



Passing stranger: a converso merchant in Elizabethan London

Un extraño de paso: un comerciante converso en el Londres isabelino

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Abstract

An account of the life of Dunstan Anes, a Portuguese converso whose family had origins in Valladolid. Over a period of more than fifty years, from 1541, Dunstan established himself as a wealthy merchant who acted both officially and clandestinely on behalf of the English crown. He successfully engaged with the most powerful institutions of the country: the court, the church and his livery company, the Worshipful Company of Grocers. Dunstan was at the centre of a group of about 100 conversos living in London more than two hundred years after Jews had been expelled from England, and nearly a century before they would be officially readmitted. Although he established himself as a gentleman and property owner, within twenty years of Dunstan's death the converso community had all but disappeared from London.

Key words: converso; London; bezoar; merchant; court.

Resumen

Relato de la vida de Dunstan Anes, un converso portugués cuya familia tenía orígenes en Valladolid. Durante más de cincuenta años, a partir de 1541, Dunstan se consolidó como un rico comerciante que actuaba tanto oficial como clandestinamente en nombre de la corona inglesa. Se relacionó con éxito con las instituciones más poderosas del país: la corte, la iglesia y su gremio, los ultramarinos. Dunstan estaba en el centro de un grupo de unos cien conversos que vivían en Londres más de doscientos años después de que los judíos fueran expulsados de Inglaterra, y casi un siglo antes de que fueran readmitidos oficialmente. Aunque se estableció como caballero y propietario, veinte años después de la muerte de Dunstan la comunidad conversa prácticamente había desaparecido de Londres.

Palabras clave: converso; Londres; bezoar; comerciante; Corte.

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Dunstan Anes appears in a list of «gentlemen» who exchanged New Year gifts with Queen Elizabeth I regularly from 1582 until his death in 1594. He was one of several grocers who offered presents to the queen. They often gave delicacies which spoke of their access to rare and delicious things, such as ginger, nutmegs or perfumed gloves from Spain. Dunstan had offered the queen three sugarloaves in 1564, the first time he appears in the list of gift exchanges, but each New Year from 1582 until his death in 1594, he gave her something really unusual: a bezoar stone¹.

This was a step up from quince pies, perfumed gloves or even marzipan shaped into a model of London's churches, all items listed in the New Year's gift rolls for Queen Elizabeth. The bezoar stone revealed something else: not just that Dunstan was connected to the Iberian and New World spice trade, but that he knew what was new.

Dunstan Anes was a freeman of the Worshipful Company of Grocers, one of the twelve great livery companies of the City of London. He supplied the Queen's household and, to underscore his status as a gentleman, he had his own coat of arms. He was a member of the congregation of St Olave's Hart Street, in the City of London. His many children – he had fourteen – were baptised at St Olave's, and several who pre-deceased him were also buried there, including two on the same day in November 1574.

So far, Dunstan Anes resembles many other successful merchants of the period: a prosperous company man with connections to the English court, and a leading member of his parish. He had a family pew in the north choir of St Olave's, a sign that he was near the top of the pecking order. When he died in 1594, he was buried under it. The fact that his grave was inside the church at all, let alone in such a prominent place, suggests he paid for the privilege (Harding, 2003).

But Dunstan was more than he seemed. A clue can be found in the text accompanying his coat of arms, which appears in the 1568 *Visitation of London*, the official list of families entitled to bear arms. The Anes family pedigree states that Dunstan's father George was from «Valiodely in Spayne», that is, Valladolid in Castile. The head of the Anes family is the only one of the nearly two hundred gentlemen listed in the 1568 *Visitation* who was born outside England. There is another clue in an image of the Anes family arms in a manuscript held in the archives of the Queen's College, Oxford. This version has a crest: «a Moor's arm embowed holding three pomegranates», according to the College of Arms². The pomegranate, symbol of the last Muslim kingdom of Spain, gave Granada its name and was adopted by Ferdinand and Isabella when the Kingdom of Granada fell to them in 1492,

¹ Gift rolls have not survived for the years 1586, 1587 or 1590-93, but as Dunstan gives a bezoar stone in each of the other years it is reasonable to assume he did the same in the intervening years.

² James Lloyd, Archivist of the College of Arms, in a message to the author, April 2025.

uniting Spain under the Catholic Monarchs, a symbol of their triumph over the infidel. It also appears in the arms of Katherine of Aragon, their daughter, still Henry VIII's wife when Dunstan Anes arrived in England.

Although the Christian rulers of Spain were adopted the imagery and architecture of Moorish Iberia and much else besides, the Moors themselves were subjugated, forcibly converted and, finally, in 1609, expelled en masse. The arm of a black man appearing on Dunstan's coat of arms is a reminder of the Spain's Muslims, and perhaps also another minority population eliminated by the Catholic Monarchs which it would have been far too risky to commemorate in such a public way: the Jews. Dunstan's family were Spanish Jews who had fled Valladolid in the general expulsion of 1492 (Wolf, 1926: 12). Anes is a Portuguese name that they would have adopted when they were forcibly converted to Christianity, as all Jews in Portugal were, in 1497 (Huerga Criado, 1994: 30). The Anes' family's original name is unknown. It is possible, however, that they were part of a medieval merchant Jewish elite in Valladolid, which was one of the seats of the court of Castile. Valladolid Jews were connected to the court and did court-related business. They were also involved in buying, selling and leasing property, and in trade (Merchán Fernández, 1976: 22-38). All these activities anticipate Dunstan Anes' occupations in sixteenth-century London.

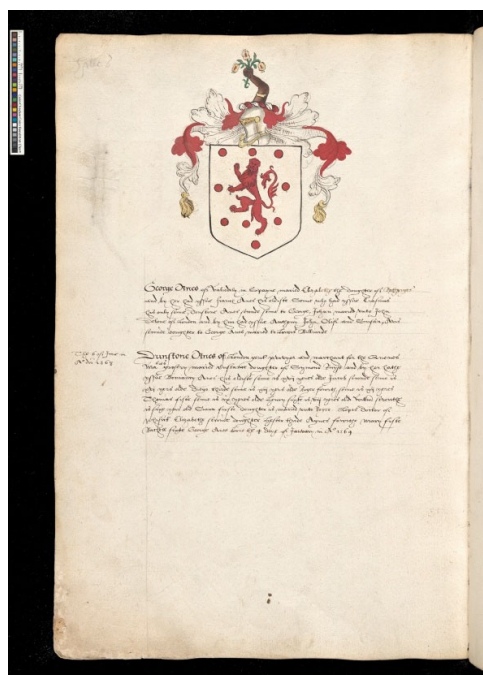


Fig. 1: Arms of the Anes family, 1568³.

³ This image is reproduced under a Creative Commons Attribution licence with the kind permission of the Provost and Fellows of the Queen's College, Oxford. Permalink: <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/dadd8516-d5de-4e67-b791-53e671e65b96/surfaces/0a57bee6-6e75-42e6-a745-060ab2414967/#>

Lucien Wolf was the first to write about the Anes family more than a hundred years ago, in his study «Jews in Elizabethan England» (Wolf, 1926: 1-91). His careful reconstruction of the origins and activities of this group of about a hundred people remains the only significant work on the subject. In the century since it was published, other historians such as Edgar Samuel and Cecil Roth, writing in the twentieth century, made minor additions (Samuel, 1955: 171-230; Roth, 1959: 1-12).

By the time they reached London, Dunstan's family were conversos, converts to Christianity from Judaism. They settled in London in 1541, and may have been there briefly twenty years earlier⁴. They had come from Lisbon, where Dunstan's father and the rest of the family had been converted by force, along with the rest of the Jewish population, in 1497 (Dunstan himself was born some time before 1521).

Wolf describes the whole London group as Jews: it is true that they shared a common Jewish origin. Most had arrived from Portugal, as Dunstan's family did, and in England they were merchants or their agents. Whether or not they were secretly practicing Jews is impossible to know with any certainty. All conformed outwardly to the religion of England, but several accounts suggest that at least some of them were crypto-Jews who worshipped in secret. Wolf quotes a denunciation made in 1588 to Bernardino de Mendoza, who had been Philip II's ambassador to England, by Pedro de Santa Cruz, a Spanish trader who had known the London conversos. Santa Cruz reported that «it is public and well known in London that they are all of the Jewish nation and as such in their homes it is known that they live according to their Jewish rites and in public they go to the Lutheran churches and hear the sermons and take the bread and wine in the form and manner that the other Heretics do»⁵. Santa Cruz later gave a sworn statement with the same information to a Madrid court.

Dunstan and his close associates were part of the community that Santa Cruz describes, and Dunstan was related by marriage to a powerful converso who had made a very public return to Judaism: Alvaro Mendes, known as Solomon Ibn Yaish in Constantinople, where he had the lease of the Sultan's customs. Roderigo Lopez, Dunstan's son-in-law, had a brother, Diego Lopez Aleman, who was married to Mendes's sister. In the 1590s, Jacob,

⁴ I use the term «converso» as it is the most neutral word in common usage. «Marrano» was common until the mid-twentieth century and French «marrane» is still often used, but «marrano» is an offensive word in Spain, a colloquial term for anything dirty or base.

⁵ «[...] sabe por ser publico y notorio en londres que todos son Judios de nazion y como tales en sus casas es fama que biben en sus rritos judaycos y en publico van a las yglesias luteranas y oyen los sermones y toman el pan y el vino en la forma y manera que los demas Herejes lo hazen» (Deposition of Pedro de Santa Cruz, Archivo General de Simancas, Secretaría de Estado. Legajo 839, folio 183). A trade dispute of 1601 in which a group of Portuguese conversos was sued by the widow of their English business partner, involved testimony describing activities that seem to be part of the Jewish Passover, and is cited in Samuel (1955).

Dunstan's second son, was appointed as Mendes/Ibn Yaish's agent. Later, he himself returned to Judaism. He is the English Jew encountered by Thomas Coryat in Constantinople in 1612. The «Amis» Coryat mentions invited him to witness a circumcision ceremony (Coryat, 1624: 427-428).

Dunstan Anes was made a freeman of the Grocers' Company in 1557, under Queen Mary. Then, he must have been a Catholic, but during the reign of Elizabeth I, queen from the time Dunstan started to prosper until the end of his life, he would have been a «heretic» of the sort that Santa Cruz describes: a Protestant. Dunstan's name was never mentioned in the context of crypto-Judaism in London, however. Wolf wrote that he had been condemned in absentia by the Portuguese Inquisition in the early 1540s. The name «Gonsalvo Enes» appears on a list of people condemned by the Inquisition, many of whom had fled Portugal for Antwerp, which circulated in Antwerp in 1544. However, the Goncalo Eannes (sic) who was burned in effigy in Portugal was a different person, a cobbler (Yerushalmi, 1971: 308)⁶.

Much recent writing on conversos in the Sephardic diaspora has focused on their relationship to Judaism, which was often conflicted.⁷ Religion has often been seen by many scholars as the key to conversos' identities, as it was for inquisitors, although others have stressed the importance of considering other factors, such as economic and political context (Pulido Serrano, 2011: 129-151). This study is not concerned with the beliefs or private religious practices of Dunstan and his companions; there is very little evidence of these. The only archival references to crypto-Judaism in sixteenth-century England describe neighbours of Dunstan's, who were in his circle (although not Dunstan himself), engaging in a secret ceremony which appears, from the description, to be the Jewish Passover (Sisson, 1938: 46-47)⁸. As Yerushalmi observed, «few phenomena can be more elusive of historical scrutiny than a secret religion whose subterranean life has been documented largely by its antagonists» (Yerushalmi, 1971: 23). Nevertheless, the study of Portuguese conversos' religious beliefs and conflicts remains a crowded field.

Other studies of conversos have emphasized their remarkable contribution to the development of long-distance trade networks, and commerce in general⁹. Dunstan Anes and many of his associates were merchants, involved primarily in the spice trade which

⁶ The Inquisition trial record is in the Torre do Tombo archive: PT/TT/TSO-IL/028/17982.

⁷ I. S. Révah was among the first to examine this subject in depth in *Les Marranes*, a study of conversos in France, in 1959. Bodian (1997), Graizbord (2019), Kaplan (2008 and 2019), Stuczynski (2019 and 2023) and Wilke (2004 and 2017) are among the scholars who have explored this subject in since the 1990s.

⁸ Sisson's paper cites The National Archives of the UK (TNA): C 24/250, a lawsuit in the court of Chancery concerning a trade dispute involving two converso merchants.

⁹ See works by Jonathan Israel and Francesca Trivellato on trade and trade networks, including cross-cultural trade, in the bibliography.

connected the Portuguese Indies with northern Europe via Lisbon, where the group-maintained agents and other contacts, notably the spice trade

This paper looks away from the broader religious and commercial context to focus instead on Dunstan Anes' life in London, and how and why he made such remarkable efforts to «pass» in English society through engaging with powerful institutions: the church, the livery companies and the court. It is an attempt to build up a fuller picture of a figure whose life hitherto has been sketched only in outline. Dunstan Anes has featured in the margins of works on better known figures such as the ill-fated doctor Rodrigo Lopez, who was his son-in-law, but he has never been the focus of study himself (for example, Green, 2003).

Dunstan appears in Lucien Wolf's study not only as a merchant and patriarch but also in his relationship to the ill-fated Rodrigo Lopez, Queen Elizabeth I's physician. Lopez was executed on charges of treason – conspiring to poison the queen – that were almost certainly false, although some of his behaviour was certainly questionable, even reckless¹⁰. Anes is in the background of accounts of this grim story, which continues to preoccupy Shakespeare scholars especially, as Lopez is a possible model for Shylock. It was this Lopez-Shylock connection, first suggested in 1880 by Sidney Lee, which provided the inspiration for Wolf's later research which identified the group of Portuguese conversos living in London in this period (Lee, 1880: 185-200). Jews had been banished from England since 1290. They would be officially readmitted only in the seventeenth century, under Oliver Cromwell. In Lee's view, the portrait of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* was so complex and nuanced that Shakespeare must have had personal contact with Jews in England, who informed it. Lee set about investigating Lopez and his associates. It has since emerged that Shakespeare did live briefly in Cripplegate, a London district where Dunstan Anes had property, in the years after the Lopez scandal, when the play was written (Nicholl, 2007).

The London group were people who had left Portugal once the Portuguese Inquisition started to persecute conversos, regardless of whether they were observant Catholics. Fear of the Inquisition was not the only reason conversos fled. Some did so because of a desire to return to Judaism openly in lands where it was permitted. In this period, that meant the Ottoman empire. Salonica had a thriving Jewish population and there were Jews in Constantinople, too. Venice, and, later, some of the papal states were also open. A third factor that led conversos to leave Portugal was the search for economic opportunities.

¹⁰ Although writers on *Lopez* disagree on his guilt, all agree that an important factor in his conviction was the enmity of the Earl of Essex, who had been another of his patients. Several accounts report that Lopez angered Essex by disclosing when drunk details of treatments he had given Essex, possibly for syphilis. This indiscretion was relayed to Essex. See Hume (1910); Kohler (1909) suggests money problems arising from a failed venture may have made Lopez behave rashly.

Antwerp was the main initial destination for Portuguese conversos in the first half of the sixteenth century, whatever their reasons for leaving (Di Leone Leoni, 2005: 237-238).¹¹ It was a relatively short sea voyage from Lisbon: the conversos travelled on ships chartered by Portuguese conversos already in Antwerp. The Netherlands was the start of a well-established overland route through the Alps to Ottoman lands for those who wished to profess Judaism¹². For those who chose to stay – and there were many – it was a flourishing trade centre.

The London community was established almost by accident. Antwerp was part of the Spanish Netherlands in this period and, although an inquisition on the Spanish or Portuguese model was never implemented there, from 1532 the regents appointed by Charles V and later Philip II regularly set up commissions of enquiry that had wide-ranging powers to arrest, question and even torture people suspected of heresy. Fortunately, the conversos had an excellent communications system via the trade networks that gave them early warning of trouble at Antwerp and the surrounding ports. Ships carrying conversos fleeing Lisbon would sail to Southampton in England and wait for word that it was safe to proceed to Antwerp. There were periods of several months at a time when it was not. On one occasion, several ships that had already landed in the Netherlands turned around again and made for London after hearing news that some of the fleet was caught up in one of these enquiries. Those who fled Antwerp or never made it there at all formed the nucleus of this London group (Wolf, 1926: 4)¹³.

They were a close-knit community, doing business together, marrying each other and even living together, just as members of the Portuguese «nation» – *a nação* – did in Antwerp, Hamburg and other European cities in this period and later.¹⁴ Nearly all lived near the Tower of London, in Aldgate Ward. This had been the historic home of London's Jews before all Jews were expelled from England in 1290. Many conversos, including the Anes family, lived in so-called «Liberties». These were the precincts of dissolved monasteries where «strangers might exercise their trades with impunity» (Page, 1893: xviii). This had been the custom since Richard III's reign (1482-1485): it is thought that these settlers were protected by religious houses as they brought wealth to the monasteries. It is one of the features of London that drew new arrivals to certain areas, as they would find those of the same nationality (Page, 1893: xviii). Conversos would also find much here to recall the

¹¹ This is a collection of sixteenth-century archival references from the Netherlands, Italy and elsewhere with commentary.

¹² Archives Generales du Royaume (AGR), Office Fiscal de Brabant, dossier 1233.

¹³ The investigations of the Netherlands commission have been preserved in the Brussels archives: Archives Générales du Royaume, Etat et Audience, 1177².

¹⁴ «Portuguese», «Portuguese nation» and «a nação» (the nation) were understood to refer to crypto-Jews or people of Jewish heritage in this period, including by the conversos themselves. See Bodian (1997).

medieval Jewish quarters of Iberian cities, which were characterised by similar structures: houses, workshops and businesses grouped together around a courtyard, separated from the street by a door (Espinosa Villegas, 1997: 5-15). Although not completely beyond the reach of the law, the Liberties were outside the jurisdiction of the Bishop of London, so they offered certain religious freedoms, as well as professional ones. They were ambiguous, like some of their inhabitants.

Dunstan Anes and his family lived in the Liberty of Crutched [crossed] Friars, a place with historical Jewish connections. In his 1598 *Survey of London*, John Stow writes that «toward the Crossed Friars, of old time were certain tenements called the poor Jurie, of Jews dwelling there» (Stow, 1598: 135). Crutched Friars was very close to another Liberty, Duke's Place, the site of the former Holy Trinity priory. It had been awarded to Sir Thomas Audley by Henry VIII. Audley cleared the site and built houses on it, although some medieval buildings survived. It was inherited by Audley's son-in-law the Duke of Norfolk, hence the name «Duke's Place» (Stow, 1598: 129). This is where a group of conversos who were part of Dunstan's circle «lived together at an inn» as Pedro de Santa Cruz's related in his testimony. Part of its appeal may have been that, as well as offering the freedoms mentioned above, it was gated, enclosed and separated from the area around it, owing to its previous existence as a religious house. Conversos clustered together, their proximity to each other perhaps giving them a sense of security (Nenk, 2003: 209). Similar patterns are seen in converso communities in France in this period, as well as in the Iberian Peninsula itself, where conversos often lived in parts of cities that had been Jewish quarters¹⁵.

Later, a church, St James Duke's Place, was built there. The whole site was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666, but Duke's Place was later the site of the Great Synagogue, the earliest Ashkenazi synagogue in London, built in 1690 and destroyed in an air raid in 1942. Bevis Marks, the earliest Sephardic synagogue, is next door, part of the same block, as is Creechurch Lane, where the London conversos were thought to have a «secret synagogue», and where the first official synagogue was established, in 1656, in a private house, before the move to Bevis Marks (Nenk, 2003: 209). These sites are all close to Houndsditch, mentioned by Thomas Dekker in his play *A strange horse-race* as being areas associated with Jews and secret worship. A later edition of Stow's *Survey*, with additions by John Strype, mentions pawnbrokers there «a base kind of vermin, or rather... "baptisatos Judaeos" who take themselves to be Christians» (Strype, 1720: 24). Dekker refers to the «Jewish tribe in the Synagogue of Houndsditch» in a scene in which the devil recites his last will and testament (Dekker, 1613). All the places mentioned here are within a few metres of each other. Duke's Place, a traditional place of refuge and protection, appears to have been the epicentre of

¹⁵ France: see Wilke (2017); Spain: see Amelang (2013).

clandestine Jewish worship, later the site of the first two London synagogues that were officially recognised after the 1656 Resettlement of the Jews under Oliver Cromwell.

Of all this group, Dunstan integrated most successfully into English society. He is the only one with the acknowledged status of gentleman, with his coat of arms. Not even Lopez, who was the queen's chief physician from 1586, had this status.

Other conversos anglicised their names – Hector for Heitor, or Francis for Francisco, and so on – and many used different names to confuse the Inquisitions if they returned to the Iberian Peninsula on business, as many did, but none chose such a startlingly English name as Dunstan. It was no doubt adopted after the family's flight from Portugal, where Dunstan was known as Gonçalgo Anes or Gonçalgo Jorge. The name Dunstan is derived from Old English words meaning «dark» and «stone». A tenth-century saint of that name was archbishop of Canterbury.¹⁶ It was not a common name in this period but there were two churches named after St Dunstan close to the part of London, near the Tower, where the conversos lived. The church of St Dunstan's in the East was moments away from the cluster of narrow streets where the conversos all lived. Wilfred Samuel, who worked with Lucien Wolf on his research in the last years of Wolf's life, and later wrote on the conversos himself, concluded that the name had been taken from the church¹⁷.

The name Dunstan Anes and variants also appears in Spanish state papers from the 1580s, when Dunstan and his group first came to the notice of Bernadino de Mendoza, Philip II's ambassador to England until he was expelled a few years before the Santa Cruz episode.¹⁸ By this time, Dunstan and the three Anes sons who survived to adulthood were all in the service of the English crown, spying on behalf of Francis Walsingham, Queen Elizabeth I's Secretary of State, whose central London home was around the corner from Crutched Friars in Seething Lane.¹⁹ The Anes men, together with Lopez and a third converso, Hector Nunes, a prominent physician, are named in both Spanish and English records as agents of Walsingham. Reports of their activities reached Philip II, who took a keen interest, underlining and querying a passage mentioning the Anes family in a letter from Mendoza (Fuensante del Valle, 1842: 132).²⁰ Their intelligence work was an adjunct of

¹⁶ *A Dictionary of First Names*, 2006.

¹⁷ Samuel also believed that the choice of name had religious significance. «Evidence of [the Anes's family's] Protestant leanings may be found in the extraordinary Christian names Erasmus and Dunstan, of two of the family. The latter name was probably derived from St Dunstan's-in-the-East, where its bearer may have been baptised». Letter of Wilfred Samuel to Lucien Wolf, September 7th 1926, in Wolf's papers at TNA in London (BA 12).

¹⁸ There are numerous spellings of the name, including Annes, Anys, Annys, Anies and Yanés.

¹⁹ An office building named Walsingham House occupies the site where the house once stood.

²⁰ Philip II underlined a short passage in a letter of 19th February 1582 that included the words «va con ella un hijo de D. Eston Yañez [a son of Dunstan Anes is going with it' (a ship)]» and wrote in the margin, «No

trade: communications were made via the spice ships going between London, Antwerp and Lisbon. Dunstan is known to have hidden letters and money in sacks of cochineal seed and pepper.²¹

We have seen that Dunstan was still a «stranger» – a foreigner – in 1557. By 1568 he is listed in records of property taxes paid by residents of several London boroughs not as a stranger but as the first in a list of Englishmen who were liable for tax.²² There is no record of his denization. A few members of the London group, including Lopez, were endenized, as was Dunstan's mother in 1541, but most of them remained «strangers». Somehow, Dunstan had changed his status, perhaps using the Anes arms.

There was more at stake here than status: strangers were subject to higher taxation and it was also harder for them to inherit or bequeath property. And Dunstan was soon a man of property. By this point in the 1560s he had substantial leases on London real estate. We know this from disputes over leases in the English courts and from an entry in the 1568 *Returns of Aliens*, where he appears as the landlord of sixty-six «strangers», mostly Huguenot weavers, in the London parish of St Giles, Cripplegate.²³ Many of these people came from Flanders, where Dunstan had links with the spice trade. An Anes ancestor had been an early secretary to the Portuguese factor there, and Dunstan himself had connections in Antwerp through the Mendes/Affaitati «spice trust» which dominated the European pepper trade from the early sixteenth century (Denucé, 1934: 17-21; Goris, 1925): 623.

The earliest record of Dunstan's activities on the continent dates from 1546, when he features in a list of men paid by the English crown for transferring 182 soldiers from Dover to Calais, then an English possession. Henry VIII was fighting the French there and at neighbouring Boulogne, in an alliance with Charles V.²⁴ It is possible that, in the 1560s, Dunstan helped some of these people to flee the area using his trade ships, in the same way that conversos fled Lisbon aboard the spice fleet.

Just as there is no record of Dunstan's denization, the College of Arms has no record of arms being awarded to the Anes family. We cannot draw firm conclusions from that, as there are many gaps in the heralds' records before the late seventeenth century. According to the College, a grant of arms might have been made to Dunstan before 1568, but no copy

sé quién es este: diréismelo si sabeis en él [‘I do not know who this is: tell me if you know of him’]». The son in question is William.

²¹ Testimony of Pedro de Santa Cruz, cited in Wolf (1926: 45).

²² Queen's College Oxford, MS 72, fol. 144v.

²³ C 3/187/63 and TNA C 3/187/64 are disputes involving Dunstan over property in St Giles. Cripplegate. This is the same parish where the 1568 tenants were living (*Returns of Aliens Dwelling in the City and Suburbs of London: from the Reign of Henry VIII to James I*, volume X, part 3, 1907, 331).

²⁴ Henry VIII: April 1546, 21-25, in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 21, Part 1, January-August 1546*.

was kept, or perhaps Anes presented arms that he had invented for himself and persuaded the officers who carried out the 1568 visitation of London that they were long-established. The College suggested these possibilities and a third: the officers and Anes agreed to register the arms as already granted, on payment of a fee. This was not the proper procedure, but it did happen.²⁵ In other words, Dunstan may well have paid a bribe.

If he did so, he was following the example of many others in his family's country of origin. Unlike Portugal, where public office and many professions were off-limits to converts, in Spain, conversos had prospered since the first wave of mass conversions in the late fourteenth century. Resentment of their success and the suspicion that many of them were secretly observing Jewish rites were catalysts for the Spanish Inquisition, established in 1480, and the *limpieza de sangre* – blood purity – statutes that followed. The *limpieza* statutes required applicants for many offices to prove their «old» Christian heritage, thus presenting a barrier to recent converts and opportunities for abuse (Soria Mesa, 2016). Many conversos in Spain tried to erase all traces of their Jewish heritage through ennoblement. In sixteenth-century Seville, Spain's principal trade centre, wealth was the principal instrument of social mobility, but it did not carry social prestige. Only nobility guaranteed that. It also offered security, the chance to escape a «tainted» background. Offices were freely bought and sold, the status of *venticuatro* (alderman) sold for 7,000 ducats in the last quarter of the century. Seville merchants also diversified away from trade in the early 1560s, just as we see Dunstan doing at the same time. More than 2,000 new houses were built there, mostly multiple dwellings (Pike, 1972: 111-112). Converso families strengthened their position within the urban elite in this period, often bribing the *linajudos*, the investigators who scrutinized lineages for traces of Jewish ancestry (Pike, 2000: 155).

Dunstan is the only one of the London converso group who was a member of a livery company, although Rodrigo Lopez and Hector Nunes were members of a professional association, the Royal College of Physicians. Dunstan was made free in June 1557 by redemption – payment of £3 6s 8d – rather than apprenticeship. The Grocers accepted him as a member because he brought something rare and valuable: his spice contracts.²⁶ This was a rarity; ninety percent of freemen of the livery companies had been apprenticed in this period (Rappaport, 1989: 28). However, it was achieved, membership was vital for anyone who wished to trade: the right to engage independently in economic activity was largely restricted to freemen. In London, men who were not citizens could only trade with freemen in retail trade: an Act of 1523 prohibited strangers from setting up shops or do «any handicraft or mystery» if they were not denizens. The freedom was «the most important

²⁵ James Lloyd, Archivist, in a message April 2025.

²⁶ Court minute book (Worshipful Company of Grocers) 1556-1591, 12v.

criterion upon which was based the distribution of urban privileges in the sixteenth century» (Rappaport, 1989: 29).

It was a given that members of the livery companies were also observant Christians. So, it is perhaps not surprising that Dunstan is the only member of the London converso group for whom we have a record of burial within a Christian church. Church attendance was obligatory in this period, and conversos did go to church, as we know from many sources, including some amusing testimony of Pedro de Santa Cruz.²⁷ Conversos often avoided Christian burial, especially within church precincts, however. One who did was the physician Hector Nunes, who died in 1591. He had arranged for his burial dues to be paid at St Olave's but requested that his body be taken to Stepney for burial, to the churchyard of the other St Dunstan's.²⁸ Several reports of the periodic Antwerp investigations into the conversos' religious practices reveal that they also abstained from some aspects of Christian burial. Pierre Calant, a grave-digger interviewed in 1540, reported that in a period of «sickness» (probably plague) in Antwerp he was asked by several conversos to dig a grave, but that it started to fill up with water falling from the roof of the nearby church. They refused to use it and requested another site, further away from the building.²⁹ In contrast, Dunstan appeared to attach great importance to his family's place within St Olave's: his children and some of his grandchildren were also buried nearby.

Dunstan's behaviour makes him an outlier within his group, but he was also at the centre of many of its activities, including trade and espionage. It is possible that he set himself up – perhaps even with the understanding or agreement of his companions – to be a model citizen. His status as a Grocer, the information and opportunities to be found at court, the gossip at church – all these could, and did, benefit the wider group. If difficult questions were asked, his company, church and court records were impeccable.

None of Dunstan's papers appears to have survived and a will has not been found, but the breadth of his activities over a long period suggests that at least some of his activities were group efforts. He was involved in raising financing for Don Antonio, the claimant to the Portuguese throne who brought about Lopez's downfall, he regularly chartered cargo

²⁷ Santa Cruz reports a comment by a leading member of the converso group in London, Alvaro de Lima: «When one day a Francisco de Valverde and Juan de Valverde, Spaniards from two neighbourhoods near Ocana, were coming from Mass, the said Alvaro de Lima asked them “where are your Worships coming from?” and they replied, “Sir, we come from seeing God” and then the said Alvaro de Lima replied, mockingly, “It remains very much to be seen whether your Worships have seen God”. And he [Santa Cruz] knows that the above-named and others have said and [continue to] utter other heresies, as this witness has heard». Quoted in Wolf (1926).

²⁸ *Registers of St Olave Hart Street, 1563-1700*, 123. «Mr Doctor Hector Noonez, carried to Stepney to be buried but paid all duties here», 13th September 1594. His sister-in-law Grace Freire, was also buried in Stepney churchyard.

²⁹ Archives Generales du Royaume, Office Fiscal de Brabant, dossier 1233, copy in Lucien Wolf papers, CC12.

ships together with others, standard practice in this period. His property ventures may also have involved associates as they appear to have been extensive.

Dunstan Anes is also the only merchant in the converso community to exchange New Year's gifts with the queen. This places him within a rarefied elite.

Men of power expected to offer gifts to the queen, and to receive gifts from her (Heal, 2014). Gift exchanges had been a tradition in England, and also France, since the Middle Ages. Henry III (r. 1216-1272) had the motto «he who does not give what he has, will not get what he wants» painted on the walls of his palace (Heal, 2014: 88). The common practice was that subjects offered gifts which were rewarded by the crown, and protocols around the type, value and timing of gifts were well-established. New Year was the traditional time of gift exchange. Subjects offered gifts, and in turn received counter-gifts from the monarch. This reciprocity confirmed that subjects were «incorporated into the personal service of the Crown» (Heal, 2014: 88). Inclusion on the list of subjects exchanging gifts was governed by protocol: not just anybody could offer gifts to the queen and be rewarded in return.

Queen Elizabeth I displayed her gifts in a special chamber, following the example of her father, Henry VIII, who had occasionally refused gifts in order to show his displeasure. In 1532, after he had cast aside Katherine of Aragon and was courting Ann Boleyn, he angrily declined Katherine's gift of a gold cup and sent her no gifts that New Year (Heal, 2014: 96).

Queen Elizabeth's subjects chose carefully. She was known to be fond of «the distinctive and glamorous» (Heal, 2014: 97). Gifts were designed to flatter, to thank, as a reminder, and even to ask forgiveness: the courtier and poet Philip Sidney gave the queen a jewelled whip when he was out of favour with the queen in 1581 (Heal, 2014: 97).

The gift exchanges, documented in rolls, were listed according to rank, with gentlemen coming last, after the various levels of the nobility. Leading noblemen often gave gifts of gold or elaborate jewellery or clothing that the queen was known to favour. The lower ranks gave more modest gifts, often with a touch of the exotic: Manus Christi, a cordial made by boiling sugar with rose water or violet water, was also a favourite (Nichols, 1823: 39-43).

This is the context in which Dunstan Anes made his gifts to the queen. That he did so at all was unusual, given his occupation. He is one of only three grocers recorded in the twenty-five surviving lists of gift exchanges (Lawson, 2013: 597). The other two, whose gift exchanges came earlier in Elizabeth's reign, gave the type of gifts that might be expected of a grocer: spices and sugarloaves (Lawson, 2013: 25-45). Others in the category of «gentlemen» who regularly made gifts were the queen's physicians (including Lopez), surgeons and apothecaries, as well as eleven members of the Bassano family, who were the queen's musicians. It has been suggested that the Bassanos, who were Italian and lived in

the same district of London as Dunstan Anes and his associates, were conversos themselves but there is stronger evidence suggesting otherwise (Ruffatti, 1998: 1-14).

After the three sugarloaves gift of 1567, Dunstan does not appear in the rolls until 1582. This may not mean that he did not offer gifts during those years; there are gaps in the record for six of those fourteen years. When he returns to the gift exchange ritual in 1582, what he offers is so unusual the first two attempts at writing it, «besaunt» and «bessart» are struck through in the manuscript before the scribe settles on a «stone pedra bazar»: a bezoar stone.

Bezoar stones are concretions found in the stomachs of ruminant animals, «especially the wild goat of Persia» (Lawson, 2013: 574). In the sixteenth century, they were supposed to be an antidote to poison. The stones could be shaved and taken as a powder, and their name comes from Persian *pād-zahr*, meaning counter-poison or antidote³⁰. They were also worn as amulets and sometimes made into jewellery.

Apart from the irony of offering the queen an antidote to poison a dozen years before his son-in-law was executed on charges of conspiring to poison her, Dunstan's gift is distinctive in other ways. It provides a connection to the Iberian cultural heritage of the converso community and the activities of another adventurous converso who was a near contemporary of Dunstan's, Garcia De Orta.

The role of the London *conversos* as importers of pepper and other spices is well known and has been studied extensively in relation to trade between Lisbon and Antwerp, often involving European banking houses which had the official contracts with the Portuguese Crown (Steensgard and Van der Wee, 1990: 14-33). This was the source of considerable wealth. Dunstan Anes was active in the pepper trade, the mainstay of the spice business.

Less well known are the specialist substances, *materia medica* and other exotica, that were imported to northern Europe, often by converso traders. This was a period of innovation and diversification in trade and new species of plants were among the many novelties imported to Europe. This was the era of the creation of the great European herbals. A neighbour of Dunstan's, also buried in St Olave's church in the City of London, was William Turner, known as the father of English botany, and author of one of the best-known sixteenth-century English herbals.³¹ Apart from the bezoar stones, Dunstan himself imported several substances previously unknown in England, which had come to Europe through the Portuguese explorations in Asia and the Americas.³²

Pliny the Elder wrote of bezoars as an antidote to poison. This was more than fancy: the calcium and phosphates they contain countered arsenic (Fricke, 2017: 342-367). They were

³⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/bezoar_n?tab=etymology

³¹ William Turner, *A new herball, wherein are contained the names of herbs...*, London, 1551.

³² Dunstan Anes' trade experiments with *materia medica* are the subject of another article in preparation.

thought of as having magical curative properties in the early modern era (Olivera and Andrade, 2021: 166-168). Bezoars are mentioned later in various Muslim sources of the Middle Ages and by Maimonides. Knowledge of bezoars is thus part of a large body of medical knowledge that was shared among Muslims, Jews and Christians in the Iberian Peninsula before 1492. Jews played an important role in transmitting this knowledge: they had been «at the boundary regions as the natural intermediaries between the Arabic Orient and the Latin Occident» in Spain since the thirteenth century when they translated Arabic medical texts into Hebrew and later into Latin (Friedenwald, 1944: 616). The special role that Jews played helps to explain the distinction of Jewish (generally Sephardic) and converso physicians among European elites in the early modern era. They were in demand at courts across Europe in the sixteenth century and were thought to possess «oriental» secrets unknown to Christian physicians, which in fact they often did. Dunstan Anes' son-in-law Rodrigo Lopez was one such doctor: his first clients were members of the English nobility, then Queen Elizabeth became a client in 1581, and from 1586 until his death in 1594, Lopez was her chief physician. Other notable examples of court physicians with Iberian heritage in this period include Jacob Mantino, Amatus Lusitanus, Brudus Lusitanus and his father «Dionysus», who features on the list of conversos who fled Portugal in the early 1540s at the same time as Dunstan Anes.³³ These physicians attended the heads of Italian papal states, as did Elias Montalto, who was also physician to Catherine de Medicis in Paris in the early seventeenth century.

The bezoar offers another connection to the converso world. Nicholas Monardes, a Seville physician and botanist with trade interests, wrote on the bezoar in 1565, in an influential work that introduced new *materia medica* to a European audience.³⁴ This book concerns discoveries from the New World, but the chapter on the bezoar stone refers to the Oriental bezoar stone. A recent study has shown that an unattributed source for Monardes' information on the bezoar was Garcia de Orta (ca. 1515-1568) (Millones Figueroa, 2014: 139-156). De Orta was a Portuguese converso of Spanish origin. A physician and naturalist, he fled the Inquisition in the 1530s, and went to Goa where he dedicated himself to botany and medicine and published, in 1563, his *Colloquies of the Simples and Drugs of India*. Not only his subject matter was new, his approach was, too. De Orta's motto was «I have seen», and he established the principle of observation, rather than received wisdom, as «an infallible criterion in natural sciences» (Friedenwald, 1944: 439). Of bezoars, de Orta noted that it was «praised by all the Arabian writers, and with much reason».³⁵ His achievements were

³³ AGR, Office Fiscal du Conseil de Brabant, dossier 1233, 22nd June 1544, copy in Lucien Wolf papers, CC12.

³⁴ *Historia medicinal de las cosas que se traen de nuestras Indias Occidentales que sirven en medicina* (Seville, 1565, 1571).

³⁵ De Orta, Garcia, *Colloquies on the simples and drugs of India* (1563). 1913. Translated by Clements Markham. London: Henry Sotheran, 362.

hidden for centuries because of the Portuguese Inquisition, which continued to persecute his family and denied his legacy. His sister was burned at the stake in 1568, the same year as he died, and his bones were later exhumed and burned by the Inquisition.

As an enterprising merchant connected to the world of medicine and the Iberian Peninsula, it is likely that Dunstan learned early on about bezoars, just as they were coming to the market, and helped to make them fashionable. He gave Queen Elizabeth I bezoar stones again in 1584, 1585, 1588, 1589 and 1594. With this gift, as with his coat of arms, he is revealing connections to the converso origins he made such efforts to hide.

The amount of gilt Dunstan was given to acknowledge his gifts was usually similar to that given to Rodrigo Lopez, and often slightly more. There is no record of the personal interaction between Dunstan and the queen, but there is abundant evidence to show that the queen was attached to Lopez. She elevated him from his first appointment in 1581 to appoint him her chief physician in 1586. She hesitated for a long time over his execution, and after his death returned his property to Sara Lopez, Dunstan's daughter, in response to Sara's appeal (Katz, 1996: 100). We can conclude that she also felt warmly towards Dunstan, whose family served the crown in many ways over half a century.

Dunstan was the only person to offer bezoar stones as a New Year's gift to Queen Elizabeth. He set a trend: towards the end of the century bezoars are evidently well known. By 1598, «bezer» is being used to describe the colour of cloth given in gifts to the queen. It appears twice that year in this context, and again in 1603. Other colours that denoted new discoveries also appear in the rolls, including «Brazil colour» (Heal, 2014: 449, 451, 501, 509).

Dunstan and his sons, though undeniably risk-takers, had a talent for staying below the radar, something that not all Dunstan's associates achieved. Apart from the spectacular fall of Rodrigo Lopez, others managed to get themselves into trouble. Bernaldo Luis, for example, was arrested in Madrid and managed to escape the inquisitors only through a clever defence and a bribe, the subject of the Prize court case in 1601. Even Hector Nunes managed to upset the usually staid council of the Royal College of Physicians. He got into a row with a fellow physician who enquired about his credentials, an argument that took up quite a bit of the committee's time, and was rebuked for using «reckless language».³⁶ Nunes was also an energetic litigator and more than once spent time in a debtors' prison (Meyers, 1996: 125-140).

Not so Dunstan. The one time he appears in a dispute, apart from occasional outings to court to defend himself property disputes, where he seems to have prevailed, he stays out of trouble. Other than his admission as a freeman in 1557, Dunstan is mentioned only once

³⁶ MS2295 Annals of the Royal College of Physicians 1518-1608 (English translation) II, 22b-23a.

in the records of the Grocers' Company. Its governing council had a role resolving disputes between its members and several troublemakers appear regularly in meeting records, selling sub-standard goods, or goods that had not been garbelled, that is, examined and certified by the company's inspectors. In 1563, he is reported in the Grocers' minutes to be «at variance» with a colleague over an unidentified substance called cheyny poyz. This conflict is swiftly resolved to everyone's satisfaction. Not all Grocers achieved this; the records are full of references to repeat offenders trading sub-standard goods or trying to dodge the garbellers. Three of Dunstan's sons were also made free of the Grocers: Benjamin, who died at 39 in 1589, Jacob and William, the seventh son. They also avoided censure.

William even appears as a mediator in the terrible times that followed Lopez's execution. When Sara Lopez, his sister, appealed to Queen Elizabeth I to have her husband's property restored to her, William put up a bond to cover Lopez's debts.³⁷ Later, William acted as surety in an important trade dispute involving several conversos in Amsterdam and Antwerp. Like his father, William appears in the records as a reliable and well-connected individual.

Membership of the Grocers' company, his standing in his church and his connection to the queen gave Dunstan status, access to information and opportunity and, he may have hoped, some protection.

This was not to be. Lopez's death was a devastating blow. Dunstan himself died in April 1594, while Lopez was in the Tower, waiting for his death sentence to be carried out. Wolf writes that Dunstan's end may have been «hastened by chagrin and anxiety» because of his son-in-law's predicament.

The same year, Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* returned to the stage. It was the most popular play of Elizabethan times, performed more often than any of Shakespeare's plays (Lee, 1888: 144). Even though the play has been interpreted as more of a black comedy than a crude caricature, the humour must have been lost on the Anes family, who had lost their two representatives at the English court within weeks of each other, their Jewish origins and associations now public knowledge (Katz, 1996: 81). There was very little commentary on Lopez's Jewish origins during his lifetime, but after his death many accounts of his treachery highlighted his Jewishness.

By 1609, under James I, the converso community of London had all but vanished. Among the handful of people who remained, William Anes and one of Sarah's daughters, Anne, are known to have remained in London until their deaths.

³⁷ Hatfield MS CP 28/8 and CP 28/10.

Dunstan Anes did not found the merchant dynasty he may have wished for. The times were not favourable, and not only in England. There were too many risks. Sixteenth-century trade was a precarious business, dependant on the European monarchs who were often at war with each other, and on Antwerp, which fell into decline in the second half of the century, a theatre of conflict. Converso involvement in court politics and espionage could bring rewards, but it was full of perils, as Rodrigo Lopez discovered. Religious ambiguity was another complicating factor. Dunstan Anes had a faultless record in the English church(es), whatever he may have believed or practiced privately. Several of his associates appear to have been crypto-Jews, as mentioned. When times were good, the Anes' family's Jewish heritage was unknown or at least ignored, but when disaster struck, conversos found themselves caught in an unwelcome spotlight. Over the next fifteen years, most left England.

Only with the rise of Amsterdam and London in the seventeenth century did converso merchants establish lasting wealth, together with the opportunity to return to Judaism openly. A generation would pass between William Anes' death in 1630 and the Resettlement of the Jews in England under Cromwell in 1656.

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CH 24 Lisbon Inquisition.

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