

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



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

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Volume 43, numéro 4, automne 2020

Spaces of Power of the Spanish Nobility (1480–1715)  
Les espaces de pouvoir de la noblesse espagnole (1480–1715)

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1076861ar>  
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i4.36418>

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Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)  
2293-7374 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Ferozan, N. (2020). Compte rendu de [Herzig, Tamar. A Convert's Tale: Art, Crime, and Jewish Apostasy in Renaissance Italy.] *Renaissance and Reformation* / *Renaissance et Réforme*, 43(4), 309–311. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i4.36418>

*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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<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i4.36417>

**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

Gonzaga, the Este, and the Borgia. Salomone was a well-known and celebrated goldsmith—the subject of many private and public letters—which helped Herzig reconstruct his life in a precise manner.

The study is divided into four parts. Section 1, “the Virtuoso Jew,” sets the stage for Herzig’s case study by giving the reader a glimpse of Salomone’s early years and how his love for the arts changed the course of his life and landed him at the court of the Ferrara, where Ercole d’Este and Eleonora of Aragon became his most important patrons. Section 2 is on Salomone’s apostasy. Herzig shows that since 1492, Ercole D’Este allowed some Jews who’d been expelled from Spain to settle in the city. Herzig also examines a letter by a Jew accusing Salomone of a crime in Venice. The Duchess and Duke of Ferrara ignored the accusation; upon his conversion, Duchess Eleanora sent a letter to her daughter Isabella with the news that Salomone had repented and requesting a pardon for the sodomy charges. From then on, Salomone enjoyed the protection of the Ferrara court. Section 3, “A Family of Converts,” examines the lives of Salomone’s family after their conversion. Herzig investigates the retaliations of the Jewish community, and the benefits the family received from the Este patronage, both for his protection and his work as an artist. The last section, “Between Christians and Jews,” investigates Salomone’s life as goldsmith of the courts and his relationship with both the Christian elites and the Jewish community as a whole.

Herzig claims that even though Salomone converted to Christianity, he remained a Jew, which meant that he was treated as an outsider by both communities. Only his connection with the Ferrara court enabled him to receive commissions for work and positions at the Borgia household for his children. Herzig states that despite the many prestigious commissions from various elite members of Italians courts, Salomone struggled financially. She hypothesizes that it might have been due to mismanagement and his gambling habits. By 1519, upon Lucrezia Borgia’s death, Salomone and his family lost the favour of the court.

Herzig, following a paper trail of correspondence by Salomone and his patrons, provides a detailed (if flawed by the lack of certain sources) story of Salomone’s personal, professional, and social life. Through analysis of his correspondence, Herzig offers readers a glimpse into Salomone’s personal thoughts and feelings. Here we learn of the struggles he felt as court goldsmith,

his and his family's struggles post conversion, the competition between artists, his poor health due to the fumes in his workshop, and the animosity of the Jews towards him and his family.

The historical significance of Herzig's book is obvious. Its study of Salamone's life as a Jewish artist makes it a wonderful addition to Italian social history, art history, and Jewish and Christian history. Moreover, Herzig also analyzes the material culture related to apostasy. She focuses on the micro-history of Salomone's life and the incidents that led to his conversion to Christianity. Instead of focusing solely on the religious aspects of conversion, Herzig offers a multilayered research into the lives of early modern artists and the courtiers who employed them. She sheds light on the expectations and realities of Jewish converts as well as the stigma of conversion in the community. Through these analyses, Herzig answers the overarching question of why Salomone converted—and concludes that it was for both protection and financial reasons.

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<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i4.36418>

**Jones-Davies, Margaret et Florence Malhomme, éd.**

***Éloquence et action à la Renaissance.***

Turnhout : Brepols, 2019. 242 p., 12 ill., ISBN 978-2-503-58320-4 (broché) 60 €.

L'influence croissante du *communicative turn* ces dernières décennies a conduit à un renouveau des études sur l'histoire de la rhétorique. À une approche d'abord théorique, fondée sur l'analyse des traités parus aux XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles, succèdent aujourd'hui des recherches sur les pratiques de l'éloquence, art de la performance. L'intérêt pour l'*actio* s'inscrit dans cette perspective, sans en éviter certaines difficultés ; il est en effet difficile de saisir, tant les témoignages demeurent clairsemés, ce que furent les formes concrètes de la persuasion par la voix, le geste et le corps que mirent en œuvre les orateurs de la Renaissance.

Les onze articles de ce volume proposent un parcours en trois étapes. Ils s'intéressent d'abord à certaines figures d'orateurs, puis à des cas où l'*actio* a pu