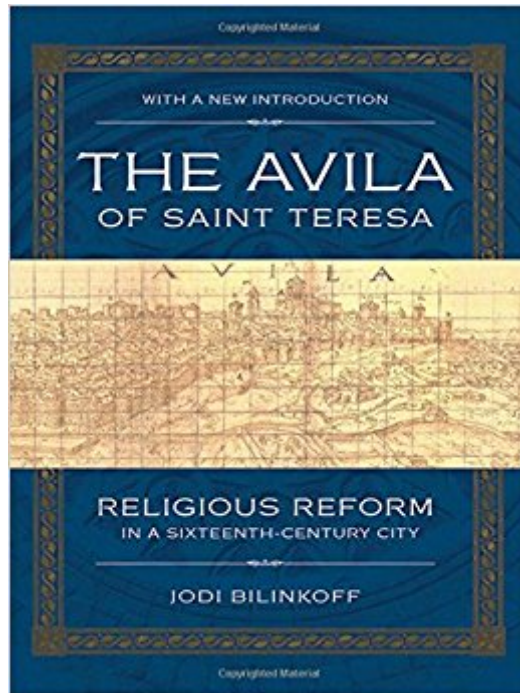




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# The Avila Of Saint Teresa: Religious Reform In A Sixteenth-Century City



## Synopsis

The Avila of Saint Teresa provides both a fascinating account of social and religious change in one important Castilian city and a historical analysis of the life and work of the religious mystic Saint Teresa of Jesus. Jodi Bilinkoff's rich socioeconomic history of sixteenth-century Avila illuminates the conditions that helped to shape the religious reforms for which the city's most famous citizen is celebrated. Bilinkoff takes as her subject the period during which Avila became a center of intense religious activity and the home of a number of influential mystics and religious reformers. During this time, she notes, urban expansion and increased economic opportunity fostered the social and political aspirations of a new "middle class" of merchants, professionals, and minor clerics. This group supported the creation of religious institutions that fostered such values as individual spiritual revitalization, religious poverty, and apostolic service to the urban community. According to Bilinkoff, these reform movements provided an alternative to the traditional, dynastic style of spirituality expressed by the ruling elite, and profoundly influenced Saint Teresa in her renewal of Carmelite monastic life. A focal point of the book is the controversy surrounding Teresa's foundation of a new convent in August 1562. Seeking to discover why people in Avila strenuously opposed this ostensibly innocent act and to reveal what distinguished Teresa's convent from the many others in the city, Bilinkoff offers a detailed examination of the social meaning of religious institutions in Avila. Historians of early modern Europe, especially those concerned with the history of religious culture, urban history, and women's history, specialists in religious studies, and other readers interested in the life of Saint Teresa or in the history of Catholicism will welcome *The Avila of Saint Teresa*. First published by Cornell University Press in 1989, this new edition of *The Avila of Saint Teresa* includes a new introduction in which the author provides an overview of the scholarship that has proliferated and evolved over the past 25 years on topics covered in her book. This new edition also includes an updated bibliography of works published since 1989 that address topics and themes discussed in her book.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The name Teresa of Avila immediately evokes Bernini's stone image of the saint in ecstasy. This lucid and readable study reveals another more public Teresa, the egalitarian monastic reformer. Tracing the development of Teresa's ideas in the context of the religious and social ferment of 16th-century Avila, Bilinkoff demonstrates the interaction between the urban pietistic reform movements and the rise of a non-noble merchant class of largely Jewish descent. Teresa's effort to reform the Carmelite order by founding small, unendowed convents devoted to contemplative prayer, Bilinkoff argues, challenged class and racial prejudices as well as the traditional dependence of monastic institutions on the aristocracy. Balanced and well researched, this volume will be welcomed by religious and social historians and scholars in women's studies."â •Virginia Quarterly Review "What Bilinkoff does exceedingly well is to give us a genuine feel for the city of Avila both before and after Teresa's lifetime. . . . Reader's of this great saint's work will be enriched by this careful piece of social history."â •Commonweal "An important addition to our understanding of sixteenth-century Spain."â •Sixteenth Century Journal "Examining the Catholic Reform and Counter-Reformation through the microcosm of the city of Avila, Bilinkoff provides a depth of analysis unequalled by any other study of this major reform movement."â •Catholic Historical Review "In The Avila of Saint Teresa, Jodi Bilinkoff describes with clarity and concision the world of sixteenth-century Avila, known through its charismatic and dynamic monastic reformer Teresa de Ahumada, Santa Teresa. This twenty-fifth-anniversary edition is a testimony to the continued attraction of Bilinkoff's account, equally approachable for specialists and those who know nothing of Spain or saints. Hers is a crisp and lucid telling of a complex storyâ •the rise of a merchant class that included converts from Judaism, its enthusiasm for a kind of religion freed from privilege in which a series of inspired women are key protagonists, and the eclipse of their movement with Spain's economic decline. I recommend the book to anyone interested in the history of Spain, the Age of Reformation, mysticism, saints and society, or women and spirituality, and of course anyone going to Avila."â •William A. Christian Jr., author of Visionaries: The Spanish Republic and the Reign of Christ

Jodi Bilinkoff is Professor of History at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She is the author of *Related Lives: Confessors and Their Female Penitents, 1450-1750*, also from Cornell, and coeditor of *Colonial Saints: Discovering the Holy in the Americas, 1500-1800*.

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