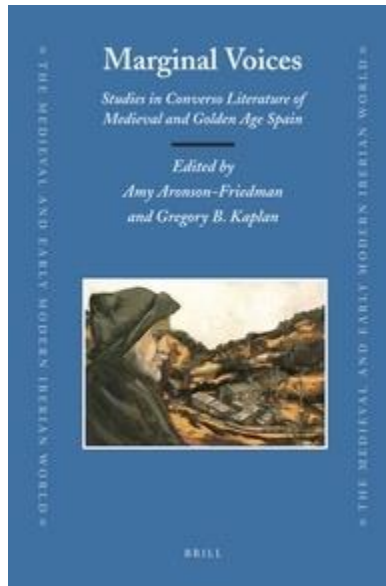


Aronson-Friedman, Amy and Gregory B. Kaplan. *Marginal Voices: Studies in Converso Literature of Medieval and Golden Age Spain*. Leiden: Brill, 2012. ISBN: 9789004214408. 320 pgs.

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The present volume is a compilation of ten essays on the *converso* population of Spain during the Middle Ages and the Golden Age that is sure to appeal to a vast audience of readers, as it addresses this topic from historical, theological, and literary perspectives. In addition to these essays, the editors have also included an extensive introduction in which they review (albeit briefly) the history of the Jewish population of the Iberian Peninsula and summarize each of the ten subsequent articles. Here we find too an explanation of the title, since, according to the editors, the first word –marginal– “captures the essence of the figures on which the essays focus as they further define and expand the cannon” (10). That the *conversos* and their *voices* were marginal at best is obvious –no need for an explanation here–, but it is true that the contributions to the volume explore each individual topic from this standpoint.

The collection begins with an essay by Gregory Kaplan –one of the volume’s editors– in which he delves into the origins of anti-Semitic attitudes in Spain following the revolt in Toledo in 1449 and the resulting preoccupation with blood purity in the country. A quick review of the evolution of anti-Jewish sentiment, as well as the inception of the so-called *limpiezas de sangre*, is an appropriate starting point for the volume, since it provides a background for the rest of the essays. Accordingly, Ana Benito continues where Kaplan leaves off by offering a chronology of the expulsion of the Jews and *moriscos* in 1492 and 1509, respectively, while introducing the process of marginalization around which the subsequent essays will be centered. Focusing on specific literary works that denounce a *converso* voice, the rest of the contributions depart from the structure of the first two and focus on individual cases. The first of these, and one of the most interesting in the volume, is David Wacks’ “Conflicted Identity and Colonial Adaptation in Petrus Alfonsi’s *Dialogus contra judaeos* and *Disciplina clericalis*,” where the author returns to the time when Jews first started converting to Christianity in Spain and identifies the obvious traces of Petrus Alfonsi’s *converso* heritage in his writings. Wacks concludes that this author’s “literary

output bridged Islamic, Jewish, and Christian literary culture” (74), a statement that can also be applied to Patricia Timmons’ contribution, where she analyzes Jewish-Christian coexistence in *Los milagros de Nuestra Señora*. Similarly to Wacks, Timmons examines the *converso* identity in medieval Spanish literature, suggesting that, since Berceo’s version of the *judezno* story does not explicitly state that the crowd who witnessed the miracle of the Jewish boy in the oven is Christian, it was most likely comprised of a mixed group of Jews and Christians. According to this author, since this event would have taken place before the Jews were forced to convert to Catholicism or leave the country, “the topics of *convivencia* and conversion in Berceo’s ‘El judiezno’ appear represented as themes of both opposition and unity” (93).

The collection’s central theme of the marginalized *converso* voices is given special importance in Bruce Rosenstock’s essay, “Against the Pagans: Alonso de Cartagena, Francisco de Vitoria, and Converso Political Theology,” in which the author examines two specific *converso* theologians who considered that “the demonization of Jewish blood is a symptom of the insurgence of paganism within the church” (117). Rosenstock gives his readers an intriguing perception of the theological and political conflicts of the time and stresses the importance of these two voices for the Christian community, concluding that “their voices are as important today as they were in their own day” (138). By doing so, this author not only draws attention to the contemporary relevance of these theologians –which could be a topic of particular interest to modern scholars–, but also remains committed to the overall purpose of the collection.

Scholars of medieval and Golden Age Spanish literature will find an abundance of information concerning a variety of authors, genres, characters, and works that are fundamental to these historical periods. For example, Deborah Rosenberg’s essay deals with *conversos* in the Spanish picaresque novel, Michelle Hamilton analyzes the Judeo-Spanish version of the *Danza de la muerte*, and Kevin Larsen’s contribution deals with Cervantes, Don Quixote, and the Hebrew scriptures. Additionally, Luis Bejarano analyzes how several other authors of the time –including Góngora, Quevedo, Lope, and Cervantes– used specific techniques in their publications to “evade Jewish ancestry suspicion” (234). Any and all of the above essays could prove useful to academics wishing to explore the influence of the *converso* voice on the one of the most fruitful literary periods of Spain, but one should heed Laura Delbrugge’s cautionary advice that the *converso* experience is not as collective as many scholars have taken it to be.

Overall, this volume consists of a series of insightful essays that, as the editors mention in the introduction, are organized into clusters based on thematic content and historical timeframe. Readers will find this impeccable organization enjoyable should they choose to read this compilation in its entirety, although the fact that almost each contributor begins his or her essay with a brief history of the *conversos* demonstrates some lack of cohesion among the articles and seems somewhat repetitive. On the other hand, scholars who would rather use this volume as reference material for future research are likely to find this a useful feature of the book, along with the authors’ attention to detail when it comes to translating passages from sources written in foreign languages and impressive bibliographies that boast an average of forty secondary sources per article. The volume is heavy on literary analysis (after all, seven of the ten contributions deal with literary works) and the timeframe of the essays could have been more concise (it is a bit of a stretch to go from Petrus Alfonsi to Góngora), but overall it is a well-rounded book and each of the contributions offer valuable insights into the topic at hand.