

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Geddes, Leslie A. Watermarks: Leonardo da Vinci and the Mastery of Nature.

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Spaces of Power of the Spanish Nobility (1480–1715)  
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engraved portraits and fourteen facsimiles corroborate arguments. The index fills thirty pages. Big as it is, I wished for more: more illustrations, a map or two, a chart or two, and a chronology.

Non-specialists will find the *Handbook* intelligent and various; specialists will appreciate its scan of all that Marvell has to offer. The *Handbook* will be an arbiter in seminars and a fixture in Marvell citation. It gives hefty help to every Marvell reader, enthralled or aspiring.

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### **Geddes, Leslie A.**

#### ***Watermarks: Leonardo da Vinci and the Mastery of Nature.***

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020. Pp. 256 + 138 ill. ISBN 978-0-6911-9269-7 (hardcover) US\$60.

Leslie Geddes's *Watermarks* is an outstanding and perceptive study of Leonardo da Vinci's works on water. It gathers a variety of the artist's drawings, paintings, maps, and writings on water which Geddes regards more broadly as "a rich and complex basis for investigating the intersections between art and water in early modern Italy" (1). Unquestionably, the topic of the book—water—is of great relevance to current studies in the humanities, and its focus on one of the most iconic figures of western culture—Leonardo—is an excellent way to expand water studies into art history, visual culture, and Renaissance studies. Indeed, Geddes's broader scope is to explore "essential concerns about the management, science, and symbolism of water" (1) and to place the study and use of water within an intellectual history of early modern Italy.

One of the strengths of the book is the vast and fascinating body of works it analyzes, the sheer variety of images and materials: drawings relating to practical endeavours such as mobile bridges and underwater devices, sketches of rivers and mountains, poetic visual images of floods, painted landscape within devotional paintings, and cartographic images of valleys and cities, among others.

Another strength is Geddes's insightful analysis of these works: their physical characteristics, their materials, techniques, modes of representation, and subject matters. Although the corpus includes works in different materials, Geddes focuses mainly on drawings that expose how artists navigated the limits of perception and the visual representation of nature. Integral to her analysis are pertinent comparisons between Leonardo's works and works by other Renaissance artists, engineers, cartographers, and architects, showing her deep knowledge of artistic, scientific, and technological cultures in the Renaissance. She relates Leonardo's design and ideas to those by Mariano Taccola, Francesco di Giorgio Martini, and Jacopo Strada. Some of her comparisons are particularly illuminating, such as the analysis of Leonardo's works in relation to Durer's prints, which skilfully shows an otherwise hidden connection between the two artists. These comparisons are fundamental to the goal of placing Leonardo's works on water in a broader context.

The book is organized in two parts. Part 1, "Water Tamed," deals mainly with the role of engineering in the management of water. Here Geddes discusses Leonardo's drawings of water mills, Archimedean screws, and suction pumps, including some of his earliest technical drawings, which demonstrate his interest in technology from his early days in Florence. Mobile bridges and underwater breathing apparatuses are the entire focus of chapter 2. Part 2, "Water Unleashed," centres instead on the poetic aspect: water as a source of philosophical investigation, of creative inspiration, or as a symbol. Here Geddes discusses landscapes in which water appears prominently, such as Leonardo's famous landscape of 1473 or images of nature by Andrea Mantegna and Antonio del Pollaiuolo. But in this section she also considers Leonardo's experiments with water flows and his observation on geological formation, both of which inform his writings and painting, as well as his maps of various parts of Tuscany and Lombardy.

There is no question that Geddes's book is a major contribution to highly relevant topics in the humanities (water), in art history (relation of art, science, and technology, as well as drawing practices and the limits of representation), and in Leonardo studies (drawings, paintings, maps, and writings on water). It brings Leonardo studies into conversation with current debates on water, landscape, and human intervention on nature, all cogent themes of humanistic research, of which art history is a part.

*Watermarks* also provides a compelling historical case study to the field of environmental humanities, an exploding field in humanities research. In general, studies in environmental humanities focus heavily on water, a fact that is hardly surprising considering the relevance of water to human life. But more often than not, environmental humanities deal with contemporary issues pertaining to water. *Watermarks* expands the field of environmental humanities with a highly relevant, visually stunning historical case.

Clearly written and lavishly illustrated, Geddes's *Watermarks* is a "must read" for Leonardo scholars and for art historians interested in the practice of drawing. But scholars in the humanities, readers interested in the early modern period, and historians of science will get great pleasure from this engaging excursus on the role of water in the early modern period: how people tamed it, how they painted and sketched it, how they mused on it philosophically and poetically—these are the cogent topics Geddes illustrates masterfully for us.

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### **Herzig, Tamar.**

#### ***A Convert's Tale: Art, Crime, and Jewish Apostasy in Renaissance Italy.***

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019. Pp. 388. ISBN 978-0-674-23753-7 (hardcover) US\$49.95.

Tamar Herzig's *A Convert's Tale* is an extremely well-written and meticulously researched book that offers an insightful and interesting view of the life of Salomone da Sesso, also known as Ercole de' Fedeli, who lived as a Jew for thirty years and then, in 1491, converted to Christianity.

A lack of institutional documentation from before the Council of Trent (1545–63) has made it difficult for early modern scholars to reconstruct the importance of apostasy from Judaism. The conversion of Jews to Catholicism in Renaissance Italy therefore remains relatively understudied. Herzig's book offers an important contribution; her research presents an interdisciplinary investigation of arts, politics, religion, and society. The conversion of Salomone is uniquely well documented because of his position at the courts of