

Women, Witchcraft, and the Inquisition in Spain and the New World

María Jesús Zamora Calvo, ed.

reseñado por

Jordan Vanderpool

Baylor University

Zamora Calvo, María Jesús, ed. *Women, Witchcraft, and the Inquisition in Spain and the New World*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2021. 214 pp. ISBN 978-0-8071-7561-3.

Edited and compiled by María Jesús Zamora Calvo, *Women, Witchcraft, and the Inquisition in Spain in the New World* (WWISNW) accomplishes a great deal in bringing to light narratives of marginalized women during the inquisitorial period in Spain and the Americas. Zamora Calvo's introduction surveys each author's contribution and presents an unequivocal thesis that is largely followed throughout the work: namely, that inquisitorial persecution of women of the time always bore the shadow of hatred and disdain. To finalize the contextual framework of the book, Zamora Calvo offers a brief overview of the three hundred and fifty years of the Holy Office (1478-1834).

Consisting of three essays, part one addresses cases of witchcraft in Spain. Beatriz Moncó Rebollo draws on the paradox of orthodox and heterodox discourse existing together in flux during the Baroque era to flesh out the binomials of woman/devil and body/evil as manifested in individual cases and mass pandemics. Sonia Pérez Villanueva addresses racial tensions in early 17th century Spain and exposes propagandist artwork's role in constructing a culture of ethnocentrism. As a conclusion of the first part, Zamora Calvo defends the case of Catalina Mateo—accused of infanticide and witchcraft—, while also considering the infamous myth of the demonic pact and its possible economic and psychological motivations.

In the more tolerant environment of the New World, less severe trials occurred, but WWISNW devotes seven studies to the topic. Alberto Ortiz begins part two by outlining the practice of ligatures and investigates the use of these spells in the case of María de la Concepción. Cecilia López-Riduara reveals the belief in magical impotence as having stemmed from the sexual obsession of the authors of *Malleus Malificarum*, which is followed by Robin Ann Rice's analysis of proto-medical midwife practices and occult charms as a

unique means for monetary gain available to women at the time. Yadira Munguía's essay studies a unique instance of self-denunciation in front of the Holy Office, which results in a relatively positive outcome for the defendant. Deviating slightly from previous essays, Claudia Carranza and Jair Antonio Acevedo López investigate the use of an esoteric plant in magical formulae, and Graciela Rodríguez Castañón brings attention to the witch as a cultural myth. Ana María Díaz Burgos brings the book to a close by addressing two cases of witchcraft motivated by economic advancement in the face of marital struggles in Cartagena de Indias.

The merits of this study are numerous and worthy of mention. *WWISNW* links the role of the inquisition in Spain to its role in the New World, elucidating the similarities and the notable differences between the Holy Office's operation intercontinentally. Moreover, the diversity of subjects perhaps proves the book's greatest advantage. Far from merely narrating numerous case studies, Zamora's complication seeks, and successfully manages, to arrive at a greater understanding of the essence of witchness during the Baroque period, principally through examining the individual woman, but also by means of more conceptual exploration.

What is often the study's greatest strength, however, at times turns into structural weakness. To some degree an outlier from the other contributors, Rodríguez Castañón's essay explores the cultural construct of the witch during the time of the Inquisition, and while a praiseworthy piece, the placement distracts from the author's astute observations. As the penultimate essay of the book, the pattern of a historiographical analysis of various inquisitorial cases in each essay has already been sufficiently established, so an essay that addresses no individual case, instead focusing on a more theoretical cultural phenomenon, results in some dissonance in the flow of the book, in particular when followed by another paradigmatic trial documentation. Munguía's investigation of an abnormal case of self-denunciation in New Spain also stands out, as it provides a glimpse into a legally well-actualized inquisitorial trial, whereas other essays underscore the Inquisition's failure in this regard. Despite the fact that these essays valuably offer unique and nuanced perspectives and add to the work's diversity, structurally they contribute to peripheral disorientation.

Among the numerous studies of the Inquisition and its historical documentation, *Women, Witchcraft, and the Inquisition in Spain and the New World* distinguishes itself for the extensive scope of its studies, which proceeds from the collaborative nature of the work and readily lends itself to the ambiguous and ideologically complex narrative of the intercontinental *Santo Oficio*. Although the thematic thread between contributors is at times tenuous, this minor fault is redeemed by the successful demonstration of its overarching hypothesis that regarding accused women the inquisitor's gaze came with a "specter of contempt, humiliation, silencing, and denial..." (3). The work implements its goal of exposing hidden trials and sufferings of women long-past and thus deserves its place in any scholarly library's catalogue that attempts to represent well the Inquisition.