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Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of Crypto-Jews

David M. Gitlitz

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David M. Gitlitz : Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of Crypto-Jews before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of Crypto-Jews:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Fernando OliveiraThis book met my expectations about the theme.5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. understanding how crypto-judaism developedBy ilana caspi mordoWell written, well resourced. An excellent source of information for anyone interested in the subject of crypto-judaism and how it developed6 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Scholarly collection, outrageous assumptionsBy Konrad RiggermannTo begin with, Gitlitz comprising work would be much shorter if it were better edited, avoiding repetitions especially of those dubious passages from dubious interrogation protocols I will deal with.I stopped reading on page 182 (of 677) when I had realized that the famous author, in spite of his broad experience in Sephardic history, is psychologically incapable of distinguishing truth and deceit in those Inquisition protocols. For instance, he concedes documentary veracity to the claims of a cleric who alleged he had seen a group of crypto-Jews scourging a crucifix and playing a ritual act including the roles of Pilate, Highpriest Annas, and Judas. Gitlitz states he is inclined to believe in the reality of such beatings of crucifixes which went on with cruel blows for half an hour, for about one hour and for so many nights until they became fatigued as if desperate Jewish housewives had nothing else to do than working out beating a symbol in whose holiness (contrarily to Christians) hardly any Jew believed. Or as if a crypto-Jewish Mexican shoemaker like Juan de Astorga could have no better marketing strategy than inserting crosses between the cork and the sole of the shoes he made (p.164). Or as if crypto-Jewesses Luisa del Valle and Antonia de Tudela had actually (during mass?) put the sacred hosts in their shoes and thrown them out after

the communion service while a Lisbon woman had even buried the host under the floor and shouted Dog, Dog every time someone trod on it (p.162). Gitlitz views a consistent picture of conversos (p.165) and an unequivocal revelation of their skepticism and antipathy (p.159) in such maltreatments of wooden sculptures, for instance by making the crucifix a witness in sexual acts (p.162), having carnal relations with a black slave who was lying on a crucifix or to meet with friends every Friday for a happy hour peaking in the perverse fun of giving an ivory crucifix thirteen lashes (p.164). I admit that it might well be true that Inquisition victim Francisco Caldern said about a wooden image of Holy Maria if you threw it in the fire it will burn well, as this is absolutely consistent with Isaiah 44:15-17, or Book of Wisdom 13:10-19 in the Christian Old Testament. Absolutely probable is also that converso Pedro Lainz in 1505 had shouted Cursed be the one who prohibited the Old Testament (p.166); that converso Rodrigo de Avila did not take off his hat to the cross, nor did he bow to the images (p.147), and that the crime Manuel de Acua was punished for in 1745, namely crossing himself with his left hand in scorn for the Cross (p.155) happened just this way. Contrarily, stories of crypto-Jews whipping and stabbing crucifixes, throwing stones and urinating on it (p.163) which in Gitlitz's view seem to have been a widespread aspect of crypto-Jewish behavior (p.163), reflect much more the Spanish Catholic obsession with images of Jesus, Mary and the saints Gitlitz himself ascertains on page 162. In a certain psycho-logical consistency, these Catholics projected their own animosity against the awful symbol of self-sacrifice, and also the mental indigestibility of a host which doctrine defined as the Godson's flesh, onto the non-believers of this doctrine. A post-war case of Christian projection in rural Catholic Bavaria, more exactly my home village Pfaffenhofen, can demonstrate how starkly Gitlitz misreads his findings: In 1948, three years after Auschwitz, the young Christian girl Brbel, on a walk through nearby forests, had a vision of Holy Mary, and the parson who happened to accompany her quick-wittedly wrote down shorthand her words in her conversation with Mother Mary. On Holy Friday 1948, Brbel was abducted in a car, or so the parish said during Saturday service. When she came back unharmed, she related about having been brought to a basement where unknown men were talking partly in foreign, partly in German language, some of them looking like Jews. In this basement, some men were counting money, one woman pulverized a holy wafer and blew the dust in Brbel's face. If this were not enough, they undressed her, X-rayed her body, put cables to her hands and feet. One black-haired man who seemed to be Jewish blasphemed the cross until men and women in shameless clothing came in who performed terrible things, defiling wafers in unimaginable ways. Gitlitz probably would take all this at face value if it had been committed by Mexican crypto-Jews of 16th century instead by host defiling Jews in 1948 Bavaria. Indeed, the place where Brbel saw the Virgin Mary today has turned into a Catholic Pilgrim Center though even Catholic Church does not confirm the visions of this girl. It was well-known that she had caught a meningitis during her service in an anti-aircraft unit. It remained well-hidden that at the time of her mysterious kidnapping she actually was pregnant with a baby girl, fathered by the parson who also propagated Brbel's vision of the Virgin Mother of God. During Brbel's and the parson's lifetime, the existence of this girl, who now (like me) is in her sixties, has never been admitted. I hope this case (which I quoted from the report given by the Christian author Heinrich Eizereif in *Das Zeichen des lebendigen Gottes*, 1976) shows sufficiently that the maltreatment of Christian idols Gitlitz ascribes to crypto-Jews is much more a result of cryptic Christian animosity against a celibate theology of sacrifice they cannot accept themselves. Since I happen to have grown up in Bavarian Catholic environment I contrarily to Gitlitz have sufficient insight into Christian anti-Jewish psyche. I do recognize Gitlitz's scholarly collection of historical data, but not his interpretations described above. As a paternal line descendant of ancestors who fled Portugal during the epoch of inquisition I feel outraged by the narrow-mindedness Gitlitz, adding insult to injury, ascribes to Sephardic crypto-Jewish victims.

Despite the increased attention given to Hispano-Jewish topics, and the "conversos" or Crypto-Jews in particular, this is the first thorough compilation of their customs and practices. Gitlitz has culled from Inquisition documents and other sources to paint a portrait of the richness and diversity of Crypto-Jewish practices in Spain, Portugal, and the New World.