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McLaughlin, Karl  (2022) Influence and skulduggery: what the vetting of Inquisition officials in 17th-Century Spain Reveals about the family of Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán (1618-c.1685). *Bulletin of Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*, 47 (1). p. 1. ISSN 2643-9581

Publisher: Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies

Version: Published Version

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Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies

Journal of the Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies

Volume 47

Issue 1

Article 1

2022

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McLaughlin, Karl (2022) "Influence and Skulduggery: What the Vetting of Inquisition Officials in 17th-Century Spain Reveals about the Family of Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán (1618-c.1685)," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*: Vol. 47 : Iss. 1 , Article 1.

Available at:

<https://asphs.net/article/influence-and-skulduggery-what-the-vetting-of-inquisition-officials-in-17th-century-spain-reveals-about-the-family-of-catalina-clara-ramirez-de-guzman-1618-c-1685>

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Influence and Skulduggery: What the Vetting of Inquisition Officials in 17th-Century Spain Reveals about the Family of Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán (1618-c.1685)

Karl McLaughlin

Archives containing the details of applications for posts in the Spanish Inquisition are an extremely valuable source of information not just for a broader understanding of the 16th and 17th centuries but also for helping piece together a more detailed picture of the family backgrounds of literary figures of the period, particularly lesser-known ones. These figures include Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán (1618-1685), an understudied author from Extremadura (Spain) who has attracted increased scholarly interest of late, as reflected in a monographic doctoral thesis work, a modern edition of her poetry, and contributions by scholars such as Borrachero, Fox, Mújica, and Colón Calderón, all of which has been instrumental in raising her profile as part of a growing emphasis on the literary production of female authors in early modern Spain.¹ A highly educated woman who neither married nor entered a convent, Ramírez de Guzmán stands apart from many of her female contemporaries due to the large number of witty and satirical pieces among her surviving writings, which consist of approximately 120 poems in two manuscripts (3884 and 3917) in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid (BNM). However, from other sources we know that she penned other (regrettably now lost) works, including at least one *comedia* and a pastoral novel.²

¹ See, respectively, Karl P. McLaughlin, *'Defragmenting the portrait': Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán, Extremadura's No Conocida Señora of the Golden Age* (PhD diss., University of Bradford, 2010); Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán, *Obra Poética*, edición, introducción y notas por Aránzazu Borrachero Mendíbil and Karl McLaughlin (Mérida: Editora Regional de Extremadura, 2010), from which all references to her poems here will be taken; Aránzazu Borrachero, "El autorretrato en la poesía de Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán (1618-post1684?)," *Calíope* 12, no. 1 (2006): 79-97; Gwynne Fox, *Subtle Subversions: Reading Golden Age Sonnets by Iberian Women* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2008); Barbara Mújica, "Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán: 'Si te he dicho que soy hermosa...'" in *Women Writers of Early Modern Spain. Sophia's Daughters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 274-82; and Isabel Colón Calderón, "Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán: autorretrato y erotismo," in *Venus Venerada: tradiciones eróticas de la literatura española*, eds. José Ignacio Díez Fernández and Adrienne L. Martín (Madrid: Editorial Complutense, 2006), 137-64. See also Bonnie Gasior, "Women's Webs of Dialogic Poetry in Early Modern Spain," *Calíope* 16, no. 2 (2010): 45-64.

² References to the novel are found in several poems by Ramírez de Guzmán and other authors in BNM Ms. 3917. These include the laudatory "En alabanza del *Extremeño*, de mi señora doña Catalina Ramírez de Guzmán. Décimas del padre guardián de San Francisco, fray José de Santa Cruz" (fol. 350v). For references to a *comedia* by her, see María José Osuna Cabezas and Inmaculada Osuna Rodríguez, "Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán y Fernando de la Torre Farfán: dos romances cruzados a cuenta de una comedia desconocida de la escritora," in *Aurea poesis. Estudios*

Biographical information on the poet is somewhat scant,³ although fortunately valuable details of her wider family are available given that her great-uncle, just thirty-five years her elder, was Lorenzo Ramírez de Prado (1583-1658), one of the country's foremost politicians whose prominent roles during the reign of Philip IV included ambassador to France, member of the Council of the Indies and, later, member of the Council of Castile. The distinguished humanist was also admitted to the prestigious Military Order of Santiago in 1629, following a process which necessitated exhaustive inquiries into his family background.⁴ As far as can be ascertained, Ramírez de Guzmán lived her entire life in what is today a relatively minor provincial town in the peripheral region of Extremadura, on the border with Portugal. In its heyday in the early 17th century, however, Llerena was a thriving town (elevated to city status in 1641 following payment of 3000 ducats to the Crown) with a population of around 10,000, a buoyant economy and an important cultural and ecclesiastical community due to the presence of numerous churches and convents.

It was also home to one of the earliest Inquisition Tribunals in the country.⁵ Llerena's Tribunal was established in 1485, at approximately the same time as the

para Begoña López Bueno, eds. Luis de Gómez Canseco, J. Montero and P. Ruiz Pérez (Córdoba: Universidad de Córdoba, 2014), 393-410.

³ Available details of her life can be found in the Introduction to the critical edition of her poetry (note 1 above). For the earliest information on the family, a great debt is owed to Joaquín de Entrambasaguas, who published a series of brief articles on the illustrious Ramírez de Prado branch in *Revista del Centro de Estudios Extremeños* between 1929 and 1932, followed by a monograph entitled *Una familia de Ingenios: Los Ramírez de Prado* (Madrid: CSIC, 1943). See also Arturo Gazul, "Nacimiento y familia de una poetisa llerenense," *Alcántara* 17 (1949): 1-6 and "La familia Ramírez de Guzmán en Llerena," *Revista de Estudios Extremeños* 45, no. 3 (1959): 499-577; also, Antonio Carrasco García, *La Plaza Mayor de Llerena y otros estudios* (Valdemoro: Tuero, 1985), 97-135.

⁴ See Archivo Histórico Nacional [hereafter AHN], *Órdenes Militares, Santiago*, Expediente 6854, "Informaciones y diligencias hechas en el hábito que pretende don Lorenzo Ramírez." A total of 322 witnesses were questioned with regard to the applicant's family origins. Four years earlier, Lorenzo was also the subject of detailed vetting for an Inquisition position in his home city of Zafra. Proof of the close relationship between the two branches of the family can be gauged from the fact that he designated the father of Catalina Clara as his representative for all the formalities associated with the application, including payment of fees and expenses. See AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 1515, Expediente 3. "Información de la limpieza de don Lorenzo Ramírez de Prado."

⁵ Llerena featured in the international media in the late 1970s following the discovery of the skeletal remains of several hundred people during renovation work in and around the tower of its main church. Dating back to at least the 17th century, the remains were initially attributed to Inquisition executions although this hypothesis was subsequently ruled out following investigations by anthropologists. The Inquisition Section of the AHN contains numerous accounts of *autos de fe* staged in Llerena during the 16th and 17th centuries, including details of those tried and their crimes. Among *autos* held in the mid-17th century were two which took place in December 1648 and December

Toledo Tribunal and just three years after the creation of the country's first Tribunal, in Seville.⁶ In terms of jurisdiction, it was the third largest in Castile, covering over 500 towns and cities, an area of approximately 40,000 km² (approximately the size of present-day Extremadura, the fifth biggest region in Spain), and the dominions of the military orders of Alcántara and Santiago. Its territory included many towns and villages on the border with neighbouring Portugal, areas to which a large number of *conversos* fled in the decades following the establishment of the Portuguese Inquisition in 1536. The Llerena Tribunal was housed in three buildings, including, from 1570 onwards, the splendid Zapata Palace. By the end of the 16th century, it boasted approximately fifty permanent officials and major inquisitorial trials initiated from Llerena around that time included those of the so-called "Alumbrados," a sect deemed insidious and depraved by the Inquisition.⁷

Although permanent Tribunals were created the length and breadth of the country – in twelve cities in the Kingdom of Castille and a further six in the Kingdom of Aragón – the choice of provincial Llerena as the seat of a major Tribunal may seem surprising. However, it will be recalled that one of the primary arguments for the establishment of the Inquisition was to identify and persecute heretics among the substantial population of *conversos* in the Spain of the time and Baja Extremadura had a sizeable number of Jewish families in the late 15th century. An estimated 125 families in Llerena had converted to Catholicism to avoid expulsion after the Edict of 1492 and it was natural to suspect that their conversion may not have been wholly genuine in all cases. A second powerful reason that helps account for the establishment of the Tribunal was the influence of Luis de Zapata, the illustrious Llerena-born politician who was a member of the Privy Council of the Catholic Monarchs.⁸

1649 in the Convent of Santa Clara, where two aunts of Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán were nuns. For details of both *autos*, see AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 2730.

⁶ For a discussion of the suggested dates of the creation of the Llerena Tribunal, see Luis Garraín Villa, *Llerena: sus calles, historia y personajes* (Llerena: Sociedad Extremeña de la Historia, 2010), 541-43.

⁷ For details of the prosecution of Alumbrados in Extremadura, including an *auto de fe* ordered by the Llerena Tribunal in March 1579 for heresy and sexual misbehaviour, see Jessica J. Fowler, "Assembling Alumbradismo: The Evolution of a Heretical Construction," in Mercedes Garcia-Arenal, ed., *After Conversion: Iberia and the Emergence of Modernity* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 251-82.

⁸ For information on the early days and activities of the Llerena Tribunal until its jurisdiction was definitively established, see Isabel Testón Núñez, María Ángeles Hernández Bermejo and Rocío Sánchez Rubio, "En el punto de mira de la Inquisición: Judaizantes y moriscos en el Tribunal de Llerena (1485-1800)," *Revista de Estudios Extremeños* 69, no. 2 (2013): 1005-54; Jaime Contreras and Jean-Pierre Dedieu, "Geografía de la Inquisición española: la formación de los distritos (1470-1820)," *Hispania*, 144 (1980): 37-93; Luis Garraín Villa, "Orígenes del Tribunal del Santo Oficio

Given its jurisdiction, powers, methods and direct impact on the lives of the population, the Inquisition was arguably one of the most feared and fearsome institutions in history. Very different figures – from 30,000 to 300,000 depending on the source – have been put forward for the number of people who died at its hands, with some historians even claiming that several million lives were lost. However, scholarship of recent decades has demonstrated that it was not as blood-thirsty as claimed initially, with the number of actual executions now placed at much lower orders of magnitude (approximately 2% of those tried). In particular, quantitative studies such as those by Contreras and Henningsen are acknowledged as offering a much more authoritative basis not just for the scale of inquisitorial prosecution but also the number of deaths.⁹ The true situation is summed up by Kamen in noting that “The Holy Office has a venerable reputation as a juggernaut of death, based as it happens largely on fiction [...] we can in all probability accept the estimate, made on the basis of available documentation, that a maximum of three thousand persons may have suffered death during the entire history of the tribunal.”¹⁰

It is not the intention of this article to examine the history and sordid practices of the Inquisition, which have merited magisterial studies down the years by a host of distinguished scholars too numerous to list here. Rather, it will focus on the information on individuals and families that can be gleaned from the

de la Inquisición de Llerena,” in Felipe Lorenzana de la Puente and Francisco Mateos Ascacíbar, coords., *Actas de la II Jornada de Historia de Llerena* (Llerena: Sociedad Extremeña de Historia, 2001), 117-34; by the same author, “El Tribunal del Santo Oficio de la Inquisición de Llerena. Nuevas aportaciones,” in Felipe Lorenzana de la Puente and Francisco Mateos Ascacíbar, coords., *Actas de las XV Jornadas de Historia en Llerena*, (Llerena: Sociedad Extremeña de Historia, 2014), 311-329; and Julio Fernández Nieva, “Inquisición interactiva. Inquisición e inquisidores llerenenses en los siglos XVI-XVII,” *Revista de Estudios Extremeños* 56, no. 1 (2000): 161-91. Valuable recent contributions can be found in the published proceedings of a monographic conference on the Tribunal held in Cáceres in 2019: Beatriz Badorrey Martín and Sixto Sánchez-Lauro, eds., *El Tribunal Inquisitorial de Llerena y su jurisdicción en Extremadura* (Madrid: Editorial Sínderesis, 2020).

⁹ The classic quantitative survey by Contreras and Henningsen remains a reference point in this regard. See Jaime Contreras and Gustav Henningsen. “Forty-four Thousand Cases of the Spanish Inquisition (1540-1700): Analysis of a Historical Data Bank,” in *The Inquisition in Early Modern Europe: Studies on Sources and Methods*, eds. G. Henningsen and J. Tedeschi (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), 100-29. Also, Gustav Henningsen, “El ‘banco de datos’ del Santo Oficio. Las relaciones de causas de la Inquisición española (1550-1700),” *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia*, 174 (1977): 547-70. Through statistical tabulations of 50,000 recorded cases tried by nineteen Spanish tribunals between 1540-1700, Henningsen established that 775 people (1.7%) were actually executed while another 700 (1.4%) were sentenced to death in effigy.

¹⁰ Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision*, (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2014), 253. As the same author rightly notes, however, “figures for executions do not of course tell the whole story of cruelty and oppression, since the negative impact of the Holy Office extended far beyond the question of burnings.”

comprehensive documentation held in the numerous Inquisition *legajos* and *expedientes* held in Spain's Archivo Histórico Nacional. Kamen is among those to highlight the value of the obsessive record-keeping by the Inquisition:

The outside world may have been kept uninformed but internally the flow of information was almost impeccable. The administrative and secretarial apparatus of the tribunal took care to set down even the most trifling business. Thanks to this, the Spanish Inquisition is one of the few early modern institutions about whose procedure an enormous amount of documentation is available. Like any judicial court, it needed paperwork to survive [...] Fortunately a good deal of this documentation has survived, making it the first European security organization that we can study adequately through its own records.¹¹

Among the documents of incalculable value, the AHN houses the comprehensive correspondence between the Council of the Inquisition in Madrid (often referred to as the *Suprema*) and its many Tribunals, together with the detailed reports compiled by officials who were dispatched to investigate persons accused of crimes against the faith and gather information on applicants for the various posts within the institution. Such investigations invariably included painstaking checks of old documents such as inventories of individuals punished for their crimes, family trees to identify potentially suspicious family names, and verbatim records of interrogations of persons known to the applicants and their families. The correspondence and reports have been particularly valuable for bringing to light key information on the family of Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán, whose two younger brothers, Pedro and Lorenzo, were the subject of extensive vetting ordered in 1642 following their applications to be admitted to junior Inquisition positions. As will become apparent below, their applications triggered surprising developments and gave rise to heated controversies in Llerena, particularly among members of its Inquisition Tribunal. For a better understanding of the context in which these arose, some preliminary remarks on the poet's family and its social standing are appropriate.

Abundant documentary evidence reflects the prominent role occupied by the Ramírez family in Llerena life, including local politics. Francisco Ramírez Guerrero, father of Catalina Clara, is a regular presence in municipal and other archives on account of the numerous official positions he held in Llerena and

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 270. Recent scholarship has, however, also drawn attention to some of the problems posed by inquisitorial and other archival practices in terms of accurately documenting certain prosecuted acts. See Zeb Tortorici, *Sins against Nature: Sex and Archives in Colonial New Spain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

neighbouring parts.¹² Frequently absent from home, he spent periods in Madrid in connection with his roles, including as the representative of the council in important hearings. He cultivated the friendship and favour of important figures in Llerena and other parts of Extremadura. A close friend of aristocrats, including the Count of La Puebla (Francisco administered the noble family's properties in Extremadura for many years and the count acted as godfather in 1614 to his fourth child) and the Marquis of Monesterio,¹³ he was on friendly terms also with the town's highest authorities. One governor, Diego de Leyna, acted as witness to his marriage in 1609, while another – Francisco Ramírez de Haro, governor between 1641 and 1647 – was a regular visitor to the family home in the Puerta Nueva. Valued at the considerable sum of 10,000 ducats, the house was among the most splendid in Llerena and very probably hosted literary gatherings, which Catalina Clara, as a reputed poet, would have taken part in and may even have led.¹⁴ The home was also used by the family to host musical evenings to entertain distinguished visitors, most likely in a bid to consolidate its social status.¹⁵

This reference to musical occasions may appear innocuous were it not for the fact that it was made in writing by senior Inquisition official Lorenzo Gutiérrez

¹² In 1619 he succeeded his father as *regidor perpetuo* of Villa de la Reina and as treasurer of the *alcabalas* of Fuente del Maestre, an office he held for more than twenty years. In the early 1620s, he was appointed governor of a group of five small towns under Llerena's jurisdiction. Various references to an army role can also be found in the municipal archives, including an instruction addressed to "los capitanes D. Francisco Ramírez Guerrero y Diego Aldana y Muñón" to inspect the local garrison to ensure it had sufficient troops to meet Llerena's obligations to the Crown. See Llerena, Archivo Histórico Municipal [hereafter AHM], *Libro de Acuerdos*, 1628-32, fol. 234r.

¹³ The two aristocrats are the subject of laudatory verses by Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán. See *Obra Poética*, poems XCIX and XXXIII, respectively.

¹⁴ For a discussion of Llerena's literary circle and Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán's likely academy involvement, see Karl McLaughlin, "Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán: Llerena's Academy Poet?," *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 95, no. 8 (2018): 957-82.

¹⁵ Many documents reflect the Ramírez family's social position and its constant concern to increase this further. Shortly after moving from Fuente de Cantos to the more attractive Llerena in the early 1600s, Antonio Núñez Ramírez, father of Francisco, applied for an *ejecutoria de hidalguía* for himself and his only son and the granting of the title was common knowledge. The "Informaciones" concerning Lorenzo Ramírez de Prado gathered in 1629 for his application to be admitted to the Military Order of Santiago include details of a dispute between Francisco's wife, Isabel de Guzmán, and the wife of Pedro de Almezquita over seating privileges during a visit to the wife of the governor. This and other references convey an image of a woman who was preoccupied with asserting her social status and who often reminded others of her blood ties to the nobility. The quarrel over seating is an excellent example of how "familial honor played a crucial role in translating the broad demands of precedence expectations into individualized disputes [...] Indeed, that groups and individuals had so much riding on the public performance of etiquette speaks to the aggregate cultural factors fostering conflicts over these matters." See Cristian Berco, "Spanish Inquisitors, Etiquette Culture, and the Brain in the 17th Century," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies* 46, no. 1 (2021): 1-26. Available at <https://asphs.net/article/spanish-inquisitors-etiquette-culture-and-the-brain-in-the-17th-century>.

Valverde, who voiced his concerns to his superiors in Madrid that the close friendship between the family and governor Ramírez de Haro ruled the latter out as a reliable character witness in the application of Catalina Clara's two brothers for posts with the Holy Office. The detail of the governor's visits has reached us through an interesting source – a *legajo* in the Inquisition Section of the AHN and dated 1642 – and it is important to explain its origins.

When Pedro and Lorenzo Ramírez de Guzmán applied to be appointed *familiares* of the Inquisition, Gutiérrez Valverde, then a *notario del secreto* of the Llerena Tribunal, informed the Suprema that governor Ramírez de Haro could not be considered an impartial witness in the inquiries as he favoured “a los pretendientes con exceso, hallándose en su casa con muchas cenas y solfeando con sus hermanas al brasero.”¹⁶ Before discussing in detail the application and the controversy it generated, some words on the sought-after role of *familiar* of the Inquisition are warranted, beginning with a brief overview of the typical personnel of an Inquisition Tribunal.

Staffing of Tribunals remained relatively consistent during the early centuries of their existence. Each Tribunal had to have two (later, three) inquisitors, who were assisted by, among others, a prosecutor (*fiscal*) responsible for drawing up charges and interrogating suspects and witnesses; theologians (*calificadores*) who acted as assessors and weighed up evidence of heresy; and a notary of the secret (*notario del secreto*), who witnessed and kept a faithful record of testimony offered; there was also a secretary general, who recorded the sentences and edicts of the tribunal and the proceedings of *autos de fe*, the rituals of public penance of condemned heretics and apostates that were staged when the Inquisition had decided their punishment.

In addition to these senior offices, there was a much-prized lay position: the *familiar*. In the earliest Inquisition formats of the Middle Ages, inquisitors moved from location to location accompanied by men at arms who provided protection and carried out their orders. For reasons of trust, these men tended to be drawn from the inquisitors' immediate or extended family, hence the name.¹⁷ However, the role gradually changed over time and, by the late 16th century, familiars came to be viewed more as a supplemental police force, unpaid agents

¹⁶ AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 2727, “Carta de Lorenzo Gutiérrez,” 24 de diciembre de 1642.

¹⁷ In the early days of the Inquisition, the first Inquisitor General, Tomás de Torquemada, reputedly travelled with up to 250 close and distant relatives. For a detailed discussion of the role and functions of these accompanying parties, see Caterina Bruschi, “*Familia inquisitionis*: a study on the inquisitors' entourage (XIII-XIV centuries),” *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome - Moyen Âge* 125, no. 2 (2013) [Online].

who kept the population under surveillance in rural areas, particularly locals suspected of judaizing activities.¹⁸

The social profile of familiars also evolved over time. Recruitment changed from popular circles, particularly artisans and shopkeepers, to more elite circles, with gentlemen and even the nobility becoming a major source. By way of example, all nine members of the Jaén Tribunal in the mid-17th century were drawn from the ranks of the local nobility. According to Pérez, the post became so fashionable that Philip IV decided to put an estimated 300 *familiar* titles on sale in 1641 (shortly before the Ramírez de Guzmán brothers submitted their application) to raise money for the war efforts in Catalonia and Portugal. Appointment brought considerable social status and privileges, such as the right to bear arms, exemptions from certain taxes and, crucially, exemption from ordinary justice, the rationale being that nothing should hinder inquisitors in the performance of their duties. Like other Inquisition agents, familiars could only be tried by an Inquisitorial court.¹⁹

In addition, they were spared the obligation to billet soldiers in their homes.²⁰ This last privilege was particularly important in Extremadura due to the protracted conflict between Spain and Portugal from 1640 onwards and Llerena's status as an important *Plaza de Armas*.²¹ The local population would certainly have been greatly inconvenienced by the conflict.²² Indeed, several aspects of the war with Portugal appear in the verses of Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán, which

¹⁸ For an overview of the origins and role of familiars and other subordinate personnel of the Holy Office, see Joseph Pérez, *The Spanish Inquisition. A History* (London: Profile Books, 2006), 117-26.

¹⁹ See Gonzalo Cerrillo Cruz, "Aproximación al estatuto jurídico de los familiares de la Inquisición española," *Manuscrits* 17 (1999): 141-58 and Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision*, 192-95. According to Anderson, the decision by Charles V in 1518 to give the Inquisition legal jurisdiction over familiars not only further enhanced its already considerable power but "gave the Familiars license for improprieties, knowing they would be treated lightly by their masters." See James M. Anderson, *Daily Life During the Spanish Inquisition* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 66.

²⁰ The billeting exemption was not always observed: the Inquisition files contain a number of letters from Llerena familiars who complained at having to accommodate soldiers in the 1640s when city officials did not.

²¹ This status is reflected in the literature of the period: in Calderón's *El Alcalde de Zalamea* (Act I, Scene II), the Captain and his troops are ordered to await in Zalamea de la Serena the arrival of reinforcements led by their general, Don Lope, from Llerena (approximately 60 km to the north).

²² For a detailed analysis of the financial burden of the war on Extremadura's towns and individual citizens, see Lorraine White, "War and Government in a Castilian Province: Extremadura 1640-1668," (PhD diss., University of East Anglia, 1985), particularly chapter 10. See also Irving A.A. Thompson, *The Military Revolution and the Trajectory of Spain: War, State and Society 1500-1700* (London: Paragon Publishing, 2020), 72, 79n179. Also, Felicísimo García Barriga, "Sociedad y conflicto bélico en la edad moderna: Extremadura ante la guerra con Portugal (1640-1668)," *Norba. Revista de Historia* 21 (2008): 29-47.

include a lengthy panegyric (poem CXII) to the Duke of San Germán, Captain General of the Spanish forces and a family friend.²³

In addition to the multiple benefits and privileges the post entailed, the social prestige of the position of familiar would undoubtedly have been an added attraction for the Ramírez de Guzmán brothers, not least because the number of familiars in Llerena had been capped at twenty-five. In short, although not ‘professional’ personnel, Inquisition familiars were highly respected and even feared, with appointment offering the holders valuable status.²⁴ In some cases, they were entitled to erect a plaque above their home doorway indicating their status. In addition, the ceremonial duties performed at *autos de fe* added to their visibility in the community.²⁵

Returning to the Ramírez family and the application of the two brothers, as noted earlier, the Inquisition Section of the AHN contains a wealth of documentation relating to the vetting process, which turned out to be much more complicated than anticipated and lasted from 1642 until at least 1646. Initial inquiries commenced in 1642 produced conflicting information, leading the Council to send other officials to Llerena and further afield in April 1643 for more detailed checks.²⁶ This was due to various surprises that emerged during the early stages of what should, in theory at least, have been a relatively routine procedure given the family’s status and its connections to influential figures, including close relatives such as the illustrious Ramírez de Prado branch of the family, as

²³ The extensive tribute includes detailed mention of victories by the Duke in battles fought in Extremadura. For a discussion of this key poem, see Karl McLaughlin, “Public and Private Social Realities in the *poesía de circunstancias* of Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán,” *The Modern Language Review* 113, no. 4 (October 2018): 753-77. The requisitioning of horses for the army is the subject of the *décimo* “Pidiendo a un caballero que tomaba caballos para el ejército que reservase uno del coche” (XCII), in which the author asks for the family to be spared from the obligation as it would mean they could not use their carriage. The poem ends with a typical play on words by the poet: “pero si queréis llevarlo, yo quiero que no ignoréis, / que en un potro nos ponéis / si nos quitáis el caballo.” (ll. 6-10).

²⁴ However, their position could often lead to problems, including discrimination by local officials. Kamen quotes from a complaint by Llerena inquisitors in 1597 concerning “the injuries which the corregidores, legal officials and town councils commit against the familiars of the Holy Office simply because they are familiars.” See *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision*, 195.

²⁵ One account of an *auto de fe* held in Granada on 27 May 1593 includes a specific description of familiars leading the procession of penitents at 7am: “The familiars went out first; they made room with rods of justice in their hands and passed through the more common people, who were in the streets. The common people, who came into the kingdom of Granada and its surrounding territory, numbered much more than 20,000. Then the three crosses came out, with their arms covered in black flags. Then the penitents themselves began to walk out...” See Lu Ann Homza, *The Spanish Inquisition 1478-1614. An anthology of sources* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 258-59.

²⁶ Based on preliminary information furnished by the local Tribunal, the officials were tasked by the Council with verifying the *limpieza* of the brothers. The specific instructions for the inquiries, to be carried out with “diligence, discretion and secrecy,” are set out in AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 2727.

mentioned above.²⁷ Detailed examination of the letters from officials dispatched to Llerena and other parts of Extremadura to inquire into the Ramírez brothers' backgrounds and merits shows that the application process triggered score-settling by many who were envious of the family's status in the city and saw their opportunity to avenge perceived grievances.

As noted earlier, their father Francisco Ramírez was a well-known and highly influential member of the Llerena community during the first half of the 17th century, serving on the Council as a *regidor perpetuo* for many years, although only after a direct appeal to Madrid thwarted an attempt by his enemies to exclude him and his closest allies from the list of twelve new *regidores*.²⁸ Stubborn and self-confident, he did not hesitate to take action against individuals who wronged or opposed him, including powerful officials and members of the nobility. He brought proceedings against one governor, Pedro González de Villoslada, on two occasions in 1630, accusing him of wrongful imprisonment after a heated argument concerning the administration of taxes.²⁹ In 1647, he took the Marquis of San Miguel to court for damage caused to the wall of the family chapel in Llerena's Iglesia Mayor, an incident recorded not only in the municipal archives but in his daughter's verses also.³⁰

Conflicts with Inquisition officials are also recorded in multiple documents, with run-ins including insults directed at Bartolomé Caperuzas, "llamándolo borracho y conminándolo a que se fuese a guardar ganado," for which Ramírez and his father were jailed briefly.³¹ In September 1644, when his sons' application was

²⁷ Alonso Ramírez de Prado, brother of Lorenzo and an influential judge in the Royal Chancery of Granada, is cited by Elliott as an example of hugely wealthy royal officials of the early seventeenth century, with a personal fortune in excess of one million escudos. See John Elliott, *Imperial Spain* (London: Penguin, 2002), 317-18. Another brother, Marcos, was Bishop of Chiapas and, later, of Michoacán in Mexico and regularly sent sums of money from the New World to his Llerena relatives. The remittances are documented in various notarial protocols.

²⁸ Ramírez accused his rivals of taking advantage of one of his visits to Madrid to approve the list and he filed a formal complaint to have the decision overturned. In a Solomonic decision, Philip IV's Council opted to increase the list of twelve to twenty, thus ensuring even greater revenue from the purchased positions (2000 ducats per post). See Llerena, AHM, *Libro de Acuerdos*, 1628-32, fol. 191.

²⁹ See Antonio Carrasco García, *La Plaza Mayor de Llerena y otros estudios*, 104.

³⁰ See *Obra poética*, poem CII. Details of the dispute can be found in Llerena, AHM, *Protocolo de Cristóbal de Aguilar*, 1647, fol. 46. The records of council meetings in Llerena show that Ramírez courted controversy when he tried to have the popular annual bullfights cancelled in 1630 as a cost-saving measure in view of the financial strain placed on Llerena by its payments to the Crown and the extra cost of raising a militia. See Llerena, AHM, *Libro de Acuerdos* 1628-1632, fol. 235v.

³¹ AHN, *Órdenes Militares*, Santiago, Expediente 6854, "Informaciones y diligencias hechas en el hábito que pretende don Lorenzo Ramírez," fol. 177v. Questioned about known enemies of Francisco and his father, witness Álvaro Guerrero reported that he was aware of acrimonious clashes not just with Caperuzas but with other Inquisition officials such as "fulano Cabeza [...] que siempre ha tenido odio a la familia de dicho Don Francisco" and Juan de Soto Silíceo, "familiar del Santo

under consideration, he was one of several witnesses quizzed in connection with the misconduct of inquisitor Diego de la Fuente and he had no hesitation in supplying details of the latter's "galanteo a una doncella principal de la ciudad, cuyo nombre no se expresa por su reputación."³²

Such an outspoken member of the community inevitably created enemies for himself and, indeed, such enmities may (in addition to the external ostentation of status entailed by the bearing of arms) have been behind a request by Ramírez in 1636 to be allowed to carry a sword and dagger at Council meetings. Attempts had already been made to discredit him years earlier when some witnesses tried to cast aspersions on the family's purity of blood during the investigations into the background of his illustrious uncle, Lorenzo Ramírez de Prado.³³ In addition, Francisco's efforts to purchase for himself the position of lifelong *corregidor* in Llerena were repeatedly blocked by his enemies.

However, the most prolonged campaign against him was not mounted until the last years of his life and arose out of the aforementioned application by his two sons to be admitted as familiars of the Inquisition. The application gave rivals the perfect opportunity to discredit the family further, as they could avail themselves of the secrecy afforded to all depositions. The Inquisition Section of the AHN

Oficio [...] que también le tiene por enemigo declarado suyo" due to a disciplinary incident in the Convent of the Conception, where Silíceo's daughter and Francisco's sister were nuns (fol. 178).

³² AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 1993, Expediente 11, fol. 123v. Two decades earlier, in April 1622, Francisco was sent to Madrid to represent the town in a dispute over seating privileges in the Iglesia Mayor during religious ceremonies. Members of the Inquisition Tribunal, it was alleged, had relegated local politicians to secondary pews and Philip IV's Council was asked to intervene to settle the conflict. See Llerena, AHM, *Libro de Toma de Razón desde 1613*, fol. 238r.

³³ John Elliott sums up the importance of purity of blood as a qualification for office in early modern Spain: "[...] popular sentiment was so strong and the religious implications of doubtful ancestry had been so widely insisted upon, that it proved impossible to check the mania for *limpieza*. As soon as purity of blood was made essential for office in the Inquisition and for entry into a religious community or a secular corporation, there was no escape from long and expensive investigations which might at any moment uncover some skeleton in the family cupboard. Since the testimony of even one witness could ruin a family's reputation, the effect of the statutes of *limpieza* was in many ways comparable to that of the activities of the Inquisition." See J.H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain, 1469-1716* (London: Penguin, 2002), 223-24. According to Pérez, a deputy in the 1618 Cortes denounced that the honour of a family could well depend on "the allegations of three or four witnesses who had heard rumours that so and so, on his grandfather's or grandmother's side, was more or less strongly suspected of having Jewish origins. And he went on to observe that in these days, in Spain, to be regarded as of noble or pure blood, you needed to have no enemies or to be rich enough to buy false witnesses, or else to be of such obscure origins that no one knew where you had come from; if you were completely unknown, you could pass for an Old Christian." See Joseph Pérez, *The Spanish Inquisition. A History*, 55-56. It is worth noting, however, that the Inquisition was not consistently supportive of blood purity statutes. Indeed, several authoritative voices openly questioned their need and validity in the 1620s. See Henry Kamen, "Una crisis de conciencia en la edad de oro en España: La Inquisición contra 'Limpieza de Sangre,'" *Bulletin Hispanique* 88, no.3 (1986): 321-356, particularly 345-346.

includes a number of boxes containing the correspondence on the matter that passed between the Llerena Tribunal and the Suprema in Madrid and it is worth dwelling on the letters and other documents for the fascinating insight they provide into Ramírez's alleged influence and the enmity he generated.

Few problems were anticipated when the brothers submitted their applications in early 1642 given that their paternal grandfather, Antonio Núñez Ramírez, had been a *contador* of the Inquisition in Llerena and their illustrious great-uncle, Lorenzo Ramírez de Prado, had been appointed as a familiar in Zafra in 1625 and went on to hold a number of more senior positions in the Holy Office. Nonetheless, certain Tribunal members were determined to ensure that the application was rejected and that the name of the family was tarnished for all time. Lorenzo Gutiérrez Valverde informed the Suprema of opinions concerning the Ramírez family expressed by various locals, including one said to have remarked ten years earlier that he was “*admirado de la vanidad de este judío [Francisco],*” a comment so widely repeated in Llerena that “*hasta los niños lo sabían.*” Gutiérrez also reported that the family had been referred to by some as “*judíos por los cuatro costados.*”³⁴

Francisco's enemies wasted no opportunity to discredit anyone who supported his sons' application. A particularly vicious campaign was mounted to blacken the name of one of the family's closest friends, Juan de Liaño, *notario del secreto* of the Llerena Tribunal, who was alleged to have falsified information gathered in 1629 concerning the origins of the mother of Lorenzo Ramírez de Prado. In another complaint filed against him, he was accused of concealing details of proceedings said to have been initiated against Francisco's father.³⁵ Liaño was also accused of incompetence in the administration of Tribunal affairs and, most seriously of all, breaching his oath of office by disclosing details of its secret deliberations to his close friend Francisco. In a letter to the Council in 1643, Gutiérrez Valverde warned his superiors of the influence of the Ramírez family

³⁴ AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 2727, ‘Cartas, expedientes y memoriales del año de 1642 (Llerena)’, “Carta de Lorenzo Gutiérrez, 24 diciembre.” Aránzazu Borrachero Mendíbil has hypothesised that the family's persistent efforts to raise its social standing may be explained by the desire to rid itself of the stigma of *converso* origins and that Francisco's marriage to Isabel de Guzmán may even have been a conscious attempt to protect the family name of the Ramírez (of lesser lineage than the Guzmáns) from accusations of Judaism. See “Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán y la construcción literaria de la subjetividad barroca,” *Letras Femeninas* 35, no. 1 (2009): 85-104. However, despite the rumours reported by Gutiérrez, there appears to be no evidence to support the *converso* origins theory. Indeed, Agustín Guerrero de Luna, a witness in the 1629 investigation into the background of Lorenzo Ramírez de Prado, told investigators that “*si don Francisco Ramírez no fuera noble y limpio no se hubiera casado tan principalmente como se casó con doña Isabel Sebastiana de Guzmán.*” See AHN, *Ordenes Militares*, Santiago, Expediente 6854: “Informaciones y diligencias hechos en el hábito que pretende don Lorenzo Ramirez,” fol. 151v.

³⁵ AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 1991, Expediente 28, fol. 2: Liaño is cited for “*haber escondido el proceso contra Antonio Núñez, padre de D. Francisco, y se descubrió por milagro.*”

over all those involved in the inquiries into the brothers and singled out Liaño for obstructing the work of the Tribunal.³⁶

However, one further and very serious allegation made against Liaño was to result in a particularly protracted investigation by the Council: his enemies explicitly stated that his support for the brothers' application was motivated by his secret marriage to their eldest sister, Beatriz (the *Tisbe* of the verses of Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán). According to his accusers, Liaño had not obtained permission from the Council or the mandatory marriage licence to wed Beatriz, who was said to be expecting his child. Neither had he dared to draw up the required proof of her *limpieza de sangre* because he knew that the lack of pure blood in her family would not only lead to the refusal of his request for permission to marry her but would almost certainly result in his removal from Inquisition office. For these reasons, it was alleged, he took steps to have any potentially incriminating documents removed from the Inquisition archives. Worse still, it was said to be common knowledge that he himself had previously dissuaded his own brother Fernando from marrying Beatriz "por ser la moza notoriamente infectada."³⁷

Liaño vehemently denied the accusations and asked the Council to open formal proceedings to clear his name and punish his Tribunal enemies, particularly ringleader Pedro de Llerena Bracamonte, who held the position of *fiscal*. The rumours being spread in the city were, he claimed, besmirching not just his own honour but that of Beatriz, and the accusation concerning the secret marriage and pregnancy "me ha expuesto a riesgo de perder la vida a manos de su padre, hermanos y deudos por ser la materia de la honra tan sensible."³⁸ Further inquiries were ordered, including the questioning of numerous persons alleged to have knowledge of the marriage. Álvaro de Bastido, the parish priest said to have officiated at the ceremony, was unequivocal in his testimony, insisting that "era falsa la voz que había de dicho casamiento, y entendía nacía de enemigos que en

³⁶ AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 2727. "Carta de Lorenzo Gutiérrez de Valverde, 12 de marzo de 1643." Gutiérrez takes the opportunity also to cast aspersions on Liaño's lineage, pointing out that "no solamente se dice en público es judío, sino descendiente de negros por lo materno." Various accusations, including his excessive friendship with certain Tribunal members and his treatment of anyone who did not support the Ramírez brothers' cause, were dismissed after investigation by a Visiting Inquisitor, although a charge of gambling led to a reprimand. See AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 1991, Expediente 15: "Cargos que resultan de la Visita de la Inquisición de Llerena contra D. Juan de Liaño, notario del secreto de ella."

³⁷ AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 2727, "Carta de Pedro de Llerena Bracamonte" (29 de septiembre de 1642). A side annotation dated 16 October 1642 by officials of the Council orders all inquiries into Pedro and Lorenzo to be halted while this and other allegations against Liaño were investigated. A reference elsewhere to the alleged marriage provides an indication of the social standing of the Ramírez family, noting that Liaño "asiste a todas horas en casa de dicha Doña Beatriz, donde por ser casa principal, no se le permitiera tan frecuente comunicación si no interviniera el matrimonio." See AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 1991, Expediente 15 "Cargo 5."

³⁸ AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 2727, "Carta de Juan Francisco Venegas de Liaño" (no date).

esta ciudad tenían el dicho D. Juan y D. Francisco Ramírez.”³⁹ Surprisingly, however, the investigating inquisitor, Diego de Escolano, concluded that the couple had indeed married (which we know not to be true as parish and other records show that Beatriz did not marry until 1664, aged 48, and bore no children). The matter of the secret marriage was considered of such gravity that several years were spent investigating the veracity of the allegations and it appears that a definitive position was not adopted by the Council until late 1647, according to a marginal note next to the charge against Liaño which states “Absuelto por no probado.”⁴⁰

Although the primary weapon used was the alleged secret marriage between Liaño and Beatriz, the enemies of the family resorted to other strategies to blacken the Ramírez name and tarnish known allies. Cristóbal Serrano, a veteran inquisitor who supported the brothers’ cause, informed his superiors in Madrid of an unsuccessful attempt by his Tribunal colleagues to have the Ramírez de Guzmán sisters tried for crimes against the faith. In one letter, dated 8 September 1644, Serrano describes how his colleagues sought to initiate “otro proceso nuevo de fe contra las hermanas de los que pretenden, aunque de repente di un voto que se diferencia harto del de mis colegas que solicitaron el mío con deseo de deshonrarlas.”⁴¹ The various Inquisition *legajos* include several references to Catalina Clara and Beatriz, who were reported by members of the Llerena Tribunal for “ciertas supersticiones” y “por haber invocado a Moisés.” The denunciations reached the Council and the sisters were admonished and warned of the serious consequences of a repetition of their conduct.⁴²

Attempts were also made to exclude from the list of investigating officials any person known to support the Ramírez brothers’ application. As mentioned earlier, the city governor was considered too frequent a visitor to the family home to provide an impartial opinion. Senior inquisitor Cristóbal Serrano was the subject of repeated allegations ranging from accepting an expensive bed as a gift from Francisco Ramírez to inviting him to his home frequently to allow him to consult secret Tribunal documents concerning the application “para que dicho D. Francisco procurase obviar con testigos o instrumentos falsos lo que constaba que le dañaba

³⁹ *Ibid.*, “Carta de Diego de Escolano” (28 de agosto de 1642).

⁴⁰ AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 1991, Expediente 15 includes a summary document (fols. 11r-11v) detailing the outcome of the charges against Liaño which were referred to the Council following the visit to the Llerena Tribunal by Francisco Díaz Cabrera.

⁴¹ AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 2728 (1). ‘Cartas, expedientes y memoriales del año de 1643 y 1644 (Llerena)’. “Carta de Cristóbal Serrano” (8 de septiembre de 1644).

⁴² AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 1990. Expediente 6, fol. 8. One of the charges of which Juan de Liaño was acquitted was that he had attempted to have a reference to the admonishment by the Council removed from the Ramírez family tree in the *Libro de Genealogías*. See AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 1991, Expediente 15: “Cargo 14.”

en el secreto.”⁴³ Serrano and fellow inquisitor Juan Cabeza Morillo were described as “puppets” under the control of Francisco Ramírez, while another Tribunal member, Juan de Montijo, was said to be totally beholden to the family, who allegedly cultivated his friendship for an ulterior motive: “se halla tan empeñado con ellos [...] y porque D. Francisco Ramírez lo regala, y a su mujer la traen en el coche y la convidan a las fiestas de toros y otros festines con esperanza de que el Inquisidor Campo Méndez lo ha de nombrar por informante.”⁴⁴ Campo Méndez himself was accused of showing excessive favour to the Ramírez family, in particular by designating Juan de Liaño to carry out key inquiries into Lorenzo Ramírez de Guzmán, despite knowing that Liaño was married to Lorenzo’s sister, and by deliberately concealing from the Council important information concerning inquiries conducted outside Llerena.⁴⁵

A further and very curious accusation was levelled at Francisco Ramírez during this vindictive campaign: in a letter entitled “El Visitador avisa de algunas cosas sobre lo que pasa en el correo mayor de Llerena,” visiting inquisitor Francisco Díaz de Cabrera, who refers to himself in various documents as “Inquisidor Apostólico del Principado de Cataluña,” asked the Council not to send Inquisition correspondence to Llerena via the normal channels since Ramírez and his alleged son-in-law Liaño had full control of the postal system and inspected all mail on arrival. They were also accused of coercing a newly-appointed local postmaster into rejecting the position because it would have ended their unauthorised access to the mail. On one occasion, they were said to have intercepted a letter sent from Llerena to the Council. This lengthy accusation is set out in a letter by Díaz de

⁴³ While the Council ordered further inquiries to ascertain the veracity of this charge, it appears to have afforded less credence (indicated by a note in the margin stating “Nihil” rather than “Averíguese”) to other accusations against Serrano, including the following: “Iten que es que en quanto escribe al Consejo, y votos que da, se alarga demasiado, gastando muchas razones poco a propósito del caso, y se contradice en ellas, con gran descrédito de su oficio. En las Informaciones de los Ramírez, dice al Consejo lo que ha hallado en el secreto contra ellos y luego añade que de equidad deben ser admitidos, confundiendo sin distinción la gracia y la justicia y dando leyes a sus superiores, lo cual hizo por hallarse beneficiado por ellos.” AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 1993, Expediente 14, fol. 5r. This is one of approximately forty accusations levelled by fellow Tribunal member Llerena Bracamonte, who also draws the attention of his superiors to Serrano’s financial circumstances, detailing several examples of his spending and pointing out that “es imposible que pueda haber ahorrado tanto en tan poco tiempo” (fol. 6r.).

⁴⁴ AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 2727, “Carta de Pedro de Llerena Bracamonte,” 29 de septiembre de 1642. Concerned at the possible influence of such allies, in the same letter Llerena Bracamonte asked his superiors in Madrid to “mandar que D. Juan de Liaño y Montijo no solo no acudan al secreto, pero si necesario fuese estén fuera de la ciudad quando se tratase este negocio.”

⁴⁵ AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 1993, Expediente 14, fol. 3r-3v. In a clear attempt to tarnish his name, Campo Méndez’s accuser Llerena Bracamonte alleged that he had fathered a child from his long-standing relationship with María Guerrero Chaves, who is described as “escandalosa y de mala casta.”

Cabrera (undated, but probably written in July 1644), which offers a rather comical description of same-day spying on confidential Inquisition correspondence.

Antes que partiese de esa corte me avisaron algunas personas que escribiese con recato porque la estafeta de esta ciudad era poco segura. Y en particular el mismo día que partí me lo avisó D. Diego Escolano, inquisidor de Toledo, que estuvo en esta ciudad muchos años, y me dijo que D. Juan Liaño y D. Francisco Ramírez tenían tanta mano con el correo que tomaban de él las cartas que querrían y las leían. La misma voz hallé en esta ciudad donde se dice públicamente, pero no supe tuviese fundamento, hasta que, examinado a D. Lorenzo Valverde en uno de los capítulos que estaba citado, dijo en su deposición que en una ocasión que el inquisidor D. Cristóbal Serrano por orden del Consejo informó sobre el negocio de los Ramírez, habiendo puesto su carta en el pliego del tribunal para el Consejo, y vístola poner el mismo D. Lorenzo, aquella misma noche, hallándose casualmente en casa del contador Juan Cabeza Morillo, supo estaban juntos dicho contador D. Juan Montejo notario del secreto, íntimo amigo de D. Juan de Liaño y D. Francisco Ramírez, y que habiéndose detenido detrás de una puerta vio estaban leyendo la carta del dicho Inquisidor para el Consejo que se había puesto aquel mismo día en el pliego.⁴⁶

The aforementioned Pedro de Llerena Bracamonte urged the Council to investigate how Francisco was privy to its secret business and, as evidence, produced a letter sent by the latter to a relative in which he discusses a number of matters under consideration by the Tribunal (ironically, Llerena Bracamante was himself then ordered to disclose how he had acquired the letter!). Llerena Bracamonte is a highly interesting, not to say controversial, figure in the proceedings not only because he formulated numerous complaints against Tribunal colleagues favourable to the Ramírez family but also because was later charged by his own superiors in Madrid for deliberately sabotaging the brothers' application and not treating them fairly due to his personal animosity towards them and their father. The serious complaints against him are set out in a lengthy document dated 1645 and entitled "Expediente de Visita, redactado con motivo de la visita a Llerena del inquisidor Francisco Antonio Díaz de Cabrera al Tribunal de la Inquisición de

⁴⁶ AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 2728 (Caja 1), "Carta de Francisco Díaz de Cabrera" (no date). Díaz de Cabrera recommends that the two men be prosecuted for their actions and that a senior official be sent from Madrid to appoint a postmaster for Llerena. AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 1991, Expediente 15 ("Cargo 15") also makes detailed reference to this alleged control by Ramírez and Liaño, who are described as "dueños de las cartas que van y vienen."

Llerena.”⁴⁷ Among the first charges we find the following: “el haber hecho con tanto esfuerzo oposición a dichos D. Pedro y D. Lorenzo, por encuentros y pasiones particulares.” Another charge laid against him, that of doctoring official documents to taint the Ramírez family name, illustrates the lengths to which he was prepared to go in his bid to block the brothers’ appointment as familiars, in this case inserting a false reference on the *Lista de Penitenciados*. The actual charge is set out as follows:

*Iten, se le hace cargo que, estando prohibido por carta acordada que no se hagan notas en los registros y papeles del secreto sin auto del Inquisidor que lo mande, en contravención de esta Orden, en el Índice de Penitenciados, en una partida de la letra A que dice Alvar Núñez, está añadida de su letra una nota que dice “este es hermano del bisabuelo de D. Francisco Ramírez que se llamó Ruy García,” la cual parece haberse puesto más con pasiones y mala voluntad que con la atención que en semejantes materias debe haber, pues dicho Alvar Núñez consta, de su proceso, ser hijo de Gonzalo García de Guadalcanal y Rui García parece, del libro de genealogías, haberlo sido de Garcí González, vecino de Fuente Cantos, con que no puede ser cierto que sean hermanos dicho Rui García y Alvar Núñez.*⁴⁸

Worse still is the next of the charges laid against him:

*Iten, se le hace cargo que, habiéndose sacado para calificar oraciones y supersticiones de las delaciones que de si hicieron D^a Beatriz y D^a Catalina Ramírez por el Sr D. Martín de Celaya, diciendo en ellas “Una mujer de dieciocho años,” sin tocarle por su oficio las copió de su letra y mudó el principio diciendo “Una mujer de edad de treinta años de raíz infecta,” no constando del proceso uno ni otro, que es verosímil las hizo para agravar la culpa de las susodichas por la enemistad que tiene con dicho D. Francisco Ramírez.*⁴⁹

⁴⁷ This and other charges laid against Llerena Bracamonte when the Suprema sent a senior Inquisitor to investigate alleged wrongdoings by Tribunal officials are set out in AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 1993, Expediente 2. For a detailed discussion of “Visitas” as a formal and highly-regulated mechanism to investigate corruption and malpractice in Tribunals, and references to various investigations ordered in the case of Llerena in the 16th and 17th centuries, see Isabel Martínez Navas, “Malas prácticas y acciones de mejora en el Tribunal de Distrito de la Inquisición de Llerena,” *Revista Electrónica de Derecho de la Universidad de La Rioja, REDUR* 17 (2019): 69-136.

⁴⁸ AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 1993, Expediente 2, fol. 10 (“Cargo 42”).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 10 (“Cargo 43”).

The bitter enmity between Francisco Ramírez and Llerena Bracamonte arising out of the latter's sustained efforts to thwart the brothers' application to be appointed *familiares* is summed up elsewhere in the files, where one official states: "Ha cobrado gran odio dicho D. Francisco contra el Inquisidor D. Pedro Bracamonte y ha dicho que lo ha de matar, y lo persigue con testimonios imputándole cosas indignas de su oficio y persona y busca personas que escriban contra él al Consejo y hable de él muy descompuestamente."⁵⁰ Relations between the two would have been further strained by Francisco Ramírez's damaging testimony in 1643, when Llerena Bracamonte was formally investigated for expediting an application by one Diego de Segura to be admitted as a familiar. In addition to reporting multiple wrongdoings, including gifts accepted from the applicant, Ramírez informed Bartolomé Paravicino San Vicente – the visiting inquisitor commissioned by the Council to investigate the allegations – of Llerena Bracamonte's courtship of Sicilia Navarro, a nun in the Convent of St Anne, a relationship he continued to pursue despite a formal warning from the Council.⁵¹

While it would be foolish to accept at face value all the allegations levelled against Francisco Ramírez, there is at least some foundation to the accusations that he attempted to influence the outcome of the inquiries. Evidence contained in the Inquisition papers points to his efforts to enlist the support of family and friends in other towns in Extremadura to counter the actions of his enemies and neutralise potentially damaging testimony. He sought the help of his cousin Pedro de Cuéllar and Inquisition notary Cristóbal Reyes to ensure an abundance of sympathetic witnesses for examination in Fuente de Cantos, where the family hailed from originally before moving to Llerena in the early years of the 17th century. Francisco was fully aware that his intervention would leave him open to charges of seeking to influence the proceedings. In November 1645, he wrote to Reyes to alert him that he and others were to be interviewed again in connection with his sons' application: "estas cosas no son para escribirlas sino habladas y podría venirme

⁵⁰ AHN, *Inquisición*, 1991, Expediente 28, fol. 2v.

⁵¹ For Ramírez's testimony, dated 20 October 1643, see AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 1993, Expediente 7, fols. 38v-47v. Six months later, Llerena Bracamonte made further allegations against Ramírez to the Council, asking it to investigate his unauthorised access to details of inquiries ordered by the Llerena Tribunal in connection with his sons' application. However, the prosecutor entrusted with the investigation of these allegations and an extensive list of other accusations by Llerena Bracamonte against Tribunal members favourable to the Ramírez cause decided that no action could be taken in the case of Francisco "pues no es ministro del Santo Oficio." See AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 1993, Expediente 14.

gran riesgo de que se supiese que yo daba estas advertencias, y pues V.M. es ministro las sabrá callar y obrar”).⁵²

What emerges from the documents contained in the Archivo Histórico Nacional and various other records in Llerena is a picture of an extremely powerful individual who was disliked by many of his colleagues in local government due to his abrasive character and refusal to support them in certain political and fiscal matters. His close contacts with prominent politicians and members of the nobility were a source of resentment and jealousy. Although perhaps not to the extent his enemies would have us believe, Ramírez undoubtedly made use of his privileged position in the community to further his own aims. In the matter of his sons' application for posts as familiars, there appears to have been no middle ground in Llerena: people either supported him fully or sided with the sizeable group of his declared opponents. The city was divided into two almost warring factions and the opinion voiced in the summer of 1644 by Francisco de Cea, the Inquisition *Comisario* appointed to deal with the application, is all too revealing: “Hallamos esta ciudad dividida en bandas sobre este negocio y mirádonos todos a las manos y siendo opuestas las parcialidades, no ha de ser muy fácil conseguir la satisfacción de entrambas.”⁵³

Unsurprisingly, the vetting procedure proved long and complex. Cristóbal Serrano wrote to his superiors in September 1644 to complain that he had spent 10-12 hours at a time checking and rechecking records of proceedings for crimes against the faith as far back as 1527 to see if ancestors of the Ramírez family had been tried.⁵⁴ The inquiries covered a vast geographical area. Francisco de Cea

⁵² AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 2729 (Caja 2), ‘Cartas, expedientes y memoriales del año de 1645 y 1646 (Llerena)’. Llerena Bracamonte forwarded to the Council a copy of the letter written by Ramírez on 29 November 1645.

⁵³ AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 2728 (Caja 1), “Carta de Francisco de Cea,” 30 de junio de 1644. In the same letter, Francisco de Cea seeks advice from his superiors in Madrid regarding a series of unusual inquiries ordered by a colleague in the Ramírez case, Lorenzo Gutiérrez Valverde. The inquiries ordered included the following: “que se copien en dibujo las armas que los pretendientes tienen encima de la puerta de las casas donde hoy viven en esta ciudad que las labró su abuelo paterno y las que están en un retablo de una capilla que labró su abuela paterna difunto su marido para reconocer que ni en unas ni en otras se hallan Villavicencios ni Cuéllares.” From earlier correspondence, it appears that the brothers had argued that their lineage was clean because, among other reasons, these very traditional Old Christian names were present in the family and Gutiérrez Valverde was actively seeking proof to undermine their argument. De Cea considered the steps to be excessive and questioned Gutiérrez Valverde's motives, as he had already openly manifested his opposition to the brothers' application. Gutiérrez Valverde was later the subject of broader disciplinary proceedings launched by the Council and in 1647 was barred indefinitely from involvement in the Llerena Tribunal. See AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 1991, Expediente 39.

⁵⁴ AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 2728 (Caja 1), ‘Cartas, expedientes y memoriales del año de 1643 y 1644 (Llerena)’, “Carta de Cristóbal Serrano,” 8 de septiembre de 1644. Serrano informs his superior that he had diligently followed instructions and had reviewed “más de mil causas de fe

informed Madrid that the *informantes* had visited Madrid, Salamanca, Zafra, Jerez de la Frontera, Seville and Llerena, spending a total of 144 days questioning witnesses during that particular part of the investigation. By 1645, approximately 300 witnesses had been quizzed in connection with the brothers' application.⁵⁵

In addition to long and complex, the vetting process was very expensive, and it is worth recalling that the costs of investigations fell almost entirely on the applicants and their families.⁵⁶ Despite the Ramírez family's comfortable position, the protracted process appears to have taken a serious financial toll on the applicants' father. Various letters and reports reveal interesting details of the sums disbursed by Francisco Ramírez, including 2200 *reales de vellón* in July 1645. A letter dated September 1645 indicates that Francisco had contracted a debt of 2638 *reales* in respect of investigator expenses, with delays in meeting the required payments prompting formal reprimands. The following month, visiting inquisitor Francisco Díez de Cabrera informed the Suprema that Ramírez had requested additional time to be able to pay 400 ducats owed, but had been unable to do so: "el padre de dichos pretendientes me vino a ver y decir que se hallaba sin dinero, que procuraría buscarlos y aunque han pasado algunos días no lo ha depositado."⁵⁷ Other letters reveal that the two brothers also paid sizeable sums in investigator fees.

It is somewhat puzzling that no mention is made in the archives of the outcome of the investigations and all references cease as of 1646. The reasons are unclear although it is possible that the application may have been withdrawn, perhaps due to the controversies generated and the length of time taken to investigate the family's background and purity of blood. Pedro Ramírez de Guzmán left Llerena not long after and is described as already living in Granada in an authorisation from his father, dated 5 March 1648, to represent him in a case before the Royal Chancery in the city.⁵⁸ He was not present in Llerena in 1666 when the surviving siblings divided up the family estate.⁵⁹ A successful public administrator, Pedro frequently listed his official titles in the documents he drew up and it is

antiguas que estaban arrinconadas entre los papeles de la Inquisición" together with "cuantos procesos criminales se han hecho después de que se fundó la Inquisición."

⁵⁵ AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 2729 (Caja 1). 'Cartas, expedientes y memoriales de los años 1645 y 46'. "Itinerario de las informaciones seguidas de don Pedro y don Lorenzo Ramírez de Guzmán, hermanos vecinos de Llerena."

⁵⁶ Although confiscations of property, fines and penances were a major source of Inquisition income, there can be no doubt that burdening the subjects of investigations with the associated expenses was an effective revenue-generation mechanism and was not conducive to a swift resolution of inquiries.

⁵⁷ AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 2729 (Caja 1). 'Cartas, expedientes y memoriales de los años 1645 y 46'. "Carta de Francisco Díez de Cabrera," 8 de octubre de 1645.

⁵⁸ Llerena, AHM, *Protocolo de Cristóbal de Aguilar*, 1648, fol. 133.

⁵⁹ Llerena, AHM, *Protocolo de Gaspar Díaz de Aguilar*, 1666, fol. 329.

unlikely he would have omitted mention of being an Inquisition familiar had he been appointed.⁶⁰

Around the same time that Pedro moved to Granada, his younger brother Lorenzo found himself at the centre of a major scandal in Llerena, when he fathered an illegitimate child with a family servant, for whom a husband was promptly found by the family in a nearby town. The child, Manuel, was reared by Juan de Castillo, a priest and family friend. In 1650, not long after his father's death,⁶¹ Lorenzo emigrated to the New World to take up a church post and never returned. However, as documents in the AHN reveal, he remained in contact with his son throughout.⁶²

The documentation discussed here has, it is hoped, provided valuable evidence not just of the very detailed procedures for investigating applicants for a junior yet coveted Inquisition position but of the opportunities such procedures offered for rivals in the Llerena Tribunal to settle scores and damage each other with accusations that prompted even more investigations, causing the vetting process to drag on for several years. The files contain numerous allegations of bias, wrongdoing and poor investigative practice, with senior Tribunal officers hurling insults at each other and seeking protection from the Council against unjust accusations. The acrimonious internal disputes prompted inquisitor Diego Campo Méndez, who was singled out by his Tribunal enemies as a staunch supporter of the Ramírez brothers' application, to request a transfer to another Tribunal in November 1642. Despite Council interventions in the form of official inspections by visiting inquisitors, the conflicts among the warring members continued and led Cristóbal Serrano, a friend of the Ramírez family, to write to his superiors in July 1647 in the following terms: "No es creíble la confusión y desorden de este tribunal [...] hacen lo que les place cuanto y como quieren y tienen los ministros del secreto gran conformidad contra mí y yo tengo harto trabajo pues no puedo votar lo que siento sin experimentar amenazas que han llegado a ejecución."⁶³

⁶⁰ Various official documents from the mid-17th century in the Llerena archives, particularly notarial protocols, contain details of the important administrative positions held by Pedro Ramírez de Guzmán. See, for example, Llerena, AHM, *Protocolo de Gaspar Díaz de Aguilar*, 1650, fol. 85; 1665, fol. 103; 1665 (julio a diciembre), fol. 920.

⁶¹ In addition to the financial toll noted above, the protracted and acrimonious investigation very likely impacted seriously on the health of Francisco as of the mid-1640s. He fell seriously ill and the gravity of his condition was such by August 1649, when he was aged sixty, that the illegible scrawl on his last will and testament had to be supported by a sworn declaration by the officiating notary. See Llerena, AHM, *Protocolo de Gaspar Díaz de Aguilar*, 1649, fol. 517r.

⁶² A letter from Lorenzo to his son from Guatemala in October 1685 thanking him for informing him of the death of his poet aunt Catalina Clara, whom he describes as "una madre que como tal te amaba," was submitted by Manuel as part of a successful legal action to inherit the family *mayorazgo*. See AHN, *Consejo de Castilla*, Legajo 33822, fols. 20-22.

⁶³ AHN, *Inquisición*. Legajo 2730. 'Cartas, expediente y memoriales de los años 1647 a 49 (Llerena).' "Memorial que remitió al Consejo el inquisidor Don Cristóbal Serrano con carta de 18

As noted earlier, scholars of Spain's early modern period, including its political and literary figures, owe a great debt to the country's most feared institution for its obsessive record-keeping, which has unlocked vast amounts of historical scholarship in the field of Hispanism. In the case of the little-known female author Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán, who resided her entire life in the peripheral Spanish province of Extremadura, the abundant correspondence and reports held in the Inquisition section and elsewhere in the Archivo Histórico Nacional have been instrumental for compiling a more detailed, not to say intriguing, picture of the poet's family, supplying invaluable evidence of the family's preoccupation with its social standing and its efforts to protect and enhance this. In particular, it has served to highlight the animosity and rivalries that surfaced on the occasion of her two brothers' bid to be admitted to a junior Inquisition post. One can but speculate whether the controversies in question, and underlying factors such as the formidable reputation and influence of Francisco Ramírez, may have represented impediments in the lives of his children, perhaps even deterring love interest in the case of his poet daughter and her siblings who either did not marry or married relatively late.⁶⁴

The study presented here has, it is hoped also, contributed significantly to knowledge of a peripheral but important Inquisition Tribunal which has attracted little scholarship outside Spain, particularly in English. The detailed examination of files relating to the Ramírez family has served to uncover the bitter enmities in a Tribunal beset by internal battles in the 1640s and whose senior members seized the opportunity of what should have been a straightforward vetting process to play out their divisions not just locally in Llerena but before the Council of the Inquisition, forcing it to allocate valuable time and resources to the investigation of personal grievances and mutual accusations ranging from illicit amorous relationships to serious malpractice in the conduct of Inquisition business.

Given Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán's predilection for satirical tirades against known individuals in Llerena, including clergymen and nuns,⁶⁵ it may seem

de julio de 1647 en que advierte de algunas cosas que parecen dignas de remedio que pasan en aquella Inquisición.”

⁶⁴ A total of eleven children were born to Francisco Ramírez and Isabel de Guzmán and, of the six who survived to adulthood, Catalina Clara, Pedro and Antonia Manuela did not marry. Beatriz did not do so until the age of forty-eight and Ana Rosalea wed by proxy at the age of thirty-three, moving immediately afterwards to her husband's home town of Úbeda, several hundred kilometres away. For his part, Lorenzo was not married by the time he departed to the New World aged twenty-eight.

⁶⁵ For an overview of her satirical and burlesque verses, see the Introduction to Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán, *Obra Poética*, 65-75. It is no coincidence that the only poem by her selected by Blecua for his well-known anthology of baroque poetry is a satirical sonnet in which she pokes fun at local man Francisco de Arévalo for his diminutive stature. See José Manuel Blecua, ed., *Poesía de la Edad de Oro, 2: Barroco* (Madrid: Castalia, 2003). Moreover, she is the only female

somewhat surprising that her surviving writings contain only one explicit mention of the Inquisition, bearing in mind that she and her family were the target of multiple attacks by identifiable local Tribunal officials. However, it is possible that she feared the potential consequences for her family of direct references to identifiable individuals in her verses, which circulated widely in Llerena among friends, acquaintances and literary colleagues. Nonetheless, it is appropriate to leave the last word to the author and include here her witty *décimo* (poem XXX) on the subject of a tiresome Inquisition secretary which encapsulates perfectly the verbal ingenuity and satirical vein that permeate her verses. Whether the target of her jibe had direct involvement in the lengthy inquiries into her brothers is, unfortunately, a matter for conjecture.

A un fiscal de corte que, siendo visitador de la Inquisición, visitó a unas señoras en compañía de un secretario muy necio que le asistía siempre

Muy bien pueden apostar,
si se permite decir,
el fiscal a divertir
y el secretario a cansar.
Por consejo le he de dar
al visitador fiel,
para no hacer el cruel
trabajo tan ordinario,
que escriba con secretario
y que visite sin él.

author to appear in the *Antología de poesía satírica española*, compiled by Antonio Martínez Sarrión (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1997).