquisition d'Espagne, depuis l'époque de son établissement par Ferdinand V, jusqu'au règne de Ferdinand VII, tirée des pièces originales des archives du Conseil de la Suprême, et de celles des tribunaux subalternes du Saint-office* [1817–1818].

4 Juan Antonio Llorente, *A Critical History of the Inquisition of Spain: From the Period of Its Establishment by Ferdinand V to the Reign of Ferdinand VII* [1827]; *The History of the Inquisition of Spain: From the Time of Its Establishment to the Reign of Ferdinand VII*. Composed from the Original Documents of the Archives of the Supreme Council, and from Those of Subordinate Tribunals of the Holy Office. Abridged and Translated from the Original Works of D. Jean Antoine Llorente. [London, 1826; Philadelphia, 1843, 1845]. References to Llorente's work are taken from the 1843 Philadelphia edition.

5 See Frances Luttikhuisen, "La noticia de l'asalt al palau de la Inquisició de Barcelona arriba a Boston" [2020: 63–76]. A 2015 reprint of *Records of the Spanish Inquisition* by CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform erroneously attributed the authorship of these documents to the American historian and educator Andrew Dickson White. This error has been perpetuated and must be corrected.

6 Luis Usóz y Río and B.B. Wiffen, eds., *Reformistas antiguos españoles*, 20 vols, 1847–1865, reprint, Barcelona 1982–83; Eduard Boehmer, *Bibliotheca Wiffeniana. Spanish Reformers of two Centuries from 1520: their Lives and Writings*, 3 vols, 1874–1904, reprint, Pamplona 2007; Ernst H.J. Schäfer, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des spanischen Protestantismus und der Inquisition im sechzehnten Jahrhundert*, 3 vols, Gütersloh, 1902, tran. Francisco Ruiz de Pablos as *Protestantismo Español e Inquisición en el Siglo XVI*, 4 vols, Seville 2014.

7 There now exists a Spanish translation by Francisco Ruiz de Pablos: Ernst H.J. Schafer, *Protestantismo Español e Inquisición en el Siglo XVI* [2014]. References to Schäfer's work are taken from Ruiz de Pablos's Spanish edition unless otherwise indicated.

beyond that already found in Montes's *The Arts* until fairly recently. Current Historical Memory Studies have renewed interest in the activities of the Spanish Inquisition and its efforts to suppress all forms of unorthodoxy. Essential for the present survey are the contributions of María Paz Aspe Ansa, Michel Boeglin, Ignacio J. Garcia Pinilla, Stafford Poole, Klaus Wagner and Tomás López Muñoz. The corpus of authentic documents—reports, instructions, edicts, sentences, correspondence between the inquisitors in Seville and the Supreme Council, etc.—published by López Muñoz<sup>8</sup> has been most helpful in clarifying, contrasting and substantiating information regarding Constantino and his imprisonment. Indeed, documents that at the time were used as instruments of tyranny, now, in the hands of investigators, have become witnesses of the tyranny that created them.

If Juan Antonio Llorente, Andrew Thorndike and Tomás López Muñoz are credited for rescuing many original Inquisition trial records, Luis Usoz y Río must be credited for rescuing the writings of many of the forgotten sixteenth century Spanish Reformers. Usoz y Río's interest in Inquisition documents and the Spanish Reformers goes back to his stay in London (1839–1841) and his acquaintance with a group of Quakers. While in England, he acquired a copy of M'Crie's *History*, which included an extract from Constantino's *Confession of a Sinner*, translated into English from the French version found in Jean Crespin's *Histoire des Martyrs* (1608). On his return to Madrid, Usoz spent many hours in Simancas paging through the archives and the Index of Prohibited Books where he found much of the information that became the groundwork of his 20-volume series of *Reformistas Antiguos Españoles*.<sup>9</sup> Following Usoz's death in 1865, Eduard Boehmer continued the task in Germany, where he compiled what became the three-volume *Bibliotheca Wiffeniana*,<sup>10</sup> a detailed catalogue of all the editions Usoz had found up until then of the writings of the Spanish Reformers, together with his notes and a brief biography of each writer. To Usoz's collection, Boehmer added Juan de Valdés's *El Salterio* [1550] (Bonn: C. Georgi, 1880) and *Trataditos* [1545] (Bonn, C. Georgi, 1880).<sup>11</sup>

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8 Tomás López Muñoz, *La Reforma en la Sevilla del siglo XVI* [2011: II]. The English translations of these documents are mine except otherwise indicated.

9 See Frances Luttikhuisen, *Underground Protestantism*, [2016] Appendix C.

10 Eduard Boehmer, *Bibliotheca Wiffeniana. Spanish Reformers of two Centuries from 1520* [2007]. For a detailed description of Constantino de la Fuente's works, see Boehmer, *Bibliotheca ...* [2007: II, 30–40].

11 Boehmer would continue to publish more works by Juan de Valdés with English translations by John T. Betts and his wife Mary.

## 2. Biographical Sketch

Specific bibliographical data concerning Constantino de la Fuente is scanty. To begin with, we must also point out a misconception regarding the family name. The name Ponce de la Fuente, by which he is often referred to, is not correct. A recent study by Michel Boeglin clarifies the error.<sup>12</sup> Neither Eduard Boehmer, in his meticulous biography of Constantino, nor Ernst Schäfer in his documented work of those accused of Lutheranism in Castile, noticed this blunder.

This introductory essay, and the appended sample of one of Constantino's writings, is an endeavour to bring to light the life and wealth of acquaintances and experiences this forgotten Spanish cathedral preacher met with, and at the same time to right certain wrongs attributed to him. The biographical section includes his family background and education, his career as preacher, his library and his conflict with the Inquisition. In a separate section we deal at length with his published works.

### 2.1 Family background

Constantino de la Fuente was born in San Clemente, in the province of Cuenca. The exact date of his birth is uncertain because no baptismal records remain from before 1584. That year the records, that until then had been kept in the vicar's house, were destroyed by a flood. Traditionally, 1502 has been accepted as his year of birth, though 1505 could also be a likely date.

Constantino was the son of Pedro de la Fuente; his mother was a Zapata, a family that originated from El Provencia, a village some 15 km to the west of San Clemente.<sup>13</sup> Pedro de la Fuente, had arrived in San Clemente from Fuente el Carnero in the province of Zamora at the turn of the sixteenth century. The move from Fuente el Carnero to San Clemente may have been due to a combination of both demographic and political motives. Originally the Ruta de la Plata, the

12 In 1568, in the French rendering of *The Artes* by Jacques Bienvenu referred to Constantino as "Fontius". In 1582, Simon Goulart, the editor of Jean Crespin's *Histoire des Martyrs*, changed it to Fonce. Later, Louis Mayeul Chaudon, in his *Nouveau dictionnaire historique* (1766), inserted the double patronymic: Fontius Pontius (Ponce de la Fuente). Half a century later, Juan Antonio Llorente in *Histoire critique de l'Inquisition d'Espagne* (1817) repeated the double patronymic, fixing it for another two centuries. See Michel Boeglin, 'Irenismo y herejía a mediados del siglo XVI en Castilla. El caso de Constantino de la Fuente', in Ignacio Javier García Pinilla (ed), *Disidencia religiosa en Castilla la Nueva en el siglo XVI* [2013, 223–249].

13 According to oral tradition, at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Alonso Sánchez de Calatayud, VI lord of El Provencio, arrived in San Clemente accompanied by a servant named Teresa Zapata who married Fernán Martínez, another of his servants. The couple settled in San Clemente. See Ignacio de la Rosa Ferrer, "Hidalgos de la Villa de San Clemente" [2018].

route that connected Salamanca with Zamora, ran through Fuente el Carnero, but towards the end of the fifteenth century a change in the layout of the road took the Ruta de la Plata closer to the neighbouring village of Corrales del Vino. As the importance of Fuente el Carnero gradually declined so did opportunities for advancement for young men. One of the fastest growing villages at the time was San Clemente in the province of Cuenca. This was basically due to political reasons. San Clemente had taken sides with Isabel I in her dispute with her niece Juanna la Beltraneja for the throne of Castile. With Isabel's victory, the village was granted numerous privileges, which attracted many newcomers looking for a better future. It is calculated that in the sixteenth century more than 80 noble families lived in the town, which earned it the nickname "The Little Court of La Mancha."

Pedro de la Fuente was the first of three brothers to arrive in San Clemente. Antonio and Cristobal came shortly afterwards. There were strong socio-political reasons for starting a new life. Both their father, Francisco de la Fuente, and their grandfather, Benito de la Fuente, had been squires to Pedro de Ledesma, commanding officer of the Zamora forces in the Battle of Toro (1476), one of the first civil wars between Isabel I and her niece Juanna.<sup>14</sup> The civil wars had changed society. Military operations had ruined crops as soldiers marched across the fields, leaving farmers with no means of livelihood; the plight of muleteers was similar since large numbers of mules had been required to transport military supplies. Farmland was abandoned and vagrancy became rampant.

In order to find a vital space in this new society, some nobles looked for opportunities in new villages, exchanging the sword for the plough, creating vineyards, turning farmland into pastures for sheep farming, etc.; others learned letters in makeshift grammar schools.<sup>15</sup> This was the case with the de la Fuente family. Whereas Pedro de la Fuente found his opportunity as public notary, a profession he seems to have practiced before moving to San Clemente,<sup>16</sup> his brothers turned to the land. They had come to San Clemente in the service of Martín Ruiz de Villamediana, a wealthy silk merchant who as a young man, in the service of his future father-in-law had come to San Clemente to buy wool,<sup>17</sup> rapidly increased his fortune with the purchase of land for sheep farming and vineyards. The de la Fuente brothers benefited from Villamediana's example and soon accumulated small fortunes. This, however, created a problem: how to avoid paying taxes. One

14 Benito de la Fuente died in the Battle of Albuera (1479), the last of the wars that put Isabel on the throne.

15 See De la Rosa Ferrer, *El año mil quinientos ...* [2020].

16 In 1501 Pedro de la Fuente was officially named notary public of the town of San Clemente (Archivo General de Simancas. Registro General del Sello, Leg. 150111, 27). I. de la Rosa Ferrer, "Hidalgos de la Villa de San Clemente" [2018: 37].

17 De la Rosa Ferrer, "Hidalgos de la Villa de San Clemente" [2018: 9].



way was by declaring themselves knights. The clergy and the nobility—the two privileged classes—were exempt from paying taxes. Being newcomers, the city authorities of San Clemente doubted the brothers' claim and insisted on considering them "*pecheros*."<sup>18</sup> Members of the city council travelled as far as Fuente el Carnero to find proof of their nobility. There they were informed that "a certain *ixosdalgo* [knight] with little distinction in the nobility, who did not pay taxes, more or less a hundred years ago had left the town." The city council needed more proof and in 1526 Antonio and Cristobal de la Fuente appealed to the High Court in Granada for an official letter certifying their status as nobles. It took twenty years of endless lawsuits for the Granada court to decide. Finally, the court ruled in their favour; their claim was certified in 1547, and confirmed in 1550.

Constantino's father never bothered about obtaining a certificate of nobility. He may very well have understood that times were changing and that the future was in education, not in titles of nobility. When Ferdinand and Isabel came to the throne there was a certain professionalization of the apparatus of the state. Bureaucrats and lawyers—men with university degrees—were in great demand. No members of the de la Fuente family figure among the educated elite of San Clemente, except for a certain Antonio de la Fuente, "a native of San Clemente," studying at the university-college of San Antonio de Porta Coeli in Sigüenza in 1549.<sup>19</sup> This Antonio de la Fuente may be the lawyer cited as a witness in 1571: "Lic. de la Fuente, lawyer of the villa, 45 years of age."<sup>20</sup>

One proof of nobility was to claim that a person was of "old Christian" stock. In other words, that he or she had no Jewish or Moorish ancestry. Being a member of a *cofradía* (brotherhood) was one way to prove this. Whether for this reason or because they were very devout, around 1530 Constantino's uncles applied for membership into the *Cofradía de Nuestra Señora de la Concepción* of San Clemente.<sup>21</sup> The same procedure would be followed by a great-grandson, Francisco de la Fuente Zapata in 1629 to obtain the habit of the Order of Santiago, by claiming that his ancestors had entered this brotherhood in 1531.

The archives of the *cofradía*, in which the names of the two brothers appear, with a confirmation 30 years later, read thus:

The books of the aforementioned brotherhood (Nuestra Señora de la Concepción y Natividad de Septiembre) were seen, where the early members are registered, particularly

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18 Pechero = taxpayer.

19 José de Rújula y de Ochotorena, *Índice de los colegiales del Mayor de San Ildefonso y Menores de Alcalá* [1946: 264].

20 De la Rosa Ferrer, "Las tiendas de San Clemente hacia 1570: la ruptura de la moral y sociedad tradicionales" [2017].

21 De la Rosa Ferrer, "La cofradía de Nuestra Señora de Septiembre: unas noticias breves" [2017].

those of the year 1531 and in each of the books were found the names and surnames of: de la Fuente, Simón, and Valera. That is, antonio de la fuente; jorxe simón; diego simón el viexo; diego de valera; francisco de la fuente; francisco simón; antonio de la fuente.

This is a list of the oldest living members of the oldest book, that of the year of 1560. Signed: Antonio de la Fuente Simon; Diego Simon el viejo; Diego de Valera; Francisco de la Fuente Pallares; Francisco de la Fuente Comeño; El Lizenciado Antonio de la Fuente,<sup>22</sup> with no membership fee, being a lawyer of the Cabildo.<sup>23</sup>

The *cofradía* had a strong reputation for admitting only “old Christians” as members. This brings us to seriously doubt the assertion that the de la Fuentes were of Jewish origin as many authors claim, an assertion based on Constantino’s response to an invitation to occupy a post in Toledo. As an excuse for not accepting the post, he had remarked—alluding to the strict application of the statutes of cleansing of blood in effect in Toledo—that “the bones of his parents and grandparents had been in their graves for many years, and he did not wish to accept any position which might cause their holy repose to be disturbed.”<sup>24</sup>

A less ascertainable argument in favour of Constantino’s *converso* origin is reported by Claudio Guillen, who found the name of a certain Alonso de la Fuente in a census compiled in 1510 of *converso* families in Seville (Fol. 129, Núm. 188) and took for granted it applied to Constantino’s family.<sup>25</sup> More recently, Michel Boeglin bases this assertion on instructions found in Inquisition archives dating 22 January 1558 in which the Supreme Council states: “In this Council there is evidence that Lic. Melchor de León has said that Constantino is a *confeso* (converted Jew).”<sup>26</sup> In addition, we cannot ignore Constantino’s father’s profession, that of notary. Many families with aspirations to move up the social ladder had Jewish origins, and profession such as auditor, secretary, and notary public was closely related to this social group.<sup>27</sup>

Despite this seemingly convincing evidence,<sup>28</sup> there are also authors who hold the opposite view. Eduard Boehmer felt that Constantino’s words refusing the post in

22 Very likely the Antonio de la Fuente who was a student at the university college of San Antonio de Porta Coeli in Sigüenza in 1549.

23 De la Rosa Ferrer, “La cofradía de Nuestra Señora de Septiembre: unas noticias breves” [2017].

24 Montanus, *The Arts* ..., [2018: 405].

25 Claudio Guillén, “Un padrón de conversos sevillanos (1510)” [1963: 78]. Guillén found the following reference: De la Fuente (Núm. 188).

26 AHN, Inquisición, lib. 575, ff. 57r.-57v.

27 Miguel A. Extremera Extremera, “Los escribanos de Castilla en la Edad Moderna. Nuevas líneas de investigación” [2001: 174–75]; Alicia Marchant Rivera, “Aspectos sociales, prácticas y funciones de los escribanos públicos castellanos del siglo de oro” [2010: 201–221].

28 William B. Jones devotes a whole chapter to the defence of Constantino’s Jewish ancestry based on a phrase found in *The Artes* [2018: 405]. William B. Jones, *Constantino Ponce de la Fuente* [1964: 417].

Toledo responded more to an expression of his disagreement with the archbishop's policy than an allusion to his Jewish ancestry. Boehmer states: "We have no reason to conclude from that refusal that there was Jewish blood in Constantino. He could not but dislike a bishop who cared so little about the genealogy of the Christian, which was the capital question for Constantino."<sup>29</sup>

The *converso* problem was very present in lawsuits regarding claims of nobility. Had the city council of San Clemente suspected that the de la Fuente brothers were *conversos*, and therefore unworthy of nobility, they would not have travelled all the way to Fuente el Carnero for proof of their nobility. The archives of the *Cofradía de Nuestra Señora* at San Clemente are emphatic regarding "old Christian" membership:

The said names of the said *cofrades* (brothers) are written and set in the said books on different pages and I hereby attest that the said brotherhood is founded on the statute of cleansing of blood and that prior to being received as a member, investigation was made, by order of the officials of the said brotherhood, regarding cleanliness of blood as appears from many of them that are in the said file." Signed: Diego de Llanos, notary.<sup>30</sup>

## 2.2 Education

Most of the young boys of San Clemente learned to read and write in the rectory of the Santiago Apostol Church, but it appears that Constantino was sent to the grammar school in the recently founded Franciscan convent. From the start, the old grammar school met with opposition from the Church. There were constant complaints regarding the lack of regular teachers. Education was mainly in the hands of the town's priests. A certain Alonso del Castillo served as private tutor for wealthy families. Ignacio de la Rosa Ferrer describes the situation in San Clemente at the beginning of the sixteenth century thus:

In order to train the new elite, the town began to equip itself with its own grammar school to form cadres for the local administration. San Clemente opened a grammar school in 1494 despite the opposition of the *provisor* (ecclesiastical judge) of the Bishopric of Cuenca. In any case, teaching youngsters at the end of 1500 was overwhelmingly in the hands of clergymen, including sacristans. It is this monopoly that explains the bishop's rejection of the grammar school in 1494. It is not that the city council viewed clerical teaching badly, but rather that the professor, a converted Jew named bachelor Alonso del Castillo, imparted 'secular grammar and

29 Boehmer, *Bibliotheca...* [2007: II, 10].

30 De la Rosa Ferrer, "El doctor Constantino Ponce de la Fuente y sus allegados, unos zamoranos asentados en San Clemente" [2017].

logic.' Indeed, up to four converts served in the church of Santiago Apostol de San Clemente in 1506. Material taught by Alonso del Castillo corresponded to a higher degree, which prepared future graduates for the universities of Alcalá or Salamanca. Towards 1490 in San Clemente there were two primary teachers: the sacristan Lope González, in the church, and Gonzalo Gallego who had his own schools in houses belonging to Miguel Sánchez de los Herreros, who would later become mayor of the town.<sup>31</sup>

After grammar school, Constantino was sent to Francisco de Cisneros's recently founded university at Alcalá de Henares instead of the old, well-established University of Salamanca. Alonso del Castillo, who ran the grammar school at the Franciscan convent may have influenced that choice. A Bull of Pope Eugene IV (1446) granted permission to found fifteen Franciscan Observance Convents in Spain. One was founded in San Clemente in 1503 on a plot of land donated by Alonso del Castillo.<sup>32</sup> The convent became a centre for primary Latin studies for the children of San Clemente. It was also an example of the rivalry existing between the *pecheros* and the noble families of San Clemente, who claimed the Church of Santiago as theirs. The affinity between Alonso del Castillo, the tenets of the Observant Franciscans and Francisco de Cisneros, an Observant Franciscan himself, strongly suggests that if Constantino went to Alcalá instead of Salamanca, it was Alonso del Castillo's doings.

At Alcalá, first-year students entered one of the *colegios menores*, where Latin was the main subject, before being allowed to enter one of the faculties in the Colegio Mayor San Ildefonso, where a mastery of Latin was required for access to the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy.<sup>33</sup> There were seven *colegios menores*, each one housing students of a particular discipline: Madre de Dios, for students of theology and medicine; San Pedro y San Pablo, for the Franciscans; Santa Balbina, for students of philosophy and logic; Santa Catalina, for students of physics and metaphysics; San Eugenio for students of Latin, Greek and Hebrew; San Isidoro, for students specializing in Latin; and San Lucas, for sick students. Whereas most students lived in these *colegios menores*, some lived in *pupilajes*, small boarding-houses subject to university rules and inspection.<sup>34</sup> Constantino would very likely have lodged, and

31 De la Rosa Ferrer, *El año mil quinientos ...* [2020: 512, 513].

32 I. de la Rosa Ferrer, "El convento de frailes franciscanos de Nuestra Señora de Gracia de San Clemente (Cuenca)," in *El convento de Nuestra Señora de Gracia de la villa de San Clemente : la pervivencia del franciscanismo en el Obispado de Cuenca*, Zaragoza: I. de la Rosa Ferrer, 2022.

33 This was a single faculty, not two separate faculties. Gonzalo Gómez García, "La necesidad de una apertura en la historiografía de la Universidad de Alcalá" [2020: 251, n45].

34 No resident could spend the night outside the colegio: the doors were locked at sunset. There was reading at table, and only Latin could be spoken, even in ordinary conversation. Stafford Poole, *Juan de Ovando: Governing the Spanish Empire in the Reign of Phillip II* [2004: 60].

initiated his studies of Greek, in the Colegio de San Eugenio. In addition to lodging and meals, these *colegios menores* also had classrooms.

This takes us back to reconsider Constantino's birth date. If he entered university around 1522 he would have done so at age twenty, a bit late considering that most young men entered the university around age sixteen or earlier. On the other hand, if the minimum age of admission into one of the faculties in the *colegio mayor* was twenty,<sup>35</sup> a birth year of 1502 is probably more accurate than 1505. If we take into account certain preferences in admitting beginning students—good results on entrance exams, preference for poor students and for young students—“because they learn languages better and faster”—,<sup>36</sup> we can assume that Constantino would have entered the university around 1517, when he was fifteen. If so, the outbreak of the Revolt of the Comuneros in 1520 would have interrupted his studies. The revolt also had significant repercussions in Alcalá. Whereas the majority of the faculty took the side of the *Comuneros*,<sup>37</sup> students from Andalusia supported the new King—young Charles V—while those from Castile opposed him. News of these events must have reached San Clemente and perhaps Constantino's father would have been reluctant to send his young son to Alcalá in 1520 or 1521. It appears that the de la Fuentes were contrary to the revolt and participated in its repression.<sup>38</sup>

Whoever Constantino's teacher was at the grammar school in San Clemente, he arrived in Alcalá with a good foundation in Latin. His teacher may also have initiated him in the subjects of the Trivium: Latin literature, rhetoric and dialectics. This, together with his own talent, enabled him already in his early years at Alcalá to compose a laudatory poem in honour of Lorenzo Balbo de Lillo, his Latin professor, that was considered worthy enough to be included in Balbo's edition of Valerio Flaco's *Argonautica* (Alcalá de Henares, 1524).<sup>39</sup> It stands to reason, therefore, that Constantino had completed his primary studies before the Revolt and that in 1522, at the age of twenty, entered the Faculty of Arts where Balbo was teaching.

Lorenzo Balbo de Lillo taught Latin literature together with Pedro de la Mota. For teaching material, they used Valerio Flaco's *Argonautica*, Silius Italicus's *Punic Wars*, Cicero's *Philippians* and by Quintus Curtius Rufus's *History of Alexander the Great*. Given the scarcity of copies for their students, it was decided that Mota would edit

35 Poole, *Juan de Ovando ...*, [2004: 60].

36 AHN, Universidades, lib. 525-F, fol. 56 r<sup>o</sup>, in Antonio Alvar Ezquerro, “El Colegio Trilingüe de la Universidad de Alcalá de Henares” [1999: 520].

Antonio Alvar Ezquerro, “La Universidad de Alcalá a principios del siglo XVI” [2016: 64–73].

37 In September 1522 Emperor Charles V returned to Castile and on October 1 a letter of royal pardon was read publicly in Valladolid for the participants in the revolt with which all the faculty members of Alcalá were officially pardoned.

38 Ignacio de la Rosa Ferrer, personal communication.

39 José Luis Gonzalo Sánchez-Molero, *El erasmismo y la educación de Felipe II (1527–1557)* [2003: 368].

a new edition of Italicus's work and Balbo would edit Flaco's. An outbreak of tertian fever prevented Mota from carrying out his part of the project. Balbo, who had not contracted the fever, published an annotated edition of both Flaco's, and Curtius's work. That Balbo, who had a brilliant future awaiting him, published nothing else after 1524 suggests that he may have died prematurely as was first suggested by Andrés Escoto.<sup>40</sup> However, this can hardly have been the case since in October of 1529 his name appears (shortened to Lorenzo de Lillo) as having received both a Licentiate degree and a Master's degree in Arts at the hands of Pedro de Lerma.<sup>41</sup> Balbo may have left Alcalá in the early 1530s together with other like-minded Erasmian humanists.

The frequent outbreaks of tertian fevers in Alcalá may have motivated Pedro de la Mota to take up a teaching post at the grammar school belonging to the Cathedral of Granada in 1525. In 1532, Mota earned the title of bachelor and master of Arts and became part of the faculty of the recently founded University of Granada, a position he held until 1556. At least two of Mota's companions from Alcalá followed him to Granada: Juan Clemente and Martin Perez de Ayala. Some students may have become ill or left at that time also. Alcalá was indeed an unhealthy locality. In 1528 Francisco de Vergara, Constantino's Greek professor, took a year's leave of absence to recuperate from some fevers and finally had to give up teaching altogether in 1541. In his *De rebus gestis*, Alvar Gómez, Cardenal Cisneros's biographer, attributes the premature death of Francisco de Vergara, as well as numerous students, to malaria.<sup>42</sup> Did Constantino interrupt his studies in 1528 due to illness?

Constantino did not stay long enough at Alcalá to master both Greek and Hebrew, nevertheless, commenting on his knowledge of classical languages, Reginaldo Gonzalo de Montes, his first biographer, is emphatic:

He was the only one, or at least one of only a few, who, in the midst of general ignorance, knew the three languages: Latin, Greek and Hebrew. He had acquired them without a teacher, and to such a level of perfection that he alone could have brought about their renaissance. With these aids he entered on the study of Holy Scripture, and even in his youth he had become so erudite that, when he gave his opinion on sacred matters or words, it seemed to everyone—except perhaps those who suffered from the disease of extreme ignorance—that there was nothing at all wanting in his words.<sup>43</sup>

40 Andrea Schott, *Hispaniae Bibliotheca, seu de academiis ac bibliothecis* [1608: 569–570].

41 Rafael Ramis Barceló and Pedro Ramis Serra, *Actos y Grados de la Universidad de Alcalá (1523–1544)* [2020: 188].

42 Alvar Gómez de Castro, *De rebus gestis a Francisco Ximeno Cisnerio: archiepiscopo Toletano, libri octo* (1569) in Pedro Urbano González de la Calle, "Francisco de Vergara y la pronunciación de la Z griega" [1948: 263].

43 Montanus, *The Arts* ... [2018: 403].

That he was “the only one, or at least one of only a few, who knew the three languages” may have been an exaggeration, but Montes’s next claim—“he had acquired them without a teacher”—strongly suggests some form of self-study. As stated, Constantino had an excellent command of Latin, but how did he acquire such an excellent knowledge of Hebrew and Greek? Knowing that one of the strong points at Alcalá was the emphasis on biblical languages, his main reason for attending could have been his interest in philology. Some of the professors, such as the famous Greek scholar Demetrio Ducas, who helped compile the Complutensian Polyglot Bible, had already left, but some of Ducas’s best students had stayed on. For example, Francisco de Vergara, who appears first as a substitute and after 1522 as a full professor of Greek,<sup>44</sup> taught from 1521 to 1541. He occupied the chair left vacant by Hernán Nuñez, the “Pinciano,”<sup>45</sup> in 1522 when Nuñez left for Salamanca. The classes were small. In 1524 Vergara only had a dozen students and in 1527 there were still only twenty registered.<sup>46</sup> In 1525 he published a reader for his students titled: *Graecorum characterum, apicum et abbreviationum explicado cum nonnullis* (Alcala, 1525). With a copy of this publication, but not Vergara’s Greek grammar—*De Graecae linguae grammaúca*—, which did not appear until 1537, and a copy of Erasmus’s parallel Greek-Latin edition of the New Testament, Constantino could make good progress on his own.

As for Hebrew, there were several excellent Hebraists at Alcalá: Alfonso de Alcalá, Alfonso de Zamora and Pablo de Coronel. All three were *conversos* and had trained to be rabbis in their youth. Pablo de Coronel was probably no longer in Alcala when Constantino arrived. Once his duties regarding the Complutensian Bible were ended, he left for Salamanca to take over Alfonso de Zamora’s chair of Hebrew. Although it was Cardinal Cisnero’s initial intention that both #Greek and Hebrew be taught in the Colegio Menor San Eugenio, it seems that Hebrew did not become an official subject with a chaired professor until 1528, when the Colegio de San Jeronimo (the Trilingual College) was created by Mateo Pascual to endow the University with a college specifically destined to the study of the Bible, both from a philological point of view and as a previous step to theological reflection, reserved for the Faculty of Theology.<sup>47</sup> The Trilingual College opened in 1528 but the following academic year it was closed by Diego de la Puente due to inadequate sanitary conditions.<sup>48</sup> There may have been another outbreak of tertian fever or

44 Urbano González de la Calle, “Francisco de Vergara ...” [1948: 252].

45 Responsible for the Greek version of the New Testament of the Complutensian Polyglot Bible.

46 Urbano González de la Calle, “Francisco de Vergara ...” [1948: 255].

47 The groups were very small: AHN, Universities, book 525-F, fol. 56 v<sup>o</sup> states that the students should be divided into groups of five - two Latin, two Greek, and one Hebrew. Alvar Ezquerro, “El Colegio Trilingue ...”, [2016: 519, n23].

48 Ramis Barcelo and Ramis Serra, *Actos y Grados ...* [2020: 64].

malaria. Unfortunately, registered information regarding the school is scarce and late, only beginning in 1613.<sup>49</sup>

Constantino may have left Alcalá around 1528 and with the basic knowledge he had acquired, he could also go on to master Hebrew on his own with the help of a Hebrew Bible—very likely Santi Pagnini’s interlinear Hebrew/Latin translation: *Veteris et Novi Testamenti nova translatio* (Lyons, 1528)—and Alfonso de Zamora’s *Introductionis artis Grammaticae hebraica* (Alcalá de Henares, 1526). Furthermore, there would have been no lack of *conversos* in San Clemente willing and able to help him with his Hebrew. In any case, as Montes states, “With these aids he entered on the study of Holy Scripture, and even in his youth he had become so erudite that, when he gave his opinion on sacred matters or words, it seemed to everyone that there was nothing at all wanting in his words.”<sup>50</sup>

A word about Francisco de Vergara and his brother Juan. Both men were accomplished Hellenist scholars and admirers of Erasmus. Juan de Vergara had been secretary to the archbishop of Toledo, Cardinal Cisneros, upon whose death in 1517 he became secretary to the next archbishop, 17-year-old William of Croy, nephew of William of Croy, Charles V’s tutor and advisor. This obliged him to move to Flanders, where he met Erasmus personally. Juan de Vergara returned to Spain in 1521 after the premature death of the young cardinal.<sup>51</sup> In 1523 he became secretary to the next archbishop of Toledo and primate of Spain, Alfonso de Fonseca. By then, Toledo had become a stronghold of Erasmus’s supporters. Fonseca’s death in 1534 was a serious blow to Spanish Erasmians, for it came at a time when the Inquisition had already arrested Bernardino Tovar and Juan de Vergara on suspicion of heresy and would soon begin proceedings against Alonso Ruiz de Virués and others.<sup>52</sup>

While the Supreme Council was busy trying to stop Lutheran literature from entering Spain, Erasmian views were having a heyday in Alcalá. Cardinal Cisneros’s emphasis on biblical studies and ancient languages brought with it an interest in Christian Humanism and, as a result, enthusiasm among the faculty and students for Erasmus and his attacks on clerical abuse and lay ignorance.

49 Alvar Ezquerro, “El Colegio Trilingue ...” [2016: 517].

50 Montanus, *The Arts ...*, [2018: 403].

51 In 1530, Juan de Vergara found himself involved in a trial (*proceso*) in which he was accused of heretical opinions regarding indulgences, the nature of the sacraments, the teaching of the church on oral prayer; his Lutheran inclination, his close friendship with Erasmus, the purchase abroad of suspicious books, etc. At the auto-da-fe held in Toledo on 21 December 1535, he was sentenced to abjure his errors *de vehementi*, to pay a fine of 1,500 ducats and to spend a year in the Monastery of San Agustín. On 27 February 1537, he regained full freedom after four years of confinement, but his trial and his imprisonment had destroyed his career and undermined his health.

52 Peter G. Bietenholz and Thomas Brian Deutscher, *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation* [2003: II, 43].



Between 1522 and 1525, the prestige of Erasmus reached its highest level in Alcalá thanks to the Vergara brothers. This was the time Constantino arrived. Was it through Francisco de Vergara that Constantino came in contact with Christian Humanism for the first time? Or was it through Lorenzo Balbo de Lillo, his Latin literature professor? Both Vergara and Balbo had studied under the Greek scholar Hernán Nunez, el “Pinciano”, but what really united the two men was their enthusiasm for Erasmus.<sup>53</sup> “El Roterdamo” became a household word among both students and professors at Alcalá. His call for a purified Christianity found a willing audience in the intellectual and spiritual ferment of the time. As Marcel Bataillon points out, “Erasmianism was much more than a simple movement of protest against the abuses of the unworthy clergy and some ignorant friars, it was a positive movement of spiritual renovation.”<sup>54</sup> Apart from Balbo and the Vergara brothers, among Erasmus’s followers were the most prestigious humanists of the day: Bernardino Tovar,<sup>55</sup> Mateo Pascual,<sup>56</sup> Pedro de Lerma,<sup>57</sup> Alonso Ruiz de Virués, and many more.

Despite this enthusiasm, there were those who opposed Erasmus and accused him of heresy. In the summer of 1527, Inquisitor General Alonso Manrique summoned scholars from Salamanca, Alcalá and Valladolid to a conference in order to judge certain suspicious passages. All the delegates from Salamanca and Valladolid, except one, declared themselves anti-Erasmians. In contrast, all those from Alcalá, except Pedro Sanchez Ciruelo, were pro-Erasmian. It basically came down to a dispute between scholastics and biblical humanists. No agreement was reached at the conference in the summer of 1527, but it was a turning point. Despite Inquisitor General Manrique’s seemingly favourable attitude towards Erasmus, a wave of

53 Bietenholz and Deutscher, *Contemporaries of Erasmus* ..., [2003: II, 383].

54 Bataillon, *Erasmus y España* [1966: 339].

55 In 1525 Bernardino de Tovar was proposed to the admiral of Castile, Fadrique Enríquez, to evangelize his territory around Medina de Rioseco, but he preferred to continue in Alcalá, as part of a group of clergymen who would eventually be accused of being Erasmians or Lutherans. Tovar was imprisoned by the Inquisition of Toledo in September 1530. The cause was reopened in 1541. He was forced to abjure de vehementi and was sentenced to pay a heavy fine, a sentence similar to that imposed on his brother Juan de Vergara

56 Mateo Pascual was a declared Erasmian. Ramis Barcelo, [2020: 30]. In 1527, Mateo Pascual entered the Colegio Mayor de San Ildefonso. The following year he was chosen rector and founded the Colegio Trilingüe. For having expressed doubts regarding purgatory in public, he was imprisoned from 1533 to 1537 and his goods confiscated. He spent the rest of his life in Rome, where he died in 1562. Francisco Fernández Serrano, *Obispos auxiliares de Zaragoza en tiempos de los arzobispos de la Casa Real de Aragón (1460–1575)* [1969: 95].

57 Pedro de Lerma was the first chancellor of the university and a staunch Erasmian. In 1537 he was called upon to abjure eleven Erasmian propositions. To avoid trouble, he left for Paris later that year, where he became dean of the faculty of theology at the Sorbonne. He never returned to Spain.

persecution began. Among the first victims were Juan de Vergara and his brother Bernardino Tovar,<sup>58</sup> for their criticism of the translation of the Vulgate Bible. A remarkable case was that against the Benedictine monk Alonso Ruiz de Virués, who had translated Erasmus's *Colloquies familiares* into Spanish in 1529. Based on the fact that he possessed a large library, he was accused of being a Lutheran, sent to Seville and imprisoned for four years.<sup>59</sup>

Wary of this growing anti-Erasmian spirit, Constantino may have chosen to abandon his studies in Alcalá out of sheer concern for his own safety. These were times of confusion, and, although it is true that the Inquisition did not burn anyone for being a follower of Erasmus, several eminent Erasmians did end up with their bones in prison, and Constantino was not going to take that chance.

There are still two other possible explanations, though remote, for Constantino's departure from Alcalá. Scholarships lasted eight years.<sup>60</sup> Did he have to leave due to financial difficulties? An even more unlikely reason could have been his conduct. Was he expelled? During the competitive examinations that he sat for years later to fill the vacancy of magisterial canon in Seville, the jurist and legal expert of the archdiocese, Juan de Ovando, brought up the objections of "all the frivolities of his youthful failings."<sup>61</sup> Ovando insisted on his having been married before taking orders, but were there other "frivolities"?

Be that as it may, for some unknown reason Constantino left Alcalá and looked for another more convenient place to continue his studies. Whatever the motives, on leaving the classrooms of Alcalá, the scriptural, humanist and Erasmian training he had acquired would constitute the substratum of his life and work. Although some scholars suggest that his choice of Maese Rodrigo's university-college in Seville was due to the fact that Dr. Francisco de Vargas and Dr. Egidio were already there—which is highly unlikely—, there could have also been more prosaic reasons. For one thing, the climate was much better and the academic—and religious—atmosphere was more charitable. Erasmus's works were still bestsellers in Seville. As Michel Boeglin observes:

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58 Juan de Vergara and Bernardino de Tovar were brothers, not half-brothers. They had different surnames because in some families a younger son took the surname of the father ("Vergara") and the older son would take the name of the paternal grandmother ("Tovar"). M<sup>a</sup> del Carmen Vaquero Serrano, "La familia de Juan de Vergara, canónigo erasmista toledano" [2019: 42].

59 In 1527 Ruiz de Virués had been part of the commission called upon to examine Erasmus's works. In 1533 his name appeared among those suspected of Lutheranism in the process against Juan de Vergara. Accused of being a Lutheran and a follower of Erasmus, he was imprisoned in Seville by the Inquisition from December 1534 to May 1538. In August of that year he was named bishop of the Canary Islands, taking possession of his see 27 March 1539. V. Beltrán de Heredia, "El proceso del erasmiano D. Alonso Ruiz de Virués, teólogo salmantino y obispo de Canarias" [1971: 339–353].

60 Poole, *Juan de Ovando ...*, [2004: 60].

61 Montanus, *The Arts ...* [2018: 415].