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Review of Marie-Theresa Hernandez, *The Virgin of Guadalupe and the Conversos: Uncovering Hidden Influences from Spain to Mexico*

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Marie-Theresa Hernández. *The Virgin of Guadalupe and the Conversos: Uncovering Hidden Influences from Spain to Mexico*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014. 276 pp.

Marie-Theresa Hernández's recent book, *The Virgin of Guadalupe and the Conversos*, sets out an ambitious mandate. In the introduction, the author variously states that this work "traces the relationship among conversos and *judaizantes*, the Church, and the Spanish monarchy through five centuries;" that "[t]his book is about Monteros and other priests before him who conserved a belief in a Jewish God while presenting themselves to the world as Christian clergy;" and that the purpose of the book is to address the narrative of the "*judaizante* influence on the Church of México." More specifically, Hernández sees the Virgins of Guadalupe of both Mexico and Spain as key components of converso belief in the Spanish empire.

To accomplish this, Hernández employs an unusual approach. The author begins with interviews with archivists, faithful readings of Américo Castro as her guide to Jewish-Christian relations, and targeted reading across several centuries of material; she then uses this background to assemble a *bricolage* of passages from documents that she finds particularly suggestive, and which she presents throughout the volume. The book begins with a chapter retelling of some of the early stories and accounts of the Virgin of Guadalupe of Spain. It then continues with a chapter on the Order of Saint Jerome, or Hieronymites, the friars (not monks, as she states) who managed the Guadalupense shrine. A third chapter considers Marian devotion as linked to kabbalistic understandings of the Shekinah, or inward Presence of the Divine. In chapter four, Hernández reviews some information about Renaissance Christian Hebraists, and continues that discussion in chapter five with an extended meditation on the career of Benito Arias Montano. The last two chapters turn the reader's attention to Mexico and two priests who wrote on the Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe: Miguel Sánchez in the mid-seventeenth century, and Manuel Espinosa de los Monteros in the early nineteenth century. Collectively, through a process of juxtaposition, association, speculation, and suspicious coincidences (e.g. 92, 140), Hernández seeks to present an image of the Mexican (and Spanish) Virgins of Guadalupe as a kind of lodestone of Judaizing or *converso* piety in the Spanish imperial world. The author frequently cites Leo Strauss's *Persecution and the Art of Writing* as particularly helpful in reading her evidence, since he argues that an author's genuine opinion can be contradicted by his or her own writing. This dissimulation, or suspicious contradictions in a text, leads Hernández to argue that the intention of some authors is in some cases to imply the opposite of what they state in a particular passage.

This methodology creates some difficulties for Hernández in proving her argument. It leaves her at times arguing against the logic of a larger work to emphasize a contrary reading of a minor passage. In cases where I was familiar with the documents under discussion (the *Comedia* about the Virgin of Guadalupe of Spain attributed to Cervantes; Andrés Bernáldez's *Memorias*; etc.) these readings seemed strained and unpersuasive. The Monteros text is the least familiar and probably most interesting of the documents she addresses, and it would have been helpful to see extensive passages from it. This would not only would have helped bolster her argument, but also might have helped clarify her strategies of *explication de texte*. Instead, we see surprisingly little of this “smoking gun,” or of the Sánchez text for which she makes similar claims. Instead, she spends more time talking about the texts than analyzing specific passages—and what little she quotes appears only in her English translation, not in the original Spanish. This approach renders the documents disappointingly opaque.

Studies of *judeoconversos* are challenging for several reasons. What practices might exist would be obscured or hidden, of course; but more importantly, the mutable, contextual, and conditional nature of belief requires the scholar to exercise considerable caution. Recent excellent scholarship as varied as that of Stefania Pastore, Juan Ignacio Pulido Serrano, and Bruno Feitler highlight the important work that can be done when one considers the broad spectrum of beliefs and unbeliefs, changing practices, and internally inconsistent attitudes of contemporaries. Hernández, by contrast, seems fascinated more by the possibilities of a hidden history and hidden identities. That fascination leads her to privilege readings of documents that suggest occluded meanings, even when implausible. Translating Giles of Viterbo's description of Charles V, *princeps missus a celo*, as “the prince who releases the secret” (92) instead of the more prosaic but accurate “the prince sent from heaven” is a minor but revealing error. Writing that Philip II was “(at least outwardly) profoundly Catholic” strains credulity and throws suspicion on the rest of her work as well. I suspect that authors of secondary works cited here may feel that they, too, have been selectively read (or in some cases misread). Finally, given the broad timeframe of Hernández's subject, it is not surprising that several errors of fact creep into the volume throughout.

In short, while the product of much reading and research, this volume will not be as useful for historians as one might wish.

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