

HISTORICAL STUDIES, I

- Topic: Interreligious Relations at an Impasse: Historical Precedents
 Convener: Michael Slusser, Saint Paul, Minnesota
 Presenters: Pamela Kirk Rappaport, St. John's University
 Rita George Tvrtković, Benedictine University

In "Intersecting Jewish-Christian Histories: The *converso* Concerns of Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz (1648-1695)," Pamela Kirk Rappaport introduced us to the subtle coded language that she has noticed in the writings of the great Mexican author, Sor Juana. After 1492, when Jews and Muslims in Spain were forced to convert to Christianity or flee the country, those who chose to be baptized found themselves second-class Christians, and the place of Jews in their genealogy dogged them and their descendents for generations, even when their families attained noble rank. Persecutions continued in Mexico right into Sor Juana's time, and there are reasons to think that her lineage—she was listed as illegitimate—included *conversos*. Sor Juana used language and themes of the sort that *conversos* employed so as not to revile their Jewish heritage, but not to declare it openly either. This phenomenon, long ignored or suppressed by histories of literature in Spanish, shows how complicated and necessary it is to integrate Jewish history with Christian history. Kirk Rappaport gave a telling example of a church in Germany, a pilgrimage destination, whose building was financed by property seized from the town's Jews in a pogrom; after centuries of suppression, that fact is now openly disclosed and absorbed into the public history of the town, and the pilgrimage door is permanently sealed.

Rita George Tvrtković told of a Dominican friar in Baghdad, Riccoldo de Montecroce, who was fluent in Arabic and knew many Muslims and the Qur'an. When the Christian citadel of Acre fell to Muslim armies in 1291 and the Dominicans there were killed, Riccoldo wrote letters to heaven, questioning the meaning of what was happening. In his surprise and anguish, he asks if God favors Muhammad, if the patriarchs and apostles might have been Saracens themselves, if Christ and all Christians would eventually become Muslim. Most fundamentally, is the Qur'an the Word of God? These letters survive in a single manuscript. Riccoldo later wrote a book against Islam that was widely used by Nicholas of Cusa, Martin Luther, and others as authoritative but betrays nothing of his time of impasse, when he was immersed in life in Baghdad at the heart of Islam.

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