Historiographical Problems in the Study of the Inquisition and the Mexican Crypto-Jews in the Seventeenth Century

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Within the scope of Mexican history, the subjects of the Inquisition and of crypto-Jews have long been the focus of heated controversy and misplaced value judgments. The unfortunate result of this has been, and still remains today, a lack of understanding of the Inquisition, particularly in its relation to the crypto-Jewish community. The polemical nature of the historiography reflects the same Black Legend versus White Legend debate that has plagued colonial Latin American historiography continuously since the Spanish conquest. Because the theme of inquisitorial persecution—i.e., the rigid enforcement of Catholic orthodoxy and exclusivity—strikes at the very nerve center of this debate between assailants and defenders of the Spanish colonial system, historians of both schools have demonstrated a great deal of emotion and self-righteousness in the pursuit of their respective causes.

Historiographically, two antagonistic schools have addressed this issue. On one hand, scholars specializing in Jewish history have continued the tradition of their Protestant, North European predecessors in their attack upon the Spanish Catholic Church in general, and upon the Holy Office of the Inquisition in particular. Such writers have tended to portray the activities of the Inquisition unfavorably, focusing attention upon atypical but spectacular behavior of that institution, and often imposing twentieth-century values regarding toleration and justice backward in time to a less-enlightened, less-ecumenical age. Reacting strongly to the detractors of the Church, a far different school of historians, composed chiefly of Latin Americans and Spaniards closely associated with modern proclerical movements, has stressed the positive role that the Church and the Inquisition played in the development of Mexican colonial society. As will be clearly demonstrated below, both schools of Inquisition history have
been motivated to a large degree by twentieth-century concerns. Both have attempted to manipulate and use the history of the Mexican Inquisition to build support for and justify present-day religious and political positions far removed from the Holy Office of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The Historiography of the Black Legend: Selective Perception

One of the largest problems encountered in the historiography of the Inquisition and the crypto-Jews in Mexico is that of perspective. Since a large share of the historical literature published on this topic during the last one hundred years has been written by scholars specializing in Jewish history, readers have to overcome the barrier of selective perception. Despite heavy evidence to the contrary, many authors convey the impression that the Holy Office in Mexico concerned itself primarily with the persecution of *judaizantes*. This trend in modern historiography had its inception in the books and articles that appeared around the turn of the twentieth century, many of which were published in conjunction with the newly formed American Jewish Historical Society. The avowed purpose of the society was to bring to light the contributions of Jews to the history of the New World. In the 1890's, when the society was founded, leaders of the scholarly Jewish community in the United States felt compelled to pursue this course in an effort to combat what they perceived as the dual evil of a growing anti-Semitism and a tendency of Jews to abandon their heritage in favor of assimilation into the mainstream of American society.

During the course of the increasingly large waves of Jewish immigration, principally from Russia and Eastern Europe, there developed a corresponding rise in the level of anti-Jewish sentiment among the native American community. In an attempt to counter this growing hostility, prominent members of the older, more established Jewish community sought to improve the image of all American Jews by portraying them in a favorable light. Hence, the American Jewish Historical Society was formed to highlight the positive historical role played by Jews. The founders of the society hoped that their message would be received by their coreligionists as well, convincing them that they could be considered patriotic Americans without having to aban-
don their ethnic heritage and their faith. In fulfillment of this aim, the works published under the auspices of the society sought to emphasize the role of Jews in the conquest and colonization of Mexico and other areas of Latin America, to the point of distorting their importance relative to other historical groups and forces. The anti-Spanish bias reflected in these works, in addition to advancing their parochial perspectives, was consistent with most contemporary scholarly works published in Europe and the United States concerning Spain and Latin America.

More recent historical scholarship in this genre has reflected similar concerns. In the wake of the Nazi atrocities and the ever-increasing tendency of second and third generations of American Jews toward assimilation, scholars of Jewish history have sought to place the experience of Mexican crypto-Jews in the context of a continuing chain of anti-Semitic persecution at the hands of the dominant Christian society. In so doing, they hoped to instill a sense of ethnic consciousness into those Jews who might otherwise have felt secure in their acceptance by the dominant culture. The message that these authors issued was very clear, and perhaps is best exemplified by the admonitions of Seymour B. Liebman:

> It behooves Mexican Jewry to remember those who preceded them to the shores of New Spain. When a prayer for any Jewish martyr or group of martyrs is recited in Mexico, let not the contemporary Mexican Jew forget Mexico's own who died for the sanctification of the name of God as did all martyrs who preceded and followed.

Mexican colonial Jews forgot their past. They blotted it out of their minds and hearts... and when Judaism ceased to have intrinsic value, it dissipated and vanished.

The early issues of the annual *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, which appeared in the 1890's and the first decade of the twentieth century, contained many articles highlighting the martyrdom and persecution suffered by Jews in Latin America at the hands of the Inquisition. Cyrus Adler, president of the society and one of the major contributors to the *Publications*, edited several transcripts of Inquisition trials of crypto-Jews, in which he offered the impression that the Holy Office existed almost exclusively for the purpose of persecuting Jews. Another whose articles frequently ap-
peared in the *Publications* was George Alexander Kohut, who similarly portrayed the inquisitors as individuals preoccupied solely with the religious practices of *marranos* and of New Christians.⁶

Through the later years of the twentieth century other writers expanded on this theme. Cecil Roth, in *A History of the Marranos*, stated that the sole purpose for the establishment of the Holy Office in New Spain in 1571 was to rid the viceroyalty of crypto-Jews. Roth neither discussed the motives for such a policy nor attempted to analyze the early activities of the Mexican tribunal of the Inquisition in persecuting other religious heretics (despite his citation that only one New Christian appeared in the first *auto de fé* of 1574). As did other turn-of-the-century authors, Roth accentuated the two short periods in Mexican history (1596–1601 and 1642–1649) when the Inquisition embarked upon campaigns against the crypto-Jewish community. In so limiting his discussion of inquisitorial activity to those brief but spectacular campaigns, he offered a distorted picture of the Holy Office, its character and function.⁷

The Argentine historian Boleslao Lewin has been one of the more prolific scholars of this genre. His many books and articles on the Inquisition in Spanish America in general, and in Mexico in particular, reflect the historiographical problem of selective perception taken to extremes. Lewin's general works discuss the origins of the Holy Office in Spain and Portugal and its development in the New World, but focus almost exclusively on inquisitorial persecution of crypto-Jews, barely mentioning other breaches of Catholic orthodoxy. Despite the impression conveyed by its subtitle, Lewin devoted a scant two and one-half pages of his *La inquisición en Hispanoamérica (judíos, protestantes y patriotas)* to an analysis of the relationships between the Holy Office and Protestant heretics in Spanish America. Instead, he preferred to concentrate on the “racism” of the institution and of the society which it represented, its “fraudulent” methods, and its persecution of crypto-Jews.⁸ In his books on the Inquisition in Mexico, Lewin's preoccupation with the latter themes is even more pronounced. He presents the trials of exemplary crypto-Jews from the 1640's, outlining their sufferings and tribulations, but does so completely in a historical vacuum, neglecting to provide any historical context, and offering the impression that persecution of crypto-Jews was the sole function of the Inquisition.⁹
More recent scholarly inquiries by specialists in Jewish history into the relationship between the Holy Office and Mexican crypto-Jews offer little improvement in overcoming the problem of perspective. Martin A. Cohen, author of *The Martyr: The Story of a Secret Jew and the Mexican Inquisition in the Sixteenth Century*, concerning the activities of Luis de Carvajal, did not pass up the temptation to dwell on the spectacular aspects of the crypto-Jewish experience in New Spain. Billed as "a tale of adventure and heroism," *The Martyr* portrays the struggle of Carvajal and other Mexican crypto-Jews against the ever-vigilant Holy Office. Nowhere in his discussion of the relationship between the crypto-Jews and the Inquisition does Cohen cite the other functions and concerns of the Inquisition. Even when discussing the interloping exploits of the Englishman John Hawkins off the Gulf coast of Mexico, Cohen fails to cite the arrest of several of Hawkins's men by the Inquisition on the charge of pursuing the Lutheran heresy.11

The many books and articles by Seymour B. Liebman on the subject similarly reflect the problem of selective perception. Readers of Liebman's works are left with the impression that the Inquisition, as the instrument of the "totalitarian" Church, was instituted in New Spain almost exclusively for the purpose of extirpating judaizantes from the land. Liebman's recurring theme of inquisitorial persecution of crypto-Jews serves to obscure not only the concern of the Holy Office with other heresies, but also its subtle uses of power for political and economic ends.

Among recent scholars of Jewish history, Salo W. Baron stands out as somewhat more analytical and objective than his colleagues cited above. To his credit Baron tends to de-emphasize the persecution of judaizantes in favor of a more sophisticated evaluation of the crypto-Jewish experience in New Spain. He properly places the crypto-Jews within the context of the larger Mexican community, citing them as only one of several minority groups in the viceroyalty and as an integral part of the ruling white minority. As such, he points out, they were treated less harshly than in Europe. Moreover, Baron notes, many Mexican crypto-Jews were successfully able to camouflage themselves by assuming new identities, thus avoiding detection by both immigration and Inquisition officials.13

Unfortunately, Baron demonstrates a certain ambivalence by his
judgment that there was a high percentage of *judaizante* cases during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. His contention that the Mexican Holy Office was overly intent upon prosecuting *judaizantes* is weakened by his reliance on questionable statistics. He cites a small sample of cases collected by David Fergusson around the turn of the twentieth century, concluding that the crypto-Jews ranked second only to bigamists for the biggest share of inquisitorial attention.14

The Historiography of the Black Legend: Judgmentalism

Together with the problem of selective perception, the historiography of the Inquisition and crypto-Jews in New Spain has been plagued by the inappropriate imposition of moral value judgments backward in time. The stress placed on the persecution of crypto-Jews by certain historians reflects an implicit and explicit application of twentieth-century values to an institution and a society of an earlier age. Much of the literature written over the past eighty years has been filled with self-righteous outrage against the “moral depravity” of the Inquisition, and its “corrupt,” “unjust” procedures, such as holding “unfair trials” where “flimsy evidence” was admitted.15 If the Holy Office were to be revived today, few would dispute these harsh words of condemnation. The imposition of such judgments backwards to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, runs counter to standards of responsible historical scholarship.

Early on, Jewish historiography began to assume the same Black Legend traits that characterized the works of nineteenth-century Protestant English and Dutch historians writing about Spain and Spanish America.16 England, Holland, and the United States represented the forces of toleration and rational, progressive development; Spain and her colonies in the New World, those of backwardness, intolerance, and stagnation. Oscar S. Strauss’s comments in his presidential address to the American Jewish Historical Society in 1900 well represent the common outlook that scholars of Jewish history shared with historians of the Black Legend school:

The causes that contribute to the advance of liberty are only in part such as germinate from within a nation; they are also such as are superinduced from without, the latter being often more active than
the former. The Inquisition in Spain and Portugal worked moral degradation and national ruin within those countries, yet the refugees it forced into exile contributed to the moral elevation and material advancement of the nations among whom they sought shelter.  

Thus, Strauss implied that Holland and England advanced and Spain declined because of the differences in their ideas and policies in regard to religious toleration. Extending his views on Anglo-Saxon superiority to the American continent, Strauss credited the establishment of the Monroe Doctrine by the United States with setting “the stamp of perpetual freedom upon the institutions of this hemisphere.” If not for North American influence, the “fires of the Inquisition” would have been rekindled, and “medieval despotism” would have “crush[ed] ... every vestige of constitutional liberty.” In this spirit of chauvinism and growing ethnic consciousness discussed earlier, scholars of Jewish history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focused their attention upon the “trail of horror” left by the Mexican Inquisition, and the “depraving influence, both mental and moral, which the Holy Office exercised” in seventeenth-century New Spain.  

The later years of the twentieth century witnessed a continuation of this trend among scholars of imposing harsh moral judgments upon the Mexican Inquisition. Cecil Roth indignantly criticized the Holy Office for its failure to comply with modern standards of jurisprudence in the arrests and trials of judaizantes. He carefully outlined each step of the inquisitorial proceso, noting how cruel or unfair the process was to the individual on trial. Although he unfavorably contrasted the Holy Office’s procedures with twentieth-century judicial practices, he made no effort to compare them with those of contemporary judicial institutions, either in Spain or in other European nations. If he had done so, he might well have found that they were no more cruel or unfair than those of his native England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.  

Arguing against the concept of historical relativism, Boleslao Lewin forcefully defended his right as a historian to condemn both the Inquisition and Spanish colonial society as sinister. Lewin contended that there exist “certain moral laws, valid in all ages and societies,” to which all societies are accountable. To avoid these moral judgments, he claimed, would be not only “historically erroneous,” but also “eth-
ically equivocal.” With this strong sense of absolute moral righteousness, Lewin consistently criticized the “racist” character of the Spanish people, their preoccupation with purity of blood lines, and the manifestation of this concern in the establishment of the Holy Office. Curiously, Lewin condemned the Inquisition for its racist practices while at the same time rejecting the relativist arguments of certain historians on the basis that they were propounded for the most part by Catholic authors. 22 Apparently Lewin was able to perceive the biases of others more astutely than his own.

Recent historical scholarship has been no less judgmental in its treatment of Spanish colonial society and the Inquisition in Mexico. Characterizing the early years of the Spanish administration of New Spain as brutal and revolting, Seymour B. Liebman has focused his Black Legend–style attack upon the “anti-Jewish” actions and the “religious prejudice” of the Holy Office. 23 Liebman’s discussion, like Roth’s, discreetly compares inquisitorial procedure to the judicial practices of twentieth-century Western societies, thus showing it in an unfavorable light. He points out, for instance, that “the prisoner could not select his own attorney,” and that the lawyers, in addition to being selected by the inquisitors, “were barred from conferring privately with their clients and were sworn to secrecy.” In addition, “The right of the accused to call witnesses was limited,” and “the testimony of even the vilest person was welcomed without discrimination.” 24 All of these methods offend, of course, the sensibilities of Liebman’s modern readers; however, seen in the context of contemporary seventeenth-century practices, they were not extraordinarily harsh.

To reinforce his own judgments concerning the Inquisition’s treatment of Mexican crypto-Jews, Liebman freely and uncritically cites authors who are notorious for their historical biases against Spain and the Holy Office. Without giving his readers the benefit of a historiographical explanation, Liebman quotes from such polemical works as Antonio Puigblanch’s The Inquisition Unmasked, George Ticknor’s History of Spanish Literature, and Eduardo Pallares’s El procedimiento inquisitorial, as if the ideas of each of these authors were to be taken at face value. We are told that “the intolerance of Christian Spaniards…had been bred on ‘an exasperated feeling against the Jews…which had shown itself…in plunder and murder of multitudes of that devoted race which, with the Moors, was hated by the
mass of the Spanish people with a bitter hatred.’ ” Liebman points out that “Eduardo Pallares wrote his book to gather ‘irrefutable proof of the injustices of inquisitorial proceedings (many of them infamous and atrocious) in order to show that the Holy Office as an institution deserved the curses of all human lovers of true justice and the liberty which God had granted to man.’ ” Without any further comment to distinguish Pallares’s views from his own, Liebman continues, “The persecution and punishments of the Inquisition were so severe that officials and private persons close to the throne made vehement protests.”

Such harsh characterizations of the Holy Office by this school of Inquisition history were also expressed in nonverbal forms. Authors such as Roth, Liebman, and Cohen complemented their texts with illustrations depicting grotesque torture scenes and burnings at the stake. In certain cases these had been drawn by artists far removed from their subjects. Based upon anti-Spanish prejudices, second-hand accounts, and a good deal of imagination, they vividly portrayed inquisitorial victims being stretched, burned, choked, or otherwise physically abused. Cecil Roth’s A History of the Marranos, for example, contains several such illustrations by the French engraver Bernard Picart (1673–1738), who designed his plates in Amsterdam in the early decades of the eighteenth century. One of his engravings, entitled “The Place of Torments and Manner of Giving the Torture,” graphically depicts hooded ministers of the Holy Office inflicting various means of torture on several victims simultaneously in a cavernous torture chamber, presided over by an inquisitor. Roth featured this illustration not only in the text of his book but also prominently on the front cover. Nowhere, however, did he cite the origin of the work, the perspective of its author, or the authenticity of the scenes described.

In a similar manner, Liebman and Cohen made use of illustrations extracted from El Libro Rojo, Vicente Riva Palacio’s nineteenth-century polemical work highlighting the atrocities performed by the Spanish upon Indians, blacks, and Jews in the colonial period. Scenes of female prisoners being disrobed before the inquisitors, of victims being subjected to torture with the soga and on the rack, and of burnings at the stake, created by P. Miranda, pepper Liebman’s The Jews in New Spain and Cohen’s The Martyr. As in the case of Roth, neither of the authors explains the biases inherent in either the illustrations or
the sources in which they were found.

While the texts of Boleslao Lewin's works contain no such macabre portrayals, the cover of his ¿Qué fue la inquisición? is an excellent pictorial representation of the author's unabashed historical biases and moral judgments against the Inquisition. Depicted on the front cover of this book, a hand grasps a yellow crucifix, fashioned in the shape of a dagger, which is pointed at the figure of a bearded Jew (curiously attired in Russian garb).

The Historiography of the White Legend

Scholars of Jewish history are not the only ones to view the relationship between the crypto-Jews and the Mexican Inquisition in a narrow perspective. The historiographical champions of the Holy Office, also motivated by twentieth-century concerns, have used their writings to create a favorable historical context for their cause. The decades following the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution of 1911 witnessed a violent reaction on the part of the revolutionary government against the once-powerful Catholic Church. Proclerical authors sought to portray the colonial Church and the Inquisition as morally upright, patriotic forces, essential for the protection and preservation of Mexican civilization. There soon appeared in Mexico several books defending the role played by the Church and the Inquisition in New Spain. Very much in accordance with the White Legend tradition, these works extolled the virtues of Spanish institutions in the New World, emphasizing the vital function served by the Church as the guardian of the faith and morality.

Padre Mariano Cuevas participated in the bitter Church-State struggle of the 1920's. He was instrumental in establishing V.I.T.A.-México, the European organization in support of Catholic activities in Mexico, and spoke out often in defense of the Church. Padre Cuevas was also one of the more articulate spokesmen representing the historical advocates of the Inquisition. His five-volume Historia de la iglesia en México, published in the 1920's, won the acclaim of contemporary Catholic leaders from all over the world. In sharp contrast to the authors described in the preceding sections, Cuevas saw the Inquisition as fulfilling a positive function within Mexican society. In every society, including that of seventeenth-century New Spain, he held, there
are “eternally damned elements, who conduct themselves not on the basis of love or noble ideas, but only out of fear of iron and fire”; the Holy Office provided this iron and fire, and used them to protect the moral fiber of Mexican society. Having placed the Inquisition in this parochial context, Cuevas then proceeded to detail the activities of the Inquisition in the seventeenth century, lamenting the paucity of cases from 1604 to 1642 in view of the growth of the “accursed Jewish community.” He praised the inquisitors of the 1640’s for their vigilance in the pursuit of the judaizantes. His approval of their actions reflected a belief that dangers similar to those faced by the seventeenth-century Church existed in every age, including his own.

This theme of the Inquisition as the protector of society from immoral and foreign elements and ideologies was echoed by other conservative Mexican authors in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Both Rafael Hernández Ortiz and Yolanda Mariel de Ibañez sought to justify the actions of the Holy Office in New Spain in terms of the defense of a divinely ordained, immutable social hierarchy. The Inquisition represented the forces of God over human weakness, a cleansing agent to purge Mexican society of dangerous, revolutionary elements which threatened the moral fabric. Implicit in this argument is the idea that the Inquisition represented a distinctly Mexican phenomenon; the Holy Office served as a bulwark to defend New Spain from dangerous outside influences, as well as a unifying force engendering a national inner strength.

**Toward a More Balanced Approach**

That the historiography of the Inquisition and crypto-Jews in seventeenth-century New Spain has been dominated by polemical works from either of two extremes should not obscure the fact that several more solid works have been published that treat this subject in a reasonably objective manner. The classic works of José Toribio Medina and of Henry Charles Lea, while certainly not free of biases, represented the first comprehensive attempts to analyze the Mexican Inquisition in an institutional framework. Both authors sought to examine the interaction between the Mexican tribunal and the royal bureaucracy in Spain, elaborating the struggles for power and the various economic and political motivations for inquisitorial activity. With regard to the impact of this activity upon Mexican society as a whole,
and upon the crypto-Jewish community in particular, neither Medina nor Lea concerned himself with more than a superficial analysis. Neither of them appeared to have examined in any detail the procesos of the judaizantes tried by the Mexican Holy Office in order to probe the lives of the victims or the relationships between them and the Inquisition.

More recently, Richard E. Greenleaf has succeeded in demonstrating how the procesos of the Inquisition could be used to examine the inner workings of society in sixteenth-century New Spain. The Holy Office, Greenleaf contends, was often used as a political tool by ecclesiastical and viceregal officials.

There exist a number of important works treating specific aspects of the Mexican Holy Office in the mid-seventeenth century. Helen Phipps’s essay, “Notes on Medina Rico’s ‘Visita de Hacienda’ to the Inquisition of Mexico,” offers a great deal of valuable information concerning inquisitorial corruption in the mid-1600s, and the attempts to reform the institution. The brevity of her work, however, provokes new questions regarding the resulting effects of the visita upon inquisitorial behavior. Luis González Obregón’s Don Guillen de Lampart concentrates on but one spectacular area of the Holy Office’s activities. While he shed some light on the conflict between the Crown and the Inquisition, González Obregón utilized only secondary sources and, like Phipps, confined himself to a narrow period of time. Jonathan Israel’s recent work, Race, Class and Politics in Seventeenth-Century Mexico, on the other hand, encompasses the entire century, and attempts to analyze the economic and social fabric of the crypto-Jewish community and its relationship with the Inquisition. While many of Israel’s observations are sound and provocative, they are based on only a superficial examination of the archival materials pertaining to Mexican crypto-Jews.

Thus, based upon the evidence presented above, it may be concluded that the historiography of the Mexican Inquisition and the crypto-Jews in seventeenth-century New Spain has been either shallowly researched or written from an extremely narrow perspective. The historiographical trend toward preoccupation with the theme of inquisitorial persecution of crypto-Jews, furthermore, has served to obscure other important areas of research in colonial Mexican history. The records maintained by the Holy Office reveal a tremendous amount of information concerning not only the Inquisition itself but, more im-
portantly, the crypto-Jewish community and Mexican society as a whole. In addition to offering the opportunity to study the obvious and spectacular phenomenon of persecution, they also provide windows into the lives of the Mexican conversos, through which may be viewed their contributions to the economy and society of New Spain, and the relationships that they maintained with one another as well as with non-conversos. It is only after inquisitorial persecution is placed in its proper perspective that students of Mexican and crypto-Jewish history can objectively examine the nature of converso life in New Spain.

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**Notes**

1. Strictly speaking, the term crypto-Jew denotes a person who was born and baptized as a Catholic Christian but secretly practiced Judaic rites and customs, while the terms converso and New Christian should be applied only to Jews who actually converted to Catholicism, but for the purposes of the discussion in this article, the latter two terms will be extended to include descendants of the original conversos who lived as crypto-Jews.


11. Ibid., pp. 42-47.
14. Ibid., p. 278.
15. Liebman, Jews in New Spain, pp. 88, 101, 105; Roth, History of the Marranos, pp. 102, 105.
21. Lewin, La inquisición en México; impresionantes relatos del siglo XVII, pp. 8-9; idem, La inquisición en Hispanoamérica, p. 10; idem, La inquisición en México; racismo inquisitorial, pp. 12-13.
23. Liebman, Jews in New Spain, p. 103.
24. Ibid., pp. 87, 89, 101-102, 104.
26. Mexico City, 1870.
27. For example, Liebman, Jews in New Spain, frontispiece, pp. 172, 199, 233; Cohen, The Martyr, pp. 158, 248, 260.
30. Ibid., 3:169.
31. Ibid., 3:180-188.
32. Rafael Hernández Ortiz, La inquisición en México (Mexico City: Imprenta “Acción,” 1944); Yolanda Mariel de Ibañez, La inquisición en México durante el siglo XVI (Mexico City: Imprenta Barrie, 1946), pp. 158-159.
34. Historia del Tribunal del Santo Oficio de la Inquisición en México (Mexico City: Imprenta Elzeviriana, 1905).

38. *Don Guillen de Lampart, la inquisición y la independencia en el siglo XVII* (Mexico City: Viuda de Ch. Bouret, 1908).


40. The author is currently engaged in a history of the crypto-Jewish community of New Spain in the mid-seventeenth century.