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### Cassen, Flora, Marking the Jews in Renaissance Italy: Politics, Religion, and the Power of Symbols

Bianca Lopez

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telle image, derrière laquelle se profilait plutôt chez Calvin une réflexion par métaphore. Ces observations attentives au rapport de fidélité qui subsiste entre le texte latin et la version française que procure un auditeur du maître Calvin, livrent une image fascinante de la première réception des enseignements du commentateur genevois, et des efforts de compréhension qui informent le travail même du traducteur. (Signalons à cet endroit ce qui semble être une erreur d'impression, à la page 20, où l'adjectif '*novum*' de la séquence latine, ligne 114, demeure non traduit dans la version française.) L'éditeur du texte français a pris le parti, comme il l'explique dans l'introduction, de moderniser l'orthographe de ce texte, précisant que celui-ci doit servir d'accompagnement qui éclaire le texte latin. Le résultat en est un texte français bien lisible, qui demeure proche de l'original.

Ce volume admirable sera d'une grande utilité non seulement aux historiens de la Réforme et aux étudiants de la théologie réformée, mais aussi, plus généralement, aux seiziémistes intéressés par la réception vernaculaire contemporaine des textes néo-latins.

JOHN NASSICHUK

The University of Western Ontario

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### **Cassen, Flora**

#### ***Marking the Jews in Renaissance Italy: Politics, Religion, and the Power of Symbols.***

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. 225 + 3 ill. ISBN 978-1-107-17543-3 (hardback) \$119.95.

Flora Cassen's monograph explores the long history of the Jewish badge. She argues that even when unenforced, northern Italian Jews suffered humiliation and other dire consequences when authorities issued badge ordinances in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Throughout her study, the author reveals that the legal requirement that Jews wear distinguishing marks was a long-term process negotiated between resident Jews, local and foreign powers, and the clergy. She uncovers this history through symbolic analysis and the social and political contexts of neighbouring Milan, Genoa, and Piedmont. Although the

reader can sometimes get lost in the complicated political history of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century northern Italy, Cassen successfully demonstrates how even when Jews challenged oppressive laws, they were still the subject of discrimination. Such ill-treatment persisted even as Jews participated in the artistic, economic, and political innovations of the Renaissance.

Cassen relies on a variety of sources to trace the history of the badge. While she predominately consults laws, including issued fines, police reports, criminal court proceedings, and depositions, she also examines personal letters and literature, including a Hebrew chronicle, to complement the socio-political context. Cassen's documentary evidence allows her to present the history of the badge as a process, rather than a single event. That governments continued to issue the badge over so many centuries speaks to its powerful symbolism, which emerged soon after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. In her study, Cassen states that the Jewish badge was both issued and enforced into the later Middle Ages and early modern period, which contrasts with more recent scholarship promoting a more positive picture of Jewish and Christian cultural exchange during these same centuries.

*Marking the Jews in Renaissance Italy* is divided into five chapters. The first chapter addresses the theory behind oppressive symbols like the badge, while subsequent chapters consider the socio-political contexts of different northern Italian regions. In chapter 1, Cassen finds that the badge's original purpose of separating Jews and Christians collided with contemporary political agendas, especially as late medieval seigneurial lordships gave way to foreign imperial authority. As Cassen explains, Jews were caught in the middle of local political skirmishes, making it almost impossible to successfully renew their *condotte*, or right to work and reside in a specific city or region. Chapter 2 concerns the triangular negotiations between the Visconti-Sforza dukes, Franciscan friars, and the Jews in Milan. Judging by the high numbers of badge issuances, and subsequent edicts of expulsion, Cassen argues that Jews constantly gained and lost political leverage in Milan, as the older Sforza family struck an alliance with the Visconti clan, who had recently come to power. Within this changing political framework, authorities could not consistently enforce the badge, presenting Jewish communities with the opportunity to reclaim traditionally-held rights and privileges. In chapter 3, Cassen considers Milan in the sixteenth century, when regional powers gave way to the Spanish Bourbons. Spanish authorities targeted travelling Jews during this period, and the badge became

a high-stakes issue, especially as reform-minded bishops put pressure on the Spanish court to convert their Milanese Jewish subjects.

Chapter 4 focuses on the Jews of the mountainous region of Piedmont, which was caught between France and Savoy during the early modern period. Jews of the region's small mountain villages banded together collectively to provide mutual aid, renew their *condotte*, and appeal any legal edicts that demanded badge adherence. In chapter 5, Cassen focuses on Genoa, where Jews were never officially granted a *condotta*. As a result, Jews living in Genoese territory found themselves caught between the political objectives of the city-state and the towns of the *contado*. Genoese municipal authorities required Jews to wear a yellow hat, which authorities enforced intermittently. This inconsistent enforcement, along with the small numbers of Jewish residents in the region, resulted in a primarily individual struggle against the badge-issuing state. For the Jews of Genoa, the social stigma of wearing a yellow hat in overwhelmingly Christian villages was worse than exile.

Overall, Cassen's study is clearly written and persuasive. However, the reader is left wondering whether a different organizing method might have suited the book better. Thematic chapters might have been less bewildering. For example, political upheaval and the presence of foreign imperial powers defined the contexts of all three regions under discussion, and could have formed the subject for a chapter. Nonetheless, the author's deep survey into the sources prompts further research. For instance, Catholic northern Italian territories may have responded to the challenges brought on by the Reformation north of the Alps. It would be interesting to uncover whether badge laws represented assertions of traditional religiosity. The question of borders also remains, as the regulation of migration seems to have increased during periods of foreign imperial rule. In reading Cassen's work, one gets the sense of the marginality of ordinary travellers as kingdoms strengthened their overt control over Italian subject states. Gender and authority are also important here, as the wives and mothers of male rulers were more closely allied with clerical supporters of the badge. Women seemed to use whatever political leverage they had available to ensure Jewish separation (the badge advocacy of Bianca Maria Sforza-Visconti comes to mind here). Finally, the subject of early modern "self-fashioning" also seems to play a significant role. Sixteenth-century issuances of the badge occurred even as individual self-presentation became so important. That the Christian majority prohibited Jewish Italians from fashioning a public self

supports Cassen's claim that Jews could not fully participate in early modern cultural exchange. Although *Marking the Jews in Renaissance Italy* raises more questions than it answers, this book convincingly reveals the political precarity of late medieval and early modern Jewish communities.

BIANCA LOPEZ

Southern Methodist University

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**Crewe, Ryan Dominic.**

*The Mexican Mission: Indigenous Reconstruction and Mendicant Enterprise in New Spain, 1521–1600.*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. 309 + 14 ill., 3 tables. ISBN 978-1-1084-9254-6 (hardback) \$114.95.

Mendicant monasteries are massive structures that still dominate several parts of the Mexican landscape today. Why did Mesoamerican peoples build these new temples—symbols of Spanish rule and a foreign god—as they were still recovering from the chaos of conquest and epidemic disease? This is the question Ryan Dominic Crewe tackles in *The Mexican Mission*, a new look at the early missionary theatre in New Spain that moves away from the spiritual encounter to the social aspects of evangelization. Crewe argues that the mission was both “a vehicle of native survival” (2) and “a pawn in the intensifying rivalries” (10) between Indigenous polities in the postconquest period. Throughout the sixteenth century, Indigenous peoples erected monasteries in their *altepetls* (city-states) to assert their own political autonomy and to rebuild their communities in a changing colonial context.

*The Mexican Mission* is divided into three sections, the first of which concentrates on the politics of conversion. For Crewe, religious change was not a question of spiritual conviction but rather a social process deeply rooted in Mesoamerican politics and Iberian expansion. He explains that the *teocalli* (temple) was the centre of the *altepetl*, a symbol of sovereignty and the heart of local identities. While Spaniards razed temples of various faiths across the Atlantic world, they still had to deal with the social, political, and spiritual afterlives of these structures. Crewe makes other transoceanic connections