

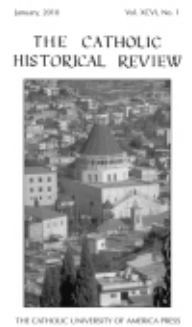


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The Tribunal of Zaragoza and Crypto-Judaism, 1484-1515
(review)

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The Catholic Historical Review, Volume 96, Number 1, January 2010,
pp. 117-118 (Review)



Published by The Catholic University of America Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cat.0.0646>

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significantly altered. She gives the following example: in 1536, a group of women in Exeter went to the priory of St. Nicholas and assaulted the men hired to dismantle the rood screen. This was a reflection that much of women's activities and opportunities in the church were lost in the Reformation. The religious behavior of women was "no longer as collective, visible and active" (p. 230).

The analysis draws on a rich collection of archival records, which the author has mined very well. Churchwardens' accounts are most central to the book, but the author uses also wills, visitation reports, tax, and ecclesiastical court records. Much insight is taken from sermons, didactic literature, saints' lives, parish wall paintings, and stained-glass windows.

This meticulously researched and engaging publication—graced by photographs, maps, graphs, tables, and two appendices—is a good book indeed, which enhances French's reputation even further. The discussion is rich with new insights and information. This is certainly a book suitable not only for the specialist but also for the general reader. The author's mastery of the sources and her deep understanding of the subject make joyful reading and a significant contribution to our understanding of "the good women of the parish."

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The Tribunal of Zaragoza and Crypto-Judaism, 1484-1515. By Anna Ysabel D'Abrera. [Europa Sacra, Vol. 3.] (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers. 2008. Pp. x, 240. €60,00. ISBN 978-2-503-52472-6.)

The subject of this industrious monograph is *converso* life in the late-fifteenth century, as relayed by inquisition records originally compiled in the city of Zaragoza, in the kingdom of Aragón. An inquisition tribunal was established in Zaragoza in 1482 and began work two years later; D'Abrera's evidence comes predominantly from the tribunal's 142 extant trials conducted between 1484 and 1515, 131 of which occurred between 1484 and 1492. Modern scholars have long known that the Spanish Inquisition was created in 1478 to combat the heresy of judaizing, in which Christians of Jewish ancestry, called *conversos*, allegedly continued to follow aspects of Mosaic Law. Historians have used surviving inquisition trials to study the social history of *conversos* who attracted the inquisitors' attention. They have also turned these legal sources toward sweeping arguments about religion and race: on the one hand, scholars such as Haim Beinart view the *conversos* largely as practicing Jews, not Christians; on the other, Benzion Netanyahu insists that fifteenth-century *conversos* were fully assimilated into Christianity and maintains that the Inquisition deliberately falsified charges of judaizing to wipe out the Jewish race. Provocatively—and problematically, from a methodological perspective—both sides are debating evidence about sincerity and religious belief for actors who left no holograph writings and made no statements outside a courtroom. D'Abrera intends to enter this debate on Beinart's

side: she believes that the *conversos*' daily lives in Zaragoza were "marked by the rituals of Judaism" (p. 187) and that "the image of converso life as revealed in the records is . . . an accurate one" (p. 196).

D'Abrera spends the first three chapters establishing a historiographical context for her work, explaining (in a highly condensed way) the history of Spanish Jewry and outlining the Inquisition's legal processes. Some mistakes and infelicities creep in here: The Inquisitor-General was Fernando de Valdés, not Francisco; and Bernardo Gui published in the 1320s, not the 1230s (pp. 54, 56). There is a contradiction between noting that 57 percent of the accused were men (p. 45) and then stating that a majority of the accused were female (p. 76). The argument that inquisitors understood Judaism because they had read medieval compendia on heresies begs important questions that are not addressed (pp. 55-59). The overview of how inquisitors worked needs the scholarship of Edward Peters, particularly in regard to the relationship between the Inquisition and Roman law. The summary of scholarship is fragmented in terms of argument, while the rather harshly worded attacks on Netanyahu's and Norman Roth's scholarship seem unnecessary.

The book becomes much more interesting and valuable in its second half. Dividing her evidence according to observance of the Sabbath, Holy Days, dietary laws, and prayer life, D'Abrera finds clues that inquisitors distinguished between rote actions and intent, and, more important, she illuminates a constant interaction between *conversos* and Jews. *Conversos* sent their servants to the Jewish quarter (*judería*) on the Sabbath to light fires and prepare food (pp. 84-85); *conversos* also participated in Passover celebrations (p. 111), gave oil as an act of charity, and used Jewish butchers to slaughter their meat, despite laws that forbade such interchanges. Most provocative are the testimonies that bespeak a borrowing of concepts from one religion to another, such as the notions that the fast of Yom Kippur could get relatives released from purgatory (p. 97), that prayers said by Jews had the same effects as ones said by monks (p. 146), or that spinning on Saturdays offended the Virgin Mary (p. 88). Ironically, D'Abrera uses this evidence to prove the inquisitors were right: they were correct to fear that the line between Jews and Christians was "exceedingly blurred" (p. 140). But her larger concern is to prove that numerous *conversos* in and around Zaragoza were practicing Jews, and there is no doubt she has provided us with poignant testimony to that effect. The reader wishes she had engaged in more comparative analysis with, for example, Ciudad Real, whose trial records are beautifully edited; she might also have spent more time thinking about how the Inquisition's legal framework affected the responses she has excavated. But her sensitive expositions of *conversos*' statements before the Inquisition add to our understanding of that complex community.