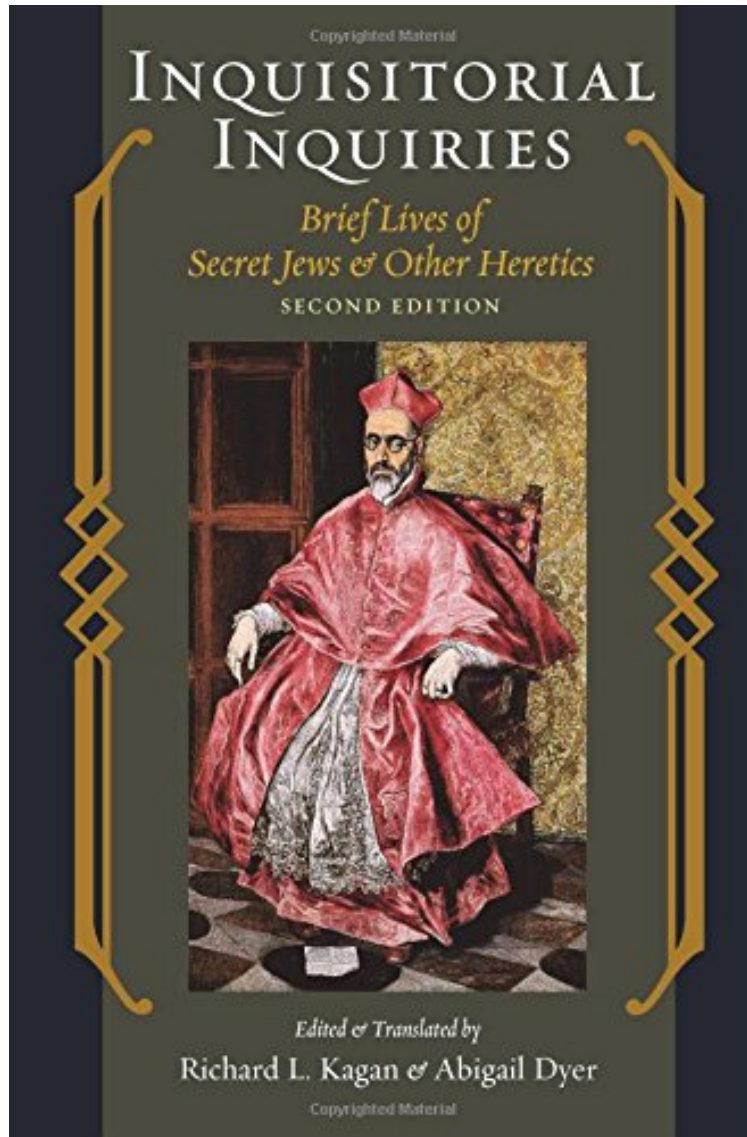


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## Inquisitorial Inquiries: Brief Lives of Secret Jews and Other Heretics

*From Richard L Kagan*  
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#1202700 in Books Richard L Kagan 2011-07-19 2011-07-19 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.00 x .61 x 6.00l, .75 #File Name: 1421401967248 pages Inquisitorial Inquiries Brief Lives of Secret Jews and Other Heretics | File size: 42.Mb

**From Richard L Kagan : Inquisitorial Inquiries: Brief Lives of Secret Jews and Other Heretics** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Inquisitorial Inquiries: Brief Lives of Secret Jews and Other Heretics:

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. I would make a very poor Inquisitor. By Peter S. Bradley

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. The story of a Jew born in 1484, expelled with the Jewish community from Spain in 1492, baptized and returned to Spain at age 12, who then wandered from Spain to North Africa to Constantinople to Italy, all the time moving between Jewish and Christian communities. At age 30, this man - Luis de Ysla - went blind in Italy at 30 and returned to Spain, where he was arrested by the Inquisition for "Judaizing." Under the Inquisition, Ysla was not tortured - In fact, only one of the five in this book was actually subjected to torture. Each section ends with the authors' very excellent discussion of the case, which often points to facts known to the Inquisitors and the social and historical circumstances of the case. In the matter of poor Luis, it seems that the Inquisitors believed him, albeit he died in custody. The authors write://Fact or fiction? It is difficult to tell. What matters is that, for Ysla at least, the autobiography he crafted enabled him to escape a full-blown inquisitorial trial and the very real possibility that he would be punished for Judaizing. Perhaps the inquisitors felt sympathy for the blind and repentant converso who stood before them, begging forgiveness. Perhaps they believed his story and accepted him for what he claimed to be: a sincere Christian who, in their eyes at least, had the misfortune of having been born a Jew. Furthermore, they were judges who regarded themselves as the ultimate bastions and guardians of Christian faith, and Ysla's apparently sincere and successful conversion may well have constituted proof positive of the superiority of Christianity itself. Whatever their ultimate reasoning, the inquisitors who heard Ysla's confession took no immediate action on his case. Rather, they proceeded cautiously, seeking to acquire as much additional information about Ysla as possible while keeping him locked up in the Inquisition's prison. The judges consequently instructed Juan Lopes, the tribunal's notary, to prepare three copies of Ysla's testimony. One of these was forwarded to the bishop of Tortosa, inquisitor general of Aragon. He in turn sent the transcript to the Inquisition in Valencia, a city where Ysla had admitted to having some converso friends, for further review. In Valencia, however, someone, probably the tribunal's secretary, marked the document with the Latin word nihil (there is nothing here). The document was then returned to Toledo, at which point someone--we do not know who--added the following notation to the transcript: Et nihil prodest ad praesens (nothing further to report). This annotation, dated 7 August 1514, marks the end of the inquisitorial proceedings against Ysla, inasmuch he is reported to have died--we do not know from what--in the inquisitorial prisons in Toledo later that year.

Kagan, Richard L.; Dyer, Abigail (2011-07-21). *Inquisitorial Inquiries: Brief Lives of Secret Jews and Other Heretics* (Kindle Locations 653-667). Johns Hopkins University Press. Kindle Edition.

2. An accused "Luteranismo" - Jamete - who immigrated to Spain and was picked up by the Inquisition in the 1550s. This is the only one of the 6 who was subjected to torture, mostly because he was - it seems - a patent liar. Of course, I was thinking he got a raw deal until the authors' comments when it was revealed that he was a wife-beater whose in-laws and wife turned him and provided the Inquisition with physical evidence showing his guilt. This leads to several observations, mostly drawn from Charles Rembar's *The Law of the Land: The Evolution of Our Legal System*. With reference to the evolution of the English legal system, Rembar argued that the trial practices that we consider "cruel and unusual" probably were more in the nature of punishment, because by the time that the accused got to "trial," the grand jury had already canvassed testimony from neighbors - who would have known everything about the accused in the small, tight-knit communities of Henrician England - and guilt had already been established. So, by all means, hold that hot rock and let's see if blisters form. Given the fact that the Inquisitors were already holding four aces before torture, I wonder if a similar dynamic was not similarly in effect. In any event the "Luteranismo" - Lutheran - was a "bad Christian" who drank, didn't attend mass, beat his wife, etc. And yet he got off "lightly."//They further declared that while it was within their right to "relax" him, as a heretic, to the secular arm for execution, they had decided, out of "equity and mercy" not to "follow the rigor of justice." The sincerity of Jamete's repentance also convinced them to revoke Jamete's excommunication and to readmit him to the body of the Church upon the condition that he publically abjure his sins at an auto de fe and wear a yellow sanbenito over his clothes for three years. They also obliged Jamete to follow a strict routine of religious observances, evidently in the

hope of guaranteeing that he would at least appear the "good Christian" he professed to be. But perhaps the harshest of all the penalties decreed by the Inquisitors was to seize Jamete's worldly goods and possessions, and prohibit from him wearing any kind of finery, notably silk, gold, silver, or jewels. Jamete, in short, was to live as like the artisan he was, and like it or not, to be a practicing Catholic. This sentence, harsh as it might seem to today's readers, was probably just inasmuch as Jamete, for all his doubts about Catholic observance and belief, had never formally renounced the Church. In fact, there are pieces of evidence--among them the Inquisition's decision to make Jamete a familiar--that suggest that he knew little about Protestantism prior to his arrival in Cuenca and his encounter there with the likes of Santos Picardo, the French artisan who presented him with a Lutheran pamphlet and seemingly introduced him to the ideas of Clement Marot, and taught him a number of anti-papal ditties and songs. As a result, one suspects that Jamete probably knew more about Luther's ideas than he ever admitted. But the evidence that he was truly a convinced Protestant is rather slim. Rather, his religious proclivities, together with those of Luis de la Ysla (chapter 1), and Diego Daz (chapter 6), are best defined by the French term *bricolage*: a grab bag or mixture of diverse practices and ideas gleaned from various sources.<sup>15</sup> Jamete's anti-clericalism, for example, derived principally from Torres Naharro, and ultimately from Erasmus, a Catholic reformer whose writings and ideas were especially influential both in France and in Spain during the first half of the sixteenth century. Kagan, Richard L.; Dyer, Abigail (2011-07-21). *Inquisitorial Inquiries: Brief Lives of Secret Jews and Other Heretics* (Kindle Locations 1177-1179). Johns Hopkins University Press. Kindle Edition. Kagan, Richard L.; Dyer, Abigail (2011-07-21). *Inquisitorial Inquiries: Brief Lives of Secret Jews and Other Heretics* (Kindle Locations 1161-1177). Johns Hopkins University Press. Kindle Edition.

3. Elena des Cespesda - a woman who served as a soldier and married a woman. Elena claimed to be a hermaphrodite. She had been married and bore a son, then her husband disappeared, and Elena became Eleno and claimed to have grown a male "shameful part." She then became a soldier, and seamstress - who was required by her town council to advertise herself as a woman even though she dressed like a man - who then "conned" a family into letting her marry their daughter. It's a very modern story. Elena was finally turned into the royal authority for "sodomy" - a capital offense - by the defrauded family. The Inquisition took jurisdiction on the bigamy and false marriage claim, thereby sparing Elena from the possibility of execution. Elena was not tortured, although she told the most incredible story about how her penis had fallen off only recently. She apparently was able to "work the system" by bribing doctors to acknowledge that she was a hermaphrodite. Apparently, 17th Century Spain was quite open to the idea that sex changes could happen quickly in the case of hermaphrodites. Ultimately, for people who are raised on stories about how the Inquisition was all about non-stop persecution of "gays," Elena got off surprisingly lightly://[The inquisitors convicted Elena on charges of sorcery and disrespect for the marriage sacrament. They sentenced her to two hundred lashes, public shaming, appearance at an auto de fe, and to serve the poor as a surgeon in a charity hospital for ten years, without pay, and with the stipulation that she do so in women's garb.] Kagan, Richard L.; Dyer, Abigail (2011-07-21). *Inquisitorial Inquiries: Brief Lives of Secret Jews and Other Heretics* (Kindle Locations 1512-1514). Johns Hopkins University Press. Kindle Edition.

4. A fake prophet - Miguel de Piedrola. Piedrola was a commoner who went around claiming prophetic powers. He was within an ace of becoming the first and only Court Prophet for Spain, when the Inquisition stepped in. Faced with the evidence of his fraud, Piedrola admitted fraud and threw himself on the mercy of the court. Apparently, the secrecy of the Inquisition was a key point in what otherwise could have been a cause celebre trial of a person who had a certain following. His sentence was, again, surprisingly light for someone who could have become a power behind the throne ala Rasputin://In the end, because of his "good confession, repentance and tears," the inquisitors granted Piedrola mercy, according to their definition. They sentenced him to appear in an auto de fe, abjure de levi and forbade him to ever again read the Bible or other Holy Scriptures, own paper, write letters, or speak of religious matters. They also sentenced Piedrola to a five-year prison sentence, which in inquisitorial vocabulary was called "perpetual jail." Kagan, Richard L.; Dyer, Abigail (2011-07-21). *Inquisitorial Inquiries: Brief Lives of Secret Jews and Other Heretics* (Kindle Locations 1962-1965). Johns Hopkins University Press. Kindle Edition.

5. Francisco and Mariana. This is yet another fascinating and bizarre case. Francisco was a Jew born in the North African town of Fez. He went to the Netherlands, where he was baptized as a Catholic. He then traveled around Spain and Portugal acting as a Rabbi for secret Jewish communities. After running afoul of the Portuguese Inquisition, where he got off with a warning, he headed for Spain and concocted the idea of presenting his Christian bigamously married "wife" as a Jew who was converting to Christianity so as to con the King into giving him a pension. Got that? "Victor/Victoria" had a simpler plot. Francisco's con job worked, until he was turned into the Inquisition as a secret Jew. What's fascinating here is that the con game played on the King is of only secondary importance. The real issue is Judaizing and his wife's bigamy and sham baptism. One has the sense that if this kind of thing had been done to Henry VIII in England, the trial would have been quicker and the verdict more final. Francisco ends up as the big loser of the book because he is handed over to a five year term in the galleys, which was a virtual death sentence. The authors note://Could Francisco and Mariana's get-rich-quick scheme have possibly worked? Probably not. Mariana's illness and hospital-bed confession helps to explain the timing of their arrests, but by November 1624 the Inquisition was already on the lookout for judaizantes among the growing contingent of Portuguese New Christians in Madrid. In addition, Francisco's activities as a clandestine rabbi

made him a relatively easy target, one almost certain to draw inquisitorial fire. Indeed, given the fact that he was a relapsed Judaizer, it is surprising that San Antonio managed to escape the death sentence. Confession and contrition were keys to surviving the inquisitorial arrest, and Francisco played his part correctly and ultimately avoided death by immolation. Mariana, too, confessed and repented while simultaneously attempting to shift blame onto her spouse. The Holy Office used Mariana's testimony as ammunition against Francisco but convicted Mariana of heresy all the same. For violations of the baptismal and marriage sacraments, Mariana de los Reyes was to receive two hundred lashes, a public shaming, and banishment from Madrid, Toledo, and their environs for eight years. Kagan, Richard L.; Dyer, Abigail (2011-07-21). *Inquisitorial Inquiries: Brief Lives of Secret Jews and Other Heretics* (Kindle Locations 2648-2656). Johns Hopkins University Press. Kindle Edition. 6. Diego Diaz was a Old Morisco - a person from a family who had converted from Islam to Christianity in the 15th Century. He was part of a mass deportation of Moriscos from Spain in the early 17th Century. Somehow he ended up in North Africa and was circumcised as part of what he claims was a forced conversion to Islam. He ultimately returned to Spain and lived a normal Christian life, until he was "shopped" to the Inquisition. Ultimately, Diaz was able to avoid any penalty by his adroit use of "strikes" against adverse witnesses - who he identified as "mortal enemies" without knowing who was testifying against him. This eliminated their testimony as evidence, and, in addition, while there was some evidence that he might have maintained some Morisco traditions, he also practiced Catholicism. The most difficult bit of evidence for him was his tailored "shameful part," which he explained as due to a forcible conversion. The authors are dubious about this claim because, it seems, the Muslims did not tend to engage in forced conversions. What's the truth? Who knows? I might speculate that if I was kicked out of my country and faith, I might be drawn to the people who had taken me in, but who knows? And why did Diaz return to Spain? 7. Dona Blanca. Dona Blanca was part of a large clan of secret Jews. She was Catholic until she was 15, when a relative introduced her to the "laws of Moses." She then had five daughters, who she raised as Jews. She became a kind of Rabbi in Spain, and, when things got too "hot" in Spain, in Mexico City. At the age of 50, Dona Blanca and her daughters are finally picked up by the Inquisition. Dona Blanca initially told a story of being wronged, but she and her daughters spouted off about the stupidity of the Inquisitors within the hearing of Inquisitorial jailhouse spies. So the gig was up. Ultimately, after being moved to solitary confinement in the torture cell - because of a lack of other facilities, allegedly, but more likely to terrify her - Dona Blanca breaks and gives up the entire Mexico City secret Jewish community. Several things are fascinating about Dona Blanca's story: 1. What about her husband? I wasn't clear about whether he was a secret Jew or not. 2. Was she from a converso family? That wasn't clear to me. She didn't know a thing about Judaism until she was 15. 3. Weird syncretic rituals. Dona Blanca and her daughters apparently "whipped" a crucifix of Jesus. I thought this was made-up nonsense but the authors accepted it as true. And there were indications that Dona Blanca's "Judaism" was, in many ways an inversion of Christianity. The authors observe: // Blanca's flagellation of a crucifix, evoked the old idea of the Jewish rejection of the idea of Christ as Messiah, although this practice, evidently carried out among crypto-Jews in Spain as well, has also been interpreted as evidence that Jews considered the figure of Christ on the cross to be little more than a wooden object devoid of spiritual import. 89 Syncretic, inverted, and "stereotypical" acts were just as much a part of Blanca's Judaizing as were recognizably Jewish practices, a point that has led some scholars to question whether or not Iberia's secret Jews were really Jews. 90 In seventeenth-century Amsterdam, for example, the newly arrived "Jews of the Portuguese nation" were so far removed from traditional Jewish practices that the autochthonous Jewish community frequently required them to undergo reconversion to Judaism and to prove their Jewish ancestry by means of "purity of blood" tests similar to those utilized in Catholic Spain. 91 Even then, these Portuguese "Jews" remained a group apart. Kagan, Richard L.; Dyer, Abigail (2011-07-21). *Inquisitorial Inquiries: Brief Lives of Secret Jews and Other Heretics* (Kindle Locations 3813-3822). Johns Hopkins University Press. Kindle Edition. It puts one in mind of the strange development of Japanese Christianity. (See *In Search of Japan's Hidden Christians: A Story of Suppression, Secrecy and Survival*.) 4. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. How could these families have thought they could escape for generations? They must have known that it would be only a matter of time before the axe fell. 5. An incredibly light sentence for such a hardened blasphemer. // [The inquisitors voted to sentence Blanca to "perpetual imprisonment," which, in the language of inquisitorial custom, meant a sentence of no more than five years. They also sentenced her to wear her sanbenito in perpetuity, to hear masses and recite certain prayers, and to be publicly shamed, flogged, and exiled from the Indies. Of Dona Blanca's five daughters, three, Mara (the eldest), Catalina (the middle child), and Clara (the "feeble-minded") died in prison. According to the autopsy the Inquisition requested for Mara, who died suddenly and unexpectedly, she died of a coronary embolism but had also been suffering from self-starvation and uterine difficulties. 80 Kagan, Richard L.; Dyer, Abigail (2011-07-21). *Inquisitorial Inquiries: Brief Lives of Secret Jews and Other Heretics* (Kindle Locations 3740-3745). Johns Hopkins University Press. Kindle Edition. Again, if we operate from the paradigm of the Inquisition as a cruel, fanatical and merciless institution, we have to marvel at the fact that this woman essentially walked away from the Inquisition with a five year prison system. People do longer in America for having kiddie porn on their computers, after all. Of course, if Dona Blanca recidivated, all bets were off. This is a fascinating and insightful book. It is not that long a read and works as an excellent primary source material for a subject that is too often mythologized. Some of the things I picked up that surprised me were: 1. There really were

"secret Jews." Most history books seem to treat the issue of conversos as a kind of deluded witch hunt. That may have often been the case, but it sure seems that there were Jewish communities, and in the case of Dona Blanca, proselytizing Jewish communities.<sup>2</sup> Fear of a "Fifth Column." Religion and nationality were intertwined in the minds of people of the era. The authors point out that the Spanish didn't have a category for Muslim Spaniard (just as the English didn't have a category for "loyal English Catholic.")<sup>3</sup> Absence of torture. I was surprised that several of these characters - Piedrola, Francisco, Dona Blanca - weren't tortured. Of course, most capitulated before torture was necessary.<sup>4</sup> The Inquisition was right. When the Inquisition started with its mantra about not arresting people without evidence, it seemed to have been right.<sup>5</sup> Light sentences. There were only around 3,000 executions as a result of the Spanish Inquisition - albeit more attention should be paid to the number condemned to the galleys since that was a virtual death sentence - but, nonetheless, one would have expected that in a civil justice system, Piedrola and Francisco would have been executed within the blink of the sovereign's eye.<sup>3</sup> of 5 people found the following review helpful. The Inquisition As It REALLY Was By Clare 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. They make some easily avoidable and frankly silly mistakes, like repeated use of the expression give confession; or explaining the odd activity of one of the accused, who said that On Sundays I carried the holy water and a knapsack from house to house, begging for alms, as work as an altar boy [p. 91]. Since when is that what altar boys do? Paradoxically, this failing makes the authors even more credible, since you can tell they aren't blindly seeking to defend the Church from its detractors. On the contrary, they're extremely impartial, and by the end of the book the Big Bad Inquisition doesn't look like such an atrocious idea at all. 1 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Inquisitorial Gossip By Augusto 50 Selected a few "interesting cases" and try to prove this was the norm. At slightly 250+ pages one of the shortest accounts of the Inquisition. Historically interesting but too light on academic weight.

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 Rubn, 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.

"A highly readable account... provides a very useful look into the lives of individuals whose activities brought them before the Inquisition." (*Sixteenth Century Journal*) "The authors have edited and translated the original documents with skill and sensitivity and accompanied each testimony with useful explanatory notes." (*History*) "A highly readable account... provides a very useful look into the lives of individuals whose activities brought them before the Inquisition." (*Sixteenth Century Journal*) "Kagan and Dyer have provided a useful service in translating excerpts from inquisitorial documents housed in Spanish and Mexican archives." (*Journal of Church and State*) "Through depositions related to Judaism, Islam, heretical Christianity and sexual deviance, the book effectively addresses many of the ethnic, racial, religious, and social tensions that plagued early modern Spain and its colonies... An excellent resource for the history classroom." (*Gender and History*) "The editors of this volume have performed a useful service for anyone interested in the Inquisition's activities." (*Renaissance Studies*) "The authors have edited and translated the

original documents with skill and sensitivity and accompanied each testimony with useful explanatory notes. The resulting autobiographies are of primary importance to historians of the period for what they teach us about prisoners lives, their tactics of dissimulation and the power of their testimony which, it might be argued, went as far as to challenge the authority of the Inquisition itself." (History)About the AuthorRichard L. Kagan is a professor of history at the Johns Hopkins University and author or editor of a number of books, including *Clio and the Crown: The Politics of History in Medieval and Early Modern Spain* and *Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500-1800*, both also published by Johns Hopkins. Abigail Dyer received her Ph.D. from Columbia University and is an independent scholar living in New York.