

# The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision

*By Henry Kamen*

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A renowned historian here presents a new view of the notorious Spanish Inquisition, arguing that there was less terror, bigotry, and persecution associated with it than has been previously believed. Based on thirty years of research, the book will revolutionize further study in the field.

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Amazon.com Review**

Mention the Spanish Inquisition and immediately thoughts of brutal torture and callous witch-hunts spring to mind. Popular belief holds up this infamous institution as a symbol of religious and political intolerance--against the Protestants, Jews, Catholic heretics, and political orders such as the Knights Templar. Yet when Henry Kamen first wrote *The Spanish Inquisition* in 1965, he argued that the Inquisition was not as powerful or cruel as commonly conceived.

This updated version of Kamen's hypothesis continues and reaffirms his original arguments. In this edition, Kamen provides additional evidence derived mostly from monographic studies conducted by other scholars that separates myth from reality; Kamen suggests that the Inquisition did not enjoy widespread popularity, in Spain or the rest of Europe, and that it was used as a device to scare off enemies. He also concludes that the failure of the Spanish populace to accept Lutheran principles had more to do with popular indifference toward Protestantism than interference from the Inquisition. Though Kamen's book is occasionally lacking in social analysis, this revisionist overview of the Inquisition's impact on Europe is rich in detail and will appeal to anyone who has an interest in this period.

### **From Kirkus Reviews**

A very well researched, kaleidoscopic study of late medieval and early modern Europe's most notorious--if hardly its most devastating--religious and racial witch hunt. Kamen, a veteran British historian of the Iberian Peninsula (Philip of Spain, 1997, etc.), professor of the Higher Council of Scientific Research, Barcelona, and a fellow of the Royal Historical Society, traces the Inquisition's various classes of victims. These included the conversos (recent Jewish converts to Catholicism, who composed the majority of the Inquisition's victims), followers of the humanist Erasmus, Lutherans and other Protestants (including foreigners), Moriscos (recent Muslim converts), and Catholics whom the tribunal deemed "heretical," often on flimsy evidence. Kamen is informative on the structure and problems of the Inquisition, noting for example the struggles between the papacy and the Spanish crown over its control (the latter gained the upper hand), corruption by some of its officials, and regional differences in enforcing its decrees. His main "revision" is to historicize the Inquisition, in the sense of contextualizing its brutal intolerance; he notes for example that "the Netherlands [in the mid-16th century] already possessed an Inquisition of its own" and that the courts in Antwerp (then part of Holland) "between 1557 and 1562 executed 103 heretics, more than died in the whole of Spain in that period." Kamen also points out how Protestant and other writers mythified the Inquisition, exaggerating its cruelties in the service of anti-Catholic propaganda. Historians also err, Kamen argues, in assigning to the Inquisition primary blame for Spain's decline as a European power; he marshals impressive evidence against this thesis. However, Kamen occasionally over-relativizes the Inquisition, going so far as to say that it created no new problems for Spain. Yet the strengths of Kamen's work, which undoubtedly will prove controversial, far exceed its shortcomings. While its wealth of detail will appeal more to academics and other specialists than to lay readers, its clear prose makes it accessible to all. -- Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

### **Review**

...a fine outline of this history, making good use of original material from the archives of the Inquisition in Simancas, Spain. He is particularly effective with statistics. -- *The Wall Street Journal*, Hugh Thomas

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