
While much has been published on Spanish altarpieces, very little has been written in English on the role of Jewish artists in the creation of altarpieces specifically, and on Jewish/Christian relationships in medieval Spain more generally. Comprised of four separately authored essays, this exhibition catalog fills in this gap in scholarship from both an art historical and strictly historical perspective. The geographic focus is the medieval Crown of Aragon during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The story of medieval Jewish-Christian relationships in Spain is told through close readings of altarpieces, manuscripts, and paintings. Figures’ clothing and dress, architectural elements, genre scenes, and decorative art objects represented in the paintings are used to illustrate and support the historical narrative.

The essay “Jews and Christians in the Medieval Crown of Aragon,” written by Thomas F. Glick, provides the historical foundation for the rest of the catalog and covers the interaction of Jews and Christians in areas of commerce and scholarship, discusses anti-Jewish pogroms and violence, public and private disputations, and the governmental and religious institutions of Jewish communities.

Carmen Lacarra Ducay’s “Overview of the Altarpieces of Aragon in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries” briefly describes a number of artists and altarpieces. More artists are mentioned than examples are provided for, making it easy for the reader to become confused and overwhelmed. Thankfully the book’s index includes all of the artists and altarpieces mentioned in the essay.

Joining the historical concepts presented in the first essay with the art historical information of the second, “Jews and Altarpieces in Medieval Spain” by Vivian B. Mann, investigates Jewish life in Spain through an analysis of the commission, production, and content of altarpieces created in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Relying on archival research, iconography, and formal analysis, this essay serves as a model of scholarship on Jewish art of medieval Spain. The book concludes with a rather light-hearted historiographical essay by Marcus B. Burke. “A Brief Survey of Jewish Studies in Spain” is as much about why more hasn’t been written on Jewish art in Spain as it is an overview of what has been written.

Included are a bibliography (prepared by Burke), ample color illustrations, a map, glossary, exhibition checklist, and an index. Recommended for all libraries and is appropriate for an undergraduate and graduate audience.

Amy Ballmer, Reference Librarian, Mina Rees Library, Graduate Center, City University of New York, aballmer@gc.cuny.edu