

2017

Review of Patrick J. O'Banion, ed. and trans., *This Happened in my Presence: Moriscos, Old Christians, and the Spanish Inquisition in the town of Deza, 1569-1611*

Carolyn Salomons
St Mary's University, andavis@astate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs>

Recommended Citation

Salomons, Carolyn (2017) "Review of Patrick J. O'Banion, ed. and trans., *This Happened in my Presence: Moriscos, Old Christians, and the Spanish Inquisition in the town of Deza, 1569-1611*," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*: Vol. 42 : Iss. 2 , Article 11.

<https://doi.org/10.26431/0739-182X.1269>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs/vol42/iss2/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies* by an authorized editor of Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies. For more information, please contact jesus@udel.edu.

O'Banion, Patrick J., ed. and trans., *This Happened in my Presence: Moriscos, Old Christians, and the Spanish Inquisition in the town of Deza, 1569-1611*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017. xlix + 264 pp.

Patrick O'Banion has created what might be a new template for teaching editions of primary sources. *This Happened in my Presence: Moriscos, Old Christians, and the Spanish Inquisition in the town of Deza, 1569-1611* goes beyond a collection of inquisitorial sources translated into English. The book also includes valuable resources for both students and professors and as such, makes a welcome addition to other excellent collections of inquisitorial primary sources.

O'Banion begins with a succinct yet thorough introduction. He introduces the reader to the town of Deza, a "dry port" of significant size in north-east Castile, near the border with Aragon. The population was ostensibly all Christian, and indeed, Jews who had converted in the previous century had been absorbed by the Old Christian population. Converted Muslims, however, were still a distinct group and made up approximately one-quarter of the population. O'Banion goes on to explain the significance of Old and New Christians, devoting separate sections to converted Jews (*conversos*) and converted Muslims (*moriscos*). There is also a brief introduction to the Holy Office of the Spanish Inquisitions, highlighting its procedures, and an overview of the political situation of Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For historians of this period, there is not much new here, save for the fascinating anecdote of Roman Ramirez the Younger, a Dezano *morisco* of some local importance who offended the wrong man and was subsequently denounced to the Inquisition. He died in prison, but his bones were burned at an *auto da fé* in Toledo, the only one attended by Phillip III. However, to an undergraduate new to the history of Spain, the introduction is invaluable.

The heart of the book consists of the documents, 92 manuscripts from the inquisitorial section of the Diocesan Archive at Cuenca. O'Banion chose these 92 because they "cast light on life in early modern Spain, especially the nature of relations between Moriscos and Old Christians at the local level." In addition, the documents "...provide a window onto early modern Spaniards' interactions with powerful institutions..."(xlv). The first and largest set of documents (1-33) consists of inquisitorial interviews conducted during the visitation of Licentiate Alonso Jimenez de Reynoso, in the fall of 1569. Most of these are denunciations tied to suspicious behavior of the *Morisco* population, which include, for example, cultural practices regarding the correct depth of a grave or customs surrounding marriage contracts. They also include more overt religious matters, such as overheard blasphemy, or the public expression of doubts about transubstantiation.

Another set of documents (35-72) deals with the visitation of Dr. Francisco de Aryanna in 1581. The accusations found in these documents mirror the first batch in scope, including: the refusal to eat a chicken not slaughtered according to Halal practices; doubts about the divinity of Christ; the suggestion by a priest that the case of the priest that most saints were actually in hell; and suspecting an elderly woman of practicing witchcraft with the brewing of love potions.

There are several documents (34, 73-76, 77) that deal with the case of the aforementioned Roman Ramirez. His confession for the Edict of Grace is included, as well as Dr. Arganda's examination of both him and his wife, as well as the sentencing

and report of the *auto da fé* in Toledo in which his body was posthumously burnt.

The final two sets of documents are perhaps the most intriguing. Documents 78-86 are nine letters written by a group of *Moriscos* who had been incarcerated in Cuenca to their friends and family in Deza. Some letters are merely informative, explaining the punishment meted out to the author or to other family members -the wearing of the *san betino*, or being sent to the galleys are quite common. Other letters ask for aid: sometimes financial, other times in the form of asking authorities to intervene and assist in gaining a prisoner's release. One husband chastises his wife for not responding to his first letter, as he longs to know how his family is faring in his absence. Interestingly, there is little in these letters of any religious sentiment; no one feels she or he has been justly accused and there is no expression of repentance.

Documents 87-92 are records of the various ways the *Moriscos* of Deza sought to evade their time in the galleys. Most of these are based on medical reasons such as old age, fever, or in one case, hemorrhoids. Included in the documents is a rather wry response to the Suprema from the Inquisitors in Cuenca, asserting that all of these weakly men were in perfect health when they left the jails.

In addition to these fascinating documents, O'Banion has included a lengthy "Cast of Characters" which provides a brief précis of all the people mentioned in the documents. He has also included Focus Questions at the end of each set of documents, designed to encourage students to consider what information can be gleaned from them. There is a subject index as well as an index of topics, a thorough bibliography, several pictures of the town and buildings in Deza, and three maps.

Patrick O'Banion has set a high standard for collections of translated documents. The book is clearly geared towards undergraduates. It would be a valuable resource to anyone teaching early modern Spanish or European history, and is a must for any course on the Inquisition.

Carolyn Salomons
St Mary's University