

RICHARD L. KAGAN, *THE INQUISITION'S INQUISITOR*. HENRY CHARLES LEA OF PHILADELPHIA, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA PRESS, PHILADELPHIA 2025, VIII, 364 PP., ISBN 9781512825985 (HARDCOVER), 9781512825992 (EBOOK).

TEOFILO F. RUIZ  
UCLA, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES



Most scholarly books have short shelf lives, extending from their publication only for a decade or even less before being replaced by new research and methodologies. Some of the great historical contributions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – Ranke, Michelet and others – are read today as historiographical or methodological landmarks in the discipline's evolution but not for what they tell us about past historical periods. Others, as is the case of Gibbon's great eighteenth-century work about Rome's decline, are read because of their rhetorical clarity. A gifted few, as with Jacob Burckhardt's celebrated work on the Renaissance in Italy or Max Weber's fundamental studies about the sociology of the past, endure and inspire further work to this day. Henry C. Lea's works, certainly those on the Medieval inquisition and on the inquisition in Spain, endure as well.

They endure, as Richard L. Kagan's magisterial study of Lea shows in this striking monograph, but not without criticism, and charges of faults and bias. Commenting on Lea's *History of the Inquisition in Spain*, completed in the first decade of the twentieth century when Lea was in his 80s, Kagan writes « Virtually all the research and writing about the history of the Spanish Inquisition since the publication of Lea's book is best seen as a gloss on this foundational work... » (p. 274–275). In his insightful concluding chapter to *The Inquisition's Inquisitor*, Kagan, one of the most consequential scholars of early modern Iberia, traces the scholarly legacies and genealogical lines of whole generation of historians who were either inspired by or who engaged with Lea's works in the United States and in Europe as the foundation for their own research. These historians – Ullmann, Haskins, Maitland, Norton, Baer, Beinart, Kamen, Kagan himself, R.I. Moore, Nirenberg, and many others – have had a profound impact on all the medievalists and early modern scholars of my generation. They were and are, as Kagan describes it, often the carriers of Lea's enormous legacy and of research, whether dissenting or agreeing, in a continuous conversation with Lea's works.

How then to tackle a book covering the life of such a towering and complex figure? How to assess Kagan's superb skills in crafting this work? I called it work because, although purportedly a biography, *The Inquisition's Inquisitor* is also a great deal more. Lea led a remarkable life, one that may be impossible to replicate in this fragmented world in which we live today. Scholars nowadays are, with just a few exceptions, fully committed to their discipline: to teach it, to write about it. We are all increasingly professionalized. Lea was what we may call today a part-time historian. As important as his passion for history was and the almost incomprehensible, sheer volume of his scholarly work, he fully lived other lives. His main dedication for more than six decades was to his publishing business. He was also deeply involved in Philadelphia politics and a major philanthropist. He was an exemplary family man.

In Kagan's depiction, Lea was a man of the world, investing wisely in the booming Philadelphia urban real estate market. His earnings and financial wealth subsidized his scholarship. Elected president of the American Historical Association, a contributor to the first issue of the *American Historical Review*, his scholarship was fully recognized by his contemporaries, as Ivy League universities bestowed him with honorary degrees in recognition of his contributions to history. He also collected Italian early modern prints, later donated by his son to anchor an important art venue in Philadelphia. Each of these pursuits could make for a separate book, revealing aspects of his life that would have made him an important historical figure even if he had not ever written a word. But he did write and published many words.

Born in Philadelphia in 1823 and dying there in 1909, he was an intellectual child of the Enlightenment, intellectually connected through his family (the Leas and the Careys) to Benjamin Franklin's influence. With a Quaker paternal inheritance and a Catholic mother, he came from what Kagan describes as a « 'mixed' or interfaith marriage » (p. 11). As an adult, Lea joined the Unitarian Church because he was a man committed to freedom of religion and against rituals and miracles. He loathed fanaticism and what he saw as the nefarious relationship between the Inquisition's harsh disciplinary policies, the Catholic Church, and papal theocracy. His commitment to freedom of belief shaped his research and writing, often drawing criticism from Catholic historians and accusations of bias against the Church, even though in his youth he had defended Catholic Churches in the city from the attacks of 'nativists' who saw Irish Catholic immigrants as a threat, attacks that eerily evoke the intolerance of twenty-first century America.

Through Lea, in Kagan's rendering, we can follow the evolution of a recently nascent United States, and the transformation of Philadelphia from the early nineteenth century through the Civil War and the beginning of the Gilded Age. Lea was an active participant in this evolution as a proud and active citizen, and as a successful businessman. The Lea Brothers publishing house (it went through

several iterations of the name) enjoyed great success as one of the main sources for medical text in the United States. Henry C. Lea's life was mainly a dutiful dedication to the family business. The writing of history was his calling, his compensation for those duties, and fun.

The city's expansive urban development, new health policies, founding of erudite societies, museums, and centers of learning, and contentious politics serve as a context for his long and productive life. They were also the focus of Lea's substantial philanthropic gifts. Kagan adroitly subtitled his book *Henry Charles Lea of Philadelphia* because *The Inquisition's Inquisitor* is also an intimate look at the city and its symbiotic ties to Lea's career. Except for a trip to France and England very early in his life, and summer visits to the New Jersey shore, the entirety of Lea's life was in the city, close to his workplace and to his beloved library. What an extraordinary life! At six years old, an age in which most of us are barely reading, he kept a diary and was learning French. In fact, his linguistic skills were formidable, serving as a gateway to his research into medieval and early modern archival material. At the age of 16, he translated works from the Classics and began his early publications on conchology and mollusks. Science's loss was history's gain. He also wrote poetry, and one must be grateful that it was not very good, turning him to his long love for history. In his eighties when many of us are 'rusting out', he completed a major multi-volume work on the Inquisition in Spain and began another major project on witchcraft. As with his history books, he was not too keen on criticism of his conchology or poetry. And he could be stubborn. When his family forbade his marriage to his cousin Anne, he waited until his family relented and was rewarded by a long and seemingly happy conjugal life. As Kagan describes it, Lea wished to « wear out rather than to rust out ». His was an example of a highly ordered life aimed at never 'rusting out': work in the morning, exercise, afternoons and evenings dedicated to research and historical scholarship. It was a search for truth to be found in the documents, the 'facts'; it was not work but for him clearly a pleasure.

If Lea was an extraordinary man, he has found in Richard Kagan an extraordinary narrator and interpreter of his life and scholarly work. Not a hagiographical rendering, *The Inquisition's Inquisitor* follows faithfully Lea's emphasis on primary sources. Kagan has mined every possible available piece of evidence. From documenting his family (Leas and Careys) and their influence on the intellectual development of young Henry to describing the politics of Philadelphia, his correspondence, and many other aspects, Kagan has provided us with as accurate a portrait of Lea's life and work as the sources would permit. In placing different facets of Lea's career within expansive contexts, Kagan presents a complex and nuanced assessment of Lea's intellectual and disciplinary trajectory.

Combining the chronological arc of Lea's life with a thematic 'thick description' of his work, Kagan presents us with a complex portrait of the making of an inquisition's historian. Later chapters in *The Inquisition's Inquisitor* focus on Lea's earlier publications on clerical celibacy, the ordeal, superstition, and what he called « sacerdotalism » – a sweeping term condemning the Church's accumulation of wealth and power and its resistance to reform. Although his life as a historian began with an interest on Hugh Capet, it soon turned to the history of religious intolerance. Kagan asks what led him to the Inquisition's history beginning with his monumental *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages* followed by the even more impressive *A History of the Inquisition in Spain*. As noted earlier, the answer is to be found in Kagan's early discussion of Lea's religious tolerance and Unitarian beliefs. Cruelty and hatred, which he identified with the Inquisition, had no place in his life. In truth, to summarize Kagan's detailed reconstruction of Lea's intellectual trajectory and Lea's attachment and life-long dedication to what he described as « my first love, the Inquisition », would require far more pages that are proper in a review. Here I turn to two central themes in Kagan's book: 1) Kagan's incisive (but always respectful and fair) assessment of the scholarly values, historical impact, and faults of Lea's books on the Inquisition; 2) the way in which Lea carried on his work without ever visiting the archives or disrupting (except from health reasons) his many activities as a businessman and as a political activist.

Besides a mastery of the documentary evidence for Lea's life and context, Kagan has undertaken exhaustive research of Lea's correspondence and other sources – exploring the scholarly response to Lea's work on the Inquisition by his contemporaries and later scholarship. In writing his study of Lea Kagan, who is intimately familiar with the Inquisition's documentation and historiography, above all in Spain, engages thoroughly with contemporary and later critique and praise for the books on the Inquisition. Voicing his own reservations as well as agreements with Lea's interpretations and evidentiary choices, Kagan notes throughout his work Lea's emphasis (following Ranke) on 'facts' to tell the story (p. 167 et al). Overwhelming factual evidence would yield, Lea argued, some semblance of truth and contribute (in a rather utopian fashion) to ethical rewards. True history as a cure for the ills of the world! What a concept!

Kagan seconds critics and provides examples of Lea's 'cherry picking' of the evidence to buttress his depiction of the Inquisition. He also notes Lea's 'bias' against the Catholic Church and papal theocracy. Choosing from the immense quantity (still daunting today) of inquisitorial documents, Lea tended to choose those documents that helped him make his point and to present the Church and the Inquisition as 'a force for evil' in a period, the Middle Ages, which for him, as Kagan argues, were darker than dark. Most of all, the Church's intolerance, « cruelty, and hatred » (p. 131–135) were impediments to human progress. Lea

embraced Comte's ideas about the progress of society, as such views resonated with his own political life, philanthropic deeds, and deep-set belief in education and the power of history to map the road to progress.

To me, one of the most fascinating discussions in this book was Kagan's extensive reconstruction and analysis of Lea's research and writing. Most historians, medievalists at the forefront of this trend, have long placed a great deal of importance on the archive, on the unique tactile experience of being part of the past by working on that are hundreds of years old. Beyond often asserting that this was the only way to do history correctly, it sent many of us to Europe as a reward for our dutifulness. Lea never went to the archives; instead, the archives came to him. Also, and this is important, he had the wealth to pay a whole host of European assistants in Europe. Today's reality is closer, I think, to Lea than to the generation of historians coming now to the end of our careers. I could have written my dissertation today without ever leaving my study. All the documents that I saw in the archives decades ago have now been published or digitalized. And then there was the agony of rolls and rolls of documents in microfilms which were very hard to read (for me at least).

Lea's path was different. Dependent on the good will of archivists and on a wide group of helpers and young scholars who identified important documents, made abstracts or copied them, Lea gathered a remarkable trove of primary sources: the 'facts' for his great works. Kagan leads us to the Bodleian Library, to Paris's National Archives, to Alcalá, Munich, and other places that loaned Lea important samples of their manuscripts on the Inquisition. This is hard to imagine today. Kagan also provides a plethora of information on the agents and collaborators without whom Lea's work would have not been possible, including brief biographies of all those who partook in the great task of lending, copying, and abstracting the past for Lea's benefit, as he sat in Philadelphia hard at work in the hours after his businessman duties were done. Kagan gives special attention to Ignacio Hernández Figueroa, Lea's go-between in Madrid, whose wise advice and labor was essential for Lea's work on the Inquisition in Spain.

This is as engaging and as thorough a biography as I have ever read. It has taught me many things I did not know about Lea, his context, and those who helped and collaborated with him. It is also a very pleasurable and engaging read. Kagan's capacious gaze uses Lea's writings on the Inquisition as the centerpiece of his research and writing, but it also deploys its protagonist as a lens to illustrate Philadelphia and American life from its early decades as a republic to the beginnings of its hegemony in a wider world. Above all, what shines through despite the critical assessment of Lea's contributions is Kagan's admiration, albeit his criticism, for Lea's enduring commitment to 'truth'. In felicitous concluding sentences, describing Lea's « long search for a vocational niche that would enable

him to 'be known and to be handed down to posterity as one of the leading spirits of the age'» (p. 296). Kagan writes:

With a gentle push from Clio, the muse of history, Lea eventually found that niche, only to struggle, and not always successfully, to balance an inherited insistence on the importance of Baconian-style 'scientific' objectivity with his own deeply internalized conviction that history should be used as a vehicle to teach moral lessons and convey ethical concerns. Finding such a balance is a challenge that historians of every age regularly confront, and for this reason Lea deserves our admiration for his repeated and remarkably learned attempts to get it right. (p. 296)

What more may one wish for as a historian and, more importantly, as a human being but to get it 'right'. Although we may not always agree with Lea's notions of right, he was indefatigably committed to his ideal of history and human progress. By this and any other standard, Richard Kagan also deserves our unreserved admiration and gratitude for his heroic and persevering work on this and many other books throughout his stellar life as a scholar. By 'getting it right'. he has gifted us and those who come after us with a remarkable, enduring, and profound scholarly triumph.