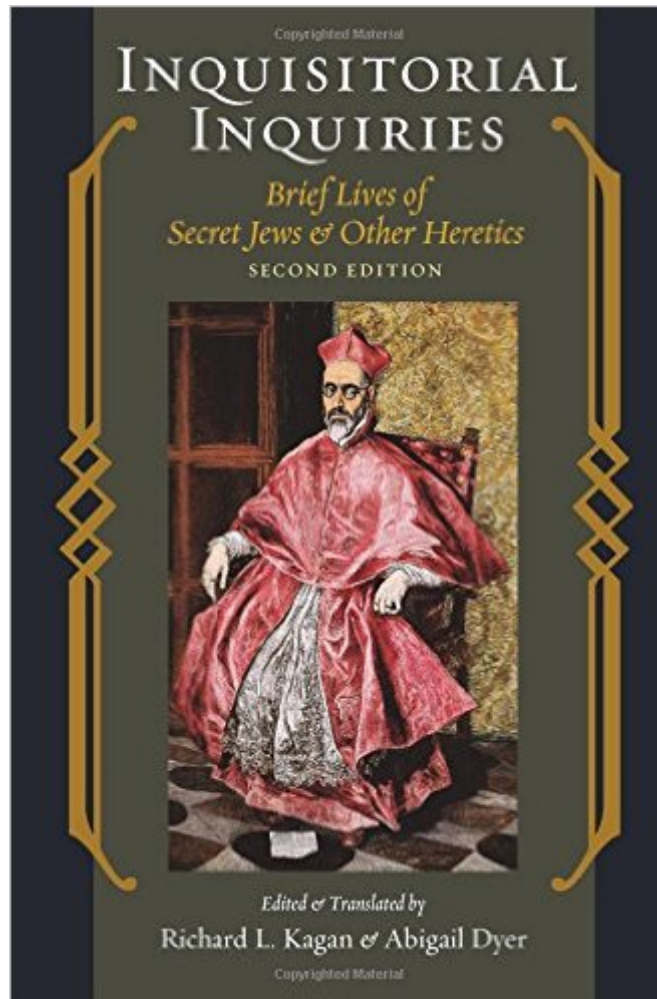


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# Inquisitorial Inquiries: Brief Lives Of Secret Jews And Other Heretics



## Synopsis

On the first day of Francisco de San Antonio's trial before the Spanish Inquisition in Toledo in 1625, his interrogators asked him about his parentage. His real name, he stated, was Abram Rub n, and he had been born in Fez of Jewish parents. How then, Inquisitors wanted to know, had he become a Christian convert? Why had a Hebrew alphabet been found in his possession? And what was his business at the Court in Madrid? "He was asked", according to his dossier, "for the story of his life". His response, more than ten folios long, is one of the many involuntary autobiographies created by the logic of the Inquisition that today provide rich insights into both the personal lives of the persecuted and the social, cultural, and political realities of the age. In the first edition of *Inquisitorial Inquiries*, Richard L. Kagan and Abigail Dyer collected, translated, and annotated six of these autobiographies from a diverse group of prisoners. Now they add the fascinating life story of another victim of the Inquisition: Esteban Jamete, a French sculptor accused of being a Protestant. Each of the autobiographies has been selected to represent a particular political or social issue, while at the same time raising more intimate questions about the religious, sexual, political, or national identities of the prisoners. Among them are a politically incendiary prophet, a self-proclaimed hermaphrodite, and a morisco, an Islamic convert to Catholicism.

## Book Information

Paperback: 248 pages

Publisher: Johns Hopkins University Press; second edition edition (July 19, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1421401967

ISBN-13: 978-1421401966

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.6 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars   See all reviews   (3 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #666,291 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #228 in   Books > History > World > Religious > Ethnic & Tribal #2838 in   Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Europe #4830 in   Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Religious Studies

## Customer Reviews

Apparently, I am very gullible. Someone shares a story about how they were forcibly circumcised by Muslims or how they "accidentally" became a rabbi twice or how their penis "accidentally" fell off, and I'm accepting it because - after all - why would they lie about stuff like that? Well, maybe not the

one about the "disappearing penis," but, really, who knows? This was simply a fascinating book that provided a glimpse into the "other side of history," i.e., the side that doesn't make it into the history books because it involves the small and lowly and their small and lowly lives. In this case, the stories of the small and lowly was incidentally preserved by the fact that the small and lowly had a run-in with the Spanish Inquisition with its obsession with due process and bureaucratic niceties. Thus, we get a glimpse of a kind of day in the life of the people who were the raw material on which history worked. Richard L. Kagan and Abigail Dyer have apparently gone through the files of the Spanish Inquisition and translated (and transliterated) five absolutely fascinating stories. I say "transliterated" because they have taken the interrogations and essentially rendered the interrogations in to a first person narrative. At first, I was worried about how this would affect the integrity of the narrative, and although I obviously don't have access to the primary source, my sense was that the narratives read more coherently and intimately as a first person narrative than as a series of third person questions and answers. I have no idea how these files were selected. Some of them may have been quite typical and some may have been selected because of their strangeness, but, again, I don't know. Thus we get the following six stories: 1.

By presenting seven different cases of people arrested and interrogated by Inquisitors for a variety of different offenses, the authors have done a tremendous favor to those of us who have had it hammered into our heads since childhood that the Spanish Inquisition was unjust, unreasonable, cruel, oppressive, and just plain stupid. Not only do the accused persons reveal by their own transcribed accounts that they are guilty as charged, but the Inquisitors judge them justly, even coming off in several cases as very lenient. It's important to keep in mind that in a country like Spain, which had an official State religion at the time, preaching/practicing other faiths was illegal under civil law. That's why Jews, Muslims, and Protestants fell afoul of the State, and ended up in the Inquisitors' prison-cells. On top of that, we see that some non-Catholics were not merely practicing their own faith; they were actually attacking Catholicism and its followers (in case #7, e.g., we see the accused teaching her children to whip a statue of Christ, p. 198). Morality was an understandably big issue too, in Catholic Spain, and you can't help pitying the clergy working for the Inquisition who were tasked with interrogating Elena/Eleno (chapter 3), who even by today's permissive standards would be considered a sexually perverted, sick freak. But don't dismiss this book as the work of ardent Catholics with chips on their shoulders because it's obvious that the authors aren't Catholic themselves.

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