

Parables of Coercion: Conversion and Knowledge at the End of Islamic Spain.
Seth Kimmel.

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Ranging across canon law, sacred philology, and history in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Spain, Seth Kimmel aims to demonstrate how the phenomenon of Muslim converts to Christianity was entertained by experts in those disciplines, as well as the ways in which the Morisco question affected the disciplines themselves. He conducts deep readings of manuscripts, printed books, and archival sources in order to chart the “intellectual consequences of coercion” (12), while noting that participation in conventional structures and modes of inquiry did not necessarily bespeak a conservative, intolerant agenda. In sum, Kimmel intends to capture a more complex intellectual history than what scholars customarily expect from this country in this epoch.

Parables of Coercion is divided into six chapters. The first two treat the pastoral and legal debates that ensued when Muslims were forcibly baptized and converted; the next pair addresses the use of Arabic in conversion efforts and the translations attempted with the Sacromonte *plomos* of Granada; the final pair confronts the historical treatment of the Alpujarras revolt of 1568–70, argues that accounts of the revolt laid the groundwork for Morisco expulsion, and charts the ways in which intellectuals could link the prospect of that expulsion to imperial and economic decline.

To his credit, Kimmel clearly explicates a number of intricate, underappreciated contexts for Spanish arguments about Muslim conversion and assimilation. He understands why the sacrament of baptism was viewed as binding, highlights the nexus that might be posited between dissimulation and pastoral success, and emphasizes that habit was a concept that

affected mightily the way ecclesiastical figures imagined the absorption of religious minorities. He gives a wonderful exposition of the balancing act between the sacred status of scripture over and against God's ability to reveal new sources. He expounds scholastic method with empathy. He stresses what early modern Spaniards saw as an important distinction between the linguistic formalism of Nebrija versus the dynamic, local vision of language as espoused by Juan de Valdes. In other words, Kimmel allows his subjects to wrestle with theological concepts, and to navigate a push-pull relationship between traditional authority and what they were witnessing on the ground.

In analogous fashion, Kimmel permits his subjects to be inconsistent and to pursue mixed goals, an approach that is especially appropriate when it comes to the translators who tried to turn the Sacromonte lead tablets into canonical scriptural texts. Kimmel persuasively charts their strategies to present the tablets' message in ways their peers would accept, while simultaneously obscuring content that bespoke a Muslim outlook on God. Equally successful are treatments of humanist Pedro de Valencia, theologian Francisco de Vitoria, and warrior-historian Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, who emerge as complex thinkers rather than one-dimensional partisans of tolerance or intolerance.

Kimmel's textual readings are convincing, yet certain assertions about the readings' larger meaning are more problematic, at least for this reviewer. Kimmel maintains that his authors were attempting to expand their own scholarly authority and to alter their disciplines by engaging in the Morisco debate (e.g., 55). While it is undoubtedly true that these individuals were interested in promoting their intellectual heft, there is almost no evidence that they conceptualized themselves as part of a disciplinary cadre and aimed to change their fields of study. They did seek out new sources as they debated whether and how the Moriscos could be assimilated. But adding bits of Arabic to a Hebrew manuscript does not constitute a change in philological method, any more than adducing comparisons between New World and peninsular conversions represents a new imagining of scholastic technique. It appears instead as if Kimmel's canon lawyers, philologists, and historians seized upon the Morisco question as a new topic and, to paraphrase Lévi-Strauss, found that Moriscos were good to think. In the process, they combined coercion and tolerance in unexpected ways, which Kimmel has now brought to the attention of a larger audience.

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