
Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme



Spohnholz, Jesse and Gary K. Waite, eds. Exile and Religious Identity, 1500–1800

Giovanni Tarantino

Volume 38, Number 1, Winter 2015

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1088718ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v38i1.22809>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Tarantino, G. (2015). Review of [Spohnholz, Jesse and Gary K. Waite, eds. Exile and Religious Identity, 1500–1800]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 38(1), 201–203. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v38i1.22809>

© Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2015

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Spohnholz, Jesse and Gary K. Waite, eds.

Exile and Religious Identity, 1500–1800.

Religious Cultures in the Early Modern World 18. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014. Pp. 288. ISBN 978-1-84893-457-3 (hardcover) £60/\$99.

The engrossing and thoroughly researched collection of essays edited by Jesse Spohnholz and Gary K. Waite centres on the early modern experience of exile *religionis causa* and its multifaceted impact on the religious identities of individuals and groups forced to flee from their native lands or to live in a state of internal exile, devising strategies of dissimulation and secrecy.

The volume aims to expand and problematize the usual focus of scholarship on the Jewish diaspora and international Calvinism (with exile generally treated as a “catalyst for radicalisation”), to cross disciplinary borders, and to challenge the customary macrohistorical approach (as “no single history of early modern Europe exists”). Thirteen essays by established and younger scholars of history, church history, early modern literature, and Renaissance studies are grouped together in three thematic sections, dealing principally with individual aspects of “identity re-formation” faced by exiles of different faiths in a variety of contexts.

The first section (Hans B. Leaman, Liesbeth Corens, Katy Gibbons, and Françoise Moreil) investigates the experience of exile of Lutheran, Catholic, and Reformed individuals and communities as a powerful driving force in consolidating solidarity and doctrinal conformity among co-religionists. It was reinforced by a carefully nurtured belief that transience and marginality are marks of Christian fortitude (see in particular Leaman’s analyses of Martin Luther and Urbanus Rhegius’s *Trostbriefe*, or exilic consolations); by expectations of a bright future back home; by the preservation, in the host countries, of their distinctive practices and objects of worship (such as the veneration of saints and relics among the expatriate English Catholic community, discussed by Corens); and also by a shared economic precariousness—albeit with obvious social- and literacy-based differences in the capacity for integration, social mobility, and language assimilation in the host countries (see the chapter by Gibbons, but also Pastore’s essay, in the third section, on refugees from the Valtellina living in Switzerland)—and inevitable linguistic inadequacies and demarcations (Moreil).

By contrast, the second section (Mirjam van Veen, Tomás A. Mantecón, Hans de Waardt, Jesse Spohnholz, and Susana Truchuelo) looks at how the enforced social promiscuity among groups belonging to different confessions or religions—and the daily practices of dissimulation—not infrequently prompted individuals and groups to profoundly rethink rigid confessional distinctions, especially those associated with purely exterior manifestations of faith. This sometimes resulted in bursts of tolerance (and a certain cultural relativism bordering almost on religious indifference) and, on other occasions, in highly personal and eclectic peregrinations and crossings back and forth between faiths and confessions generally considered to be incompatible. This can be seen in particular in Mantecón's excellent essay on the fluctuating conversions of Isaac Nabrusch, and in Hans de Waardt's fascinating reconstruction of the singular life of the Dutch spiritualist exile and self-appointed prophet Justus Velsius Haganus. Of the essays in this section, the study by Jesse Spohnholz also deserves particular attention. Spohnholz shows how exile induced by confessional divisions—and the consequent diminished capacity of religious authorities to exercise a capillary social control over their highly mobile and ever-changing communities—not uncommonly provided an opportunity to escape from unhappy or no longer gratifying conjugal ties, though the experience of exile was also inevitably gendered, affecting women, and their chances of starting a new life, differently than men.

The final section (Marta Albalá Pelegrín, Gary K. Waite, Alessandro Pastore, and Jorge Díaz Ceballos) explores the various ways in which the experience of exile was reworked and transmitted by former refugees or their descendants. Pelegrín offers a subtle account of the mutations in both the shared perception and the literary representation of the Marranos, and of their purported plural identities in the context of a Rome still more inclined, in the first decades of the sixteenth century, to ridicule rather than actually marginalize the Jews and "New Christians." Gary Waite's essay deftly identifies, among the many currents of ideas that fed the underground stream of the radical Enlightenment, the destabilizing convergences that emerged in the Netherlands between the *conversos* of Inquisition Spain and the radical religious dissenters ("unconventional Christians"), primarily spiritualists and antitrinitarian Socinians, as they all held institutional religion and rites in contempt. (See also, in this volume, Mirjam van Veen's chapter on Coornhert's perfectionism and his belief in the "invisible church" to which all believers belonged.) By shedding

light on Catholic/non-Catholic trade and smuggling dynamics in early modern Spain, Susana Truchelo presents events and data of great significance to further corroborate the view that the slow advance of religious tolerance in early modern Europe came not only through the theorization of its legitimacy—if not yet of its rightness—but also by much more pragmatic reasons of economic and commercial convenience.

The appendix to La Créquinière's *Conformité des Coutumes des Indiens Orientaux avec celles des Juifs et des autres Peuples de l'Antiquité* (in the disputed English translation by the “deist” John Toland) contains a significant warning (or is it praise?):

when one travels [...] thro' many people of different religions, it grows so customary to hear people mention God, and the worship that is due to Him, after so many different ways, that is very dangerous, lest by this means he fall into a kind of indifference about religion, which borders upon deism: and upon this account, an able man in our time, viz. Mr. Bruyere, has said, That commonly a man brings home from his voyages, much less of religion than he had before.¹

Exile and Religious Identity, 1500–1800 significantly concludes with Ceballos's fascinating chapter about the comparative discourses of Calvinist minister Jean de Léry—and his “exile's exile” in Brazil—on cannibalism, “savages,” and ritualized violence, which once more stresses the potential dimension of self-criticism inherent to exiles' and travellers' representation and understanding of the Other. And it would perhaps be fitting to conclude by quoting Léry, at the moment of his departure from the New World: “I often regret that I am not among the savages, in whom [...] I have known more frankness than in many over here, who, for their condemnation, bear the title of ‘Christian.’”

GIOVANNI TARANTINO
University of Melbourne

1. Mr. de La Créquinière, *The agreement of the customs of the East-Indians, with those of the Jews, and other ancient people* (London: Printed for W. Davis, 1705), 152–53.