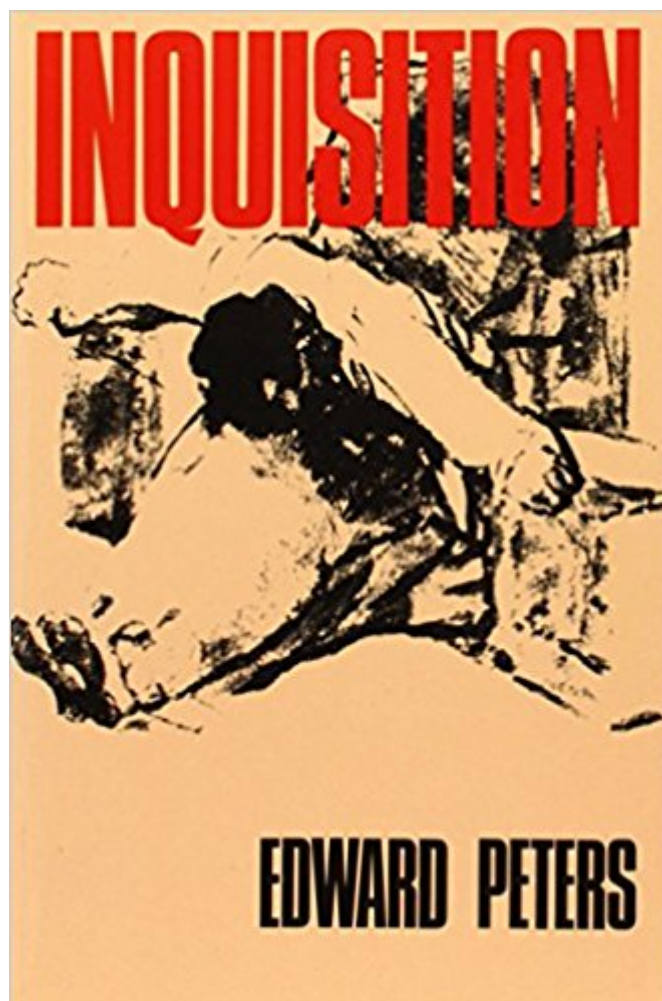


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Inquisition



Synopsis

This impressive volume is actually three histories in one: of the legal procedures, personnel, and institutions that shaped the inquisitorial tribunals from Rome to early modern Europe; of the myth of The Inquisition, from its origins with the anti-Hispanists and religious reformers of the sixteenth century to its embodiment in literary and artistic masterpieces of the nineteenth century; and of how the myth itself became the foundation for a "history" of the inquisitions.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Inquisition history, a developing field, provides a key to the "understanding of past societies in their entirety." Peters, professor at the University of Pennsylvania and author of *Torture*, demonstrates this key function as he traces the transformation of the inquisition tribunal from a simple legal procedural of ancient Rome to its employ as a feared instrument of enforcing religious orthodoxy in the medieval period, to its symbolic use in the works of such contemporary writers as Kafka, Koestler and Miller. In Peters's view, the societal divisions brought about by the Reformation in the 16th century provide the grounds for centuries of polemic, fiction and a vivid mythology that caused the term "The Inquisition" to be persistently associated with coercive authority that attempts to stifle free expression. Richly detailed and relevant in application to contemporary philosophy, this study, mainly of interest to historians and social scientists, establishes the thesis that "the history of myth is a valid part of history." Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Tracing the Inquisition's history from its roots in Roman legal procedure through its growth under the Roman Church as an instrument to enforce religious orthodoxy and up to its depiction as a symbol of intellectual dissent (no longer simply the Inquisition, but now "The Inquisition) by such artists as Schiller, Verdi, and Dostoevski, Peters makes a forceful and cogent case that history and myth inform one another--thus making historical objectivity but another myth. Not only an excellent study of the Inquisition, but a piquant look at the methodology of historians."--"Kirkus Reviews

Quality work product reviewing the myth/myths surrounding the misused/abused inquisition phenomena. Suddenly the Roman Catholic Church, Spain and Portugal don't look so bad, do they ?!

Good, all good.

I picked this book up for my college class it was in good condition and what I needed. Did not read all of it, but what I did read served the class well.

There's nothing much I can say here that the other four- and five-star reviewers haven't said already, so let me just add three things: 1) Peters' book makes good use of original sources close to the time of the events, an essential characteristic of reliable historical accounts. 2) Other reviewers have given this book a low rating because they thought the writer was biased. I'm not going to provide any arguments about historical bias vs. reviewer bias; if you're smart enough to read this book, then you're smart enough to parse those arguments for yourself. But I will say that Peters wisely sticks to the one topic at hand, not as an apologist but as an observer. 3) Finally, a note to clarify any confusion about the author: there's another Ed Peters who *is* a Catholic apologist who *also* occasionally discusses historical issues; this guy isn't that guy.

My introduction to the notion that most of us believe a lot of exaggerations and falsehoods about "the Inquisition" was William Walsh's book, "Characters of the Inquisition." Walsh was an ardent Catholic and a great admirer of Queen Isabella. As a novice reader on the Inquisition, I had little way to gauge how serious might be his bias. Then, along came Edward Peters! His book is hardly a whitewash of the goal of a confessional state (everybody believes in the same religion or you leave), nor of the methods used in Spain and other places to try to enforce this. But it does give us 20th Century folks

a clearer picture of 15th and 16th Century thinking that heresy was treason, and treason then like today was a serious crime against the state. After giving facts of the inquisitions, Peters uses the second half of the book to describe how the facts of the inquisitions got exaggerated and embellished with falsehoods over the centuries, eventually becoming what he calls the "Myth of the Inquisition." After reading Peters, I can even more enthusiastically recommend Walsh. --- One chapter I would have liked to have seen in Peters is a review of inquisitions done by Protestants in Geneva, Germany, and England, including the Witch Hunts. It would be good to have something to compare to the Spanish, Portuguese, Romans and Venetians.

Edward Peters' book "Inquisition" is the furthest thing from a whitewash. Peters marshals facts neatly, cleanly, and readably, separating the facts from the fictions. Tracing the notion of inquisition from its linguistic roots (inquire, inquest) all the way to the parodies of Monty Python and Mel Brooks, he shows how what we think of as THE INQUISITION is a composite of some historical fact and a lot of (truth to tell) whitewash and propaganda. One of Peters' central arguments revolves around the printing press. The moveable type printing press was developed in /northern/ Europe and, as the Protestant Reformation spread, so did the printing press -- primarily into Protestant lands. Spain, the largest empire in Europe at the time, was also ardently Catholic. The printing press was therefore enlisted as a propaganda tool. Many lurid pamphlets, of at best questionable veracity, were spread by Protestants to show the levels of evil, the depravity to which the Spanish had sunk; Peters also points out how several of these same charges had been levelled against other groups both prior to Spain's rise and then later against new foes, but due to the new power of the written word, and the rise in literacy, the charges truly struck home. On the other hand Peters does not shrink from the vile acts of the inquisition, Spanish or otherwise. He points to the origins of what we now collectively recognize as "The Inquisition" during the 12th century, citing both its powers and its limits. He shows the later abuses, especially in Spain and the New World, including torture, forced conversions, endless imprisonments, and the rest. He also is meticulous in pointing out the comparative small numbers of people these horrors were visited upon, as the inquisitions (yes, plural) tended to keep fairly tight records. The last part of the book is probably the most interesting, because here Peters deals with the /idea/ of The Inquisition. Based on the pamphlets of the 16th and 17th centuries, later writers grab up what has become a stock image. The Gothic writers of the late 18th and early 19th centuries drive these fictionalized visions even deeper into the collective set of themes of European literature. By the end of the 19th century and certainly in the 20th and 21st centuries, it is nearly impossible to eradicate the /vision/ of the Inquisition (NOBODY expects the

Spanish Inquisition!) from the reality of the times. No one wants a return of the inquisition.

Conversely, its excesses have been decried to the point of shrillness and amplified to a degree of grotesque improbability. Peters work is the single most solid, credible and even-handed work on the topic to date. Unlike many other works that rely on secondary sources or the oft-repeated pamphlets of the Protestant north, Peters looks into papal records, notes from both sides, histories, diaries, letters, and all the minutiae that go into making a true historical and historiological work. On top over everything else, the work is neither dry nor dull -- it is a solid read for either the casual reader or the scholar. I cannot help but recommend this volume to anyone who would like a better understanding of both the abuses and the truth behind the inquisition.

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