

Popularizing Anti-Semitism in Early Modern Spain and Its Empire (Review)

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Popularizing Anti-Semitism in Early Modern Spain and Its Empire: Francisco de Torrejoncillo and the Centinela contra Judíos (1674), by François Soyer. Leiden: Brill, 2014. Pp. 346. \$145. ISBN: 9789004250475.

The last few years have witnessed an increase in the number of publications in Jewish Studies that address topics in diverse disciplines, ranging from ancient art and history, to religion, to political analysis of the most recent events that have affected Jews around the world. The sensitive and ever-present question of the origin of anti-Judaism, and its related term of more recent coinage, “anti-Semitism,” is a subject that remains essential to scholarly inquiry, notably among historians and literary critics who specialize in the Iberian Peninsula. François Soyer’s volume *Popularizing Anti-Semitism in Early Modern Spain and its Empire* joins the best studies on Jews and Spain of the most recent decade. In it he provides an annotated English translation of *Centinela contra Judíos puesta en la Torre de la Iglesia de Dios* (1674), along with an introduction containing an extensive and valuable history and analysis of the work.

Centinela contra Judíos was published in 1674 in Madrid. By the end of the eighteenth century the work had gone through nine editions in Spain (1674–1736), four editions in Portuguese translation (1684–1748), and a partial publication in Mexico (1775). Its author, Francisco de Torrejoncillo, was a Franciscan friar from the southwestern region of Extremadura in Spain who in 1673 joined a missionary trip to the Philippines and remained there until his death in 1704. According to Soyer’s biographical reconstruction, the friar most likely never saw a published volume of his own work. Torrejoncillo himself acknowledged that he did not write anything new or original, but rather culled ideas and narratives from a variety of sources for his intended purpose: to serve as an ideological lookout, a sentinel in the Tower of the Church, from which to protect and defend the Catholic Church from the threat posed by *conversos*—Jews who, before and after the 1492 expulsion from Spain of Jews and Muslims, had been forced to convert or face persecution. Throughout the following two centuries, the *converso* population became sizable, and the perceived “judaizing” inclinations of those *conversos* became one of the Inquisition’s major concerns. As a result, between 1630 and 1730 persecution intensified. By the 1670s Torrejoncillo became convinced that “crypto-Judaism was rife amongst the *conversos* of Spain and Portugal” (Soyer 8) and composed the *Centinela contra Judíos*, which Soyer describes as “an apologia of the Inquisition and its activity against the threat of crypto-judaizing heretics” (14). Torrejoncillo believed that any Jewish ancestry in an individual, no matter how remote, meant that the *converso* still held secret Jewish beliefs, a widely held notion reflected in the test known as

“*limpieza de sangre*” (“purity of blood”), which was designed to determine an individual’s heritage.

Other anti-Jewish treatises, as vitriolic as *Centinela contra Judíos*, had been in circulation before, but because they were not easily accessible their readership was more limited. According to Soyer, several facts make *Centinela contra Judíos* a volume worthy of study: this polemic/apology is the first of its kind written in vernacular Spanish (Castilian); its style and organization show that it was aimed at the lay person; and it was reasonably priced. Such factors made possible the book’s wider circulation in Spain and the colonies. According to Soyer, *Centinela contra Judíos* inspired a subgenre of works that not only imitated Torrejoncillo’s style but also even paid homage to the original by including the word “centinela” in their titles—to wit, the *Centinela contra Franceses* (1808) by the historian and politician Antonio de Capmany (Soyer, 73–74). It is befitting, then, that this influential work has now appeared in an annotated English translation and will be accessible to a wider scholarly audience.

This English translation of *Centinela contra Judíos* has been carefully thought out. Soyer succeeds in maintaining the tone and cadence of the original while correcting Spanish misspellings, breaking up long paragraphs, and enclosing in parentheses the Spanish translations that Torrejoncillo provided for his Latin citations. All of this, in addition to the uniformity of the typesetting, makes the English version much smoother than the Spanish original (the latter is not included in this volume but can be found online).

In this rigorous scholarly work, Soyer closely examines the scribe Torrejoncillo’s citations of multiple sources in advancing his arguments. Although many errors in those citations can be attributed to the typesetter (mistakes found in page and chapter references of sources, and in some of the sources themselves), Soyer also shows that the *Centinela contra Judíos* abounds in inaccuracies in chronology, the names of royalty, statistics, dates of events, and the identity of sources. For example, he elucidates how a direct reference to Eusebius was actually alluding to Gratian, whose work was cited incorrectly in Gonzalo de Illescas’s 1602 *Historia pontifical*, but which was correctly cited in its original 1589 edition (186, n.5).

One assumes that page limitations prevented Soyer from including, along with his substantial critical introduction to and English translation of *Centinela contra Judíos*, a copy of the Spanish original—an essential tool for Golden Age specialists. Even though the 1674 text is accessible via the Biblioteca Digital Hispánica of the Spanish National Library, a bilingual edition containing the original accompanied by a comparative study of all the editions is still needed and, one hopes, forthcoming; that is to say, a critical edition in the customary way.

Popularizing Anti-Semitism in Early Modern Spain and Its Empire is a handsome hardcover volume whose cover illustration is the 1728 title page of *Centinela contra judíos*. Maps of Spain, Portugal and the Philippines, and color plates related to Torrejoncillo and his work stir curiosity and invite readers to study the text carefully. Scholars from various disciplines and from subfields such as Transatlantic Studies, Diaspora Studies, and Inquisitorial history, as well as nonacademic readers, would benefit greatly from the extensive and detailed historical knowledge contained in this volume. With that said, the volume suffers from typographical errors both in English and in Spanish, inconsistencies in capitalization and spelling, and recurrent grammatical

mistakes. Nevertheless, this study contains a wealth of information useful for scholars in diverse fields and remains accessible and enticing to a variety of readerships.