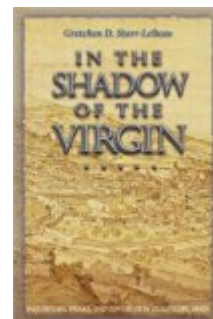


Gretchen D. Starr-LeBeau. *In the Shadow of the Virgin: Inquisitors, Friars, and Conversos in Guadalupe, Spain.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. 280 S. \$39.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-691-09683-4.



Reviewed by Elka Klein

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One of the most heated debates in the admittedly sedate field of medieval Jewish history is the degree of fidelity to Judaism of the conversos, the Jews who accepted baptism in late-fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Spain, and their descendants. One camp--exemplified by Yitzhak Baer and Haim Beinart--views the conversos as faithful to Judaism insofar as possible. According to this view, the Inquisition, despite the evil of its means, was to some extent justified in its ends in the sense that it responded to a real problem for Spanish Christian society. The other--exemplified by Benzion Netanyahu and Norman Roth--contends that the Inquisition blew far out of proportion the degree of converso judaizing behavior, and that the majority of the conversos were fully assimilated into Christian society. According to this view, the Inquisition itself created the phenomenon it imagined it had found.

In this excellent book, Gretchen Starr-LeBeau positions herself with a growing group of scholars who argue for a more complex view of converso identity, stressing the variety of converso practices, and the mutations to which converso identi-

ty was subject. Starr-LeBeau's contribution to this approach is to view the conversos, their religious practices, and their identity in the context not of Jewish but of Christian society. Her choice of terminology here is significant: of the possible terms to describe the converso population, her preference is to call them "New Christians." She also prefers the term "judaizing" to the more common "crypto-Judaism," emphasizing the rift between conversos and Jews; despite similarities of some practices with those of Judaism (and notwithstanding the strong attraction of many to Judaism), New Christians were exactly that, Christians (see p. 52 n. 4).

The Extramaduran town of Guadalupe serves her well in her agenda. Guadalupe was an extremely popular pilgrimage site, one favored by the Catholic monarchs, Fernando and Isabel. It was a town with a significant population of New Christians, but--even prior to the expulsion of 1492--without Jews. The absence of Jews helps to focus the eye of the historian on relations between New and Old Christians. But Starr-LeBeau is also interested in the intersection between poli-

tics and religion, and here Guadalupe is also ideal. The royal patronage enjoyed by the friary (the town was governed by the friars of the Order of St. Jerome, the Jeronymites) highlights the intersection between local and national concerns; and the considerable involvement of certain wealthy conversos with the friary sets the stage for the story she tells of the role of the Inquisition in clarifying--and even reifying--the identities of Old and New Christians alike.

Starr-LeBeau begins by setting the scene, introducing Guadalupe, the shrine of the Virgin, and the friars who controlled both. She then moves in the next chapters to discuss the religious identities of the various populations in the town. Chapter 2 gives a "thick description" of the range of religious and devotional practices--both Jewish and Christian--in the town. Chapter 3 focuses more closely on the conversos and their connections with Old Christian townspeople and friars. These chapters form the basis of the first part of her argument: that the religious identity of New Christians (and by extension that of Old Christians) was multifaceted and subject to change, and that the lines between the two groups were not as clear as the Inquisition (or later scholars who have looked primarily through the lens of Inquisition records) believed.

Chapter 4 turns to the events which brought the Inquisition to Guadalupe in 1485. Social conflict within the town over the lordship of the friars combined with resentment against converso functionaries when some wealthy conversos attempted (unsuccessfully) to influence the election of the prior in 1483. In response, the new prior brought the Inquisition to town, hoping to "quell these local political and social conflicts, to settle immediate grievances, and to sever the link between clerical ill-governance and an influential New Christian minority" (p. 144). The next chapters detail the success of this measure and its unintended consequences. Chapter 5 details the activities of the Inquisition in Guadalupe in 1485,

the process of trials and their outcomes. It sets up Starr-LeBeau's argument that the expectations which the Inquisition brought to their task not only affected what they saw but transformed religious identity in Guadalupe. The Inquisitor's view of a stark dichotomy between good and bad Christians, and their suspicions that all or most New Christians fell into the latter category essentially reified the distinction between Old and New Christians. Starr-LeBeau does not downplay the detrimental effects of the Inquisition, which created an atmosphere of suspicion, encouraged denunciation, and put New Christians in a bind: if they confessed, they would be tried, but if they didn't confess others would likely testify against them and they would be worse off. Yet the accused were not without options. Chapter 6 examines the strategies of the accused, and suggests a degree of resistance (only minimally successful) to the efforts of the Inquisition. Chapter 7 turns to look inside the friary. The friars had hoped to use the Inquisition to consolidate their control of the town. Yet the presence of significant numbers of conversos in the friary and the testimony of many townsmen against the friars ultimately led to an internal Inquisition. The most notorious judaizer in the friary, Diego de Marchena, was sentenced to death and burned at an auto-da-fé. The internal Inquisition showed that the friary was rent by the same tensions as the town, and as in the town, it was used to eradicate these divisions. The Inquisition in Guadalupe here presaged a shift in the Jeronymite order from a long history of sympathy for conversos towards the more punitive approach represented by the Inquisition, and from inclusion to exclusion.

The book concludes in chapter 8 with a discussion of the outcomes of the Inquisition, and serves to sum up the arguments of the book. At one level the impact was limited. Although the most notorious judaizers were executed in 1485, those punished with "lifetime" imprisonment or exile were in fact freed or (tacitly) allowed to return within a few years, and to pick up their lives,

albeit perhaps with more caution and a leavening of fear (justified in some cases). Yet at the same time the summoning of the Inquisition did indeed allow the friars to excise opposition to their rule in town and to wipe out divisions within the friary. Finally, the friary's relationship with the crown was strengthened, further enhancing the position of the friary, and contributing to a new ideology of the sacrality of the state in Spain.

This book exemplifies the best features of a monograph on a local topic. It draws together a broad variety of archival material (rather than relying only on Inquisition documents), and uses it to paint a compelling picture of one town's encounter with the Inquisition. Starr-LeBeau is among other things a good storyteller: she skillfully pulls from her sources the stories of particular individuals, complete with character development, and credible speculation on their motivations. Her portraits of individuals capture the imagination. But this book also integrates the local story with the most significant developments of a Spanish society in the process of transition: changes in religious culture, in politics, in institutions, and in society. Starr-LeBeau handles the various (often heated) scholarly controversies on which her work touches with grace; this book betrays none of the awkwardness which plagues so many former dissertations. The clarity with which she summarizes previous scholarship, expounds her argument, and tells the stories of friars and townspeople, New and Old Christians, make this a book which could be assigned to advanced undergraduates (the chapters on the Inquisition in particular will go a long way to undercutting the romantically sinister view of the Inquisition shared by so many students).

The book's most important contribution from the point of view of Judaic Studies is Starr-LeBeau's insistence on the contingency and fluidity of converso identity, and her persuasive argument that the obsession with the question of "how Jewish were they" imposes an artificial dichotomy

on them: "Of the multiple ways in which Guadalupe identified themselves--by occupation, confraternity membership, location of residence, place of origin, ethnicity--Jewish descent did not automatically supersede all others" (p. 259). But for specialists in Jewish Studies it will also provide a salutary model of how much "external" history is often necessary to make sense of "internal" phenomena. This is not a work primarily of Jewish history, but it is a book that anyone interested in the Jews of Spain, their non-Jewish descendants, or students of the nature of Jewish identity, should read.

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