



Heretics or Daughters of Israel?: The Crypto-Jewish Women of Castile

By Renee Levine Melammed

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Between 1391 and the end of the 15th century, numerous Spanish Jews converted to Christianity, most of them under duress. Before and after 1492, when the Jews were officially expelled from Spain, a significant number of these conversos maintained clandestine ties to Judaism, despite their outward conformity to Catholicism. Through the lens of the Inquisition's own records, this groundbreaking study focuses on the crypto-Jewish women of Castile, demonstrating their central role in the perpetuation of crypto-Jewish society in the absence of traditional Jewish institutions led by men. Renee Levine Melammed shows how many "conversas" acted with great courage and commitment to perpetuate their religious heritage, seeing themselves as true daughters of Israel. Her fascinating book sheds new light on the roles of women in the transmission of Jewish traditions and cultures.

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Review

"...thoroughly researched and brilliantly written." --*Midstream*

"Melammed has done a fine job of bringing what should have long been a central topic in *converso* studies from the periphery of the field to its rightful place."--*The Jewish Quarterly Review*

"Renée Levine Melammed has given us an impressive and thoughtful study of the records of the Inquisition, showing how they can serve as an important source for documenting women's religion and demonstrating how, during a difficult period, women preserved Jewish religious expression for men."--*NASHIM*

"The stories of these valiant women contribute profitably to Jewish and general history and to women's studies."--*Choice*

"...[A]n interesting and important book that reveals a great deal about the lives of these Christian or Jewish women on whom the Inquisition focused its wrath - in the belief that the flames of the auto-da-fe would save their souls from the fires of hell."--*Ha'aretz*

"Renee Levine Melammed has given us an impressive and thoughtful study of the records of the Inquisition, showing how they can serve as an important source for documenting women's religion and demonstrating how, during a difficult period, women preserved Jewish religious expression for men."--*Nashim*

"...Melammed's analysis of the social history of the *conversos* is invaluable. She uncovers their jobs, servants, social networks, religious practices, and even their diets....[She] makes clear the tragedy of their unstable and precarious existence, a life that was aptly described by one crypto-Jew as 'like a cork [floating] on the water'."--*Sixteenth Century Journal*

About the Author

Renee Levine Melammed is at Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem.

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