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**[Review of] James S. Amelang. *Parallel Histories: Muslims and Jews in Inquisitorial Spain*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013. xi + 208 pp. \$25.95. ISBN: 978-0-8071-5410-6.**

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James S. Amelang. *Parallel Histories: Muslims and Jews in Inquisitorial Spain*.

Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013. xi + 208 pp. \$25.95. ISBN: 978-0-8071-5410-6.

Readers looking for an intelligent introduction to the complex question of religious minorities in Spain — converted Jews and their descendants, known as conversos, and converted Muslims and their descendants, known as Moriscos — have found it in James Amelang's new book, *Parallel Histories*. But specialists in the field will also appreciate this book, which sparks new questions even as it revisits key scholarly debates. It is a masterful work of synthesis, the product of wide reading and deep thinking on complex topics. Amelang's goal is to explore the troubled legacy of religious pluralism in medieval Iberia as it played out in an early modern Spain that increasingly valued religious and ethnic conformity. In particular, he juxtaposes the histories of Moriscos and conversos — two populations that experienced similar pressures but suffered different fates. To do this, he makes a number of subsidiary arguments about the history of both Moriscos and conversos. Many of the questions he treats — questions regarding assimilation, religious belief and practice, and majority Old Christian attitudes toward these minority populations — are thorny and contentious individually, so that this book, though relatively brief, is the product of careful argumentation throughout. The

conclusions may not always be new to specialists, but the lucid way in which Amelang explains his topic, and the breadth of his focus, make this an important work.

The first half of the book addresses the fate of Spain's Muslim converts, the Moriscos, from their mass conversions in the early sixteenth century to their expulsion from Spain about a century later. Earlier chapters relate the narrative of forced conversions of Muslims and rightly emphasize the contemporary image of Moriscos as primarily a political, rather than a religious threat. Following chapters identify some of the distinctive qualities of Morisco life in Spain in the sixteenth century, their frequent isolation from urban life and the persistence of distinctive dress and other ethnic markers that perpetuated a separate lifestyle from the Old Christian majority. A final chapter addresses the expulsion of the Moriscos and their subsequent disappearance from the record. It evokes the pain of the expulsion and notes that some Moriscos managed to remain in Spain or return, despite the odds, and that others found the transition to living a life of normative Islam in an Islamic state more challenging than they had imagined.

The second half of the book addresses Jewish converts to Christianity and their descendants, known as conversos. It is an analysis that never loses sight of the forest because of the trees. Amelang is particularly successful when discussing the issue of assimilation by conversos into Old Christian society. It is a difficult subject for scholars, since records — Inquisition records par excellence — that identify conversos highlight conflict and ongoing alienation from the majority. Yet Amelang teases out the evidence scholars have uncovered of sixteenth-century assimilation by Spanish conversos into the broader society, even in the midst of ongoing scrutiny. Amelang also traces continuing manifestations of anti-Semitism and the tortured history of *limpieza de sangre*, or blood purity, drawing in part on the important work of Stefania Pastore. He wisely urges caution when considering the role of converso ancestry in understanding the extraordinary cultural production of the Spanish Golden Age. The last chapter tackles the question of skepticism and the place of conversos in the history of skepticism, from Uriel da Costa and Juan de Prado to Baruch Spinoza. The book ends with the observation that contemporaries saw conversos as more polluting or contaminating than Moriscos, even as conversos were assimilating much more successfully into Spanish society.

I do have one regret: while this book is an excellent introduction to the histories of these two minorities, it is less useful as an introduction to the historiography of the field. Specialists will recognize the secondary sources that underlay particular sections of the book, but the minimal notes will make it harder for newcomers to make those connections. There is a bibliography organized by chapter, which helps, but it is a shame that the much more extensive bibliographic essay of the original Spanish volume does not appear here. But that is a small point about what is sure to remain a foundational volume for years to come.

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