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Novoa, James W. Nelson. Being the Nação in the Eternal City

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even “tentative answers to the issues confronting the history of art today” (8), he moves the discussion forward by a steady stream of eloquently presented questions aimed at revealing what he considers to be a real, if finally elusive, truth, namely the truth of understanding “the images of cultures other than our own” (175). While the approach certainly suits the complexity of such a truth, it also leaves one longing at times for more definitive answers. “Presencing,” for example, is a no less slippery concept than the aesthetic for the myriad ways in which artworks might succeed in “breaking time.” Along similar lines, more precise discussion of the signifying capacities of image seems especially warranted. Still, there is something keenly and compellingly appropriate about facing the *aporia* of art’s chronicities through the poetry of Moxey’s own evocative writing.

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Novoa, James W. Nelson.

Being the Nação in the Eternal City.

Portuguese Studies Review Monograph Series 2. Toronto: Baywolf Press, 2014. Pp. 354 +16 ill. ISBN 978-0-921437-52-9 (paperback) \$56.95.

Novoa’s important book reconstructs and interprets the lives and deeds of seven Portuguese New Christians who came to prominence in Rome between 1532 and 1588. More than a century ago, Alexandre Hercolano acknowledged the existence of a community of Portuguese *conversos* in search of papal support against Portugal’s Inquisition. However, the names, motivations, and political and commercial strategies, not to mention the social affiliations and artistic taste of these expats, remained almost completely unknown. It is the great merit of Novoa’s study not only to have unearthed the history of the *nação* from the archives of Rome, Florence, Parma, and Lisboa, but also to have linked it with the broader histories of early modern Portugal, Spain, Italy, the Ottoman Empire, and the Jewish *diaspora* at large.

The volume comprises an introduction, nine chapters, and a brief conclusion, followed by a documentary appendix, a glossary, and a bibliography. The introduction and the first three chapters lay out the context in which these

conversos lived and operated. Chapter 1 (“Conversion and Inquisition”) focuses on the forced conversion of Portuguese Jews culminating in 1497 and the establishment of a national Inquisition in 1531—two events that triggered a migration of converted and non-converted Jews from Portugal to Italy, together with a definition of a distinct New Christian identity. Chapter 2 (“New Christians and Nations”) examines the formation of safe havens and commercial hubs in European cities, together with the definition of a distinct form of self-representation among Portuguese *conversos* abroad. Chapter 3 (“Sixteenth Century Rome”) describes the political structures of Papal Rome and the role played by foreign *nationes*, including Portugal, in the life of the city. A closer dialogue with the social sciences might have enriched this otherwise impeccable contextualization as far as identity formation is concerned. Mentioned only briefly, for instance, Paul-André Rosenthal’s work on migrant identities might have enlightened the findings presented in these opening chapters and those that follow.

Set between 1532 and 1592, the remaining six chapters recount the vicissitudes of the Roman *nação* through the lives of seven prominent *conversos*. Opportunism, we learn from chapter 4 (“A Man For All Seasons: Duarte de Paz”), rather than solidarity with his compatriots, was behind Duarte’s manoeuvring at the Apostolic Chamber. For this ruthless businessman, capital gain was worth more than the proverbial mass. After moving to Ferrara and Venice, Duarte ended his days in the Ottoman Empire, where he converted to Judaism only to die shortly afterwards as a Muslim. What looks like genuine interest in the cause of *conversos*, on the contrary, animates the life and deeds of Diogo Antonio discussed in chapter 5 (“Diogo Antonio, Cleric and Lawyer”). Thanks to this respected lawyer, Portuguese *conversos* became a recognizable *nazione* in Rome—an important, albeit ambiguous achievement, as chapter 6 demonstrates (“Diogo Fernandes Neto: Lisbon to Rome”). As his notable, although inconclusive, meeting with Ignatius of Loyola demonstrates, Fernandes knew all too well how to infiltrate the Papal Curia. In 1542, however, the Portuguese Inquisition seized a series of letters giving evidence of *conversos* bribing high prelates in exchange for protection. The ensuing trial, which alongside Fernandes also disgraced the apostolic *nuncio* in Portugal, offers a snapshot into the Roman *nação*—a group conscious of its identity but internally divided.

The aftermath of Trent, the election of the anti-Semitic Paul IV, and the Portuguese succession crisis provide the context for chapters 7 (“From Lamego to Rome: The Doctor and the Merchant”), 8 (“Antonio da Fonseca, New Christian Governor of the Portuguese in Rome”) and 9 (“Portugal’s New Christian Man in Rome”). As the lives of Pedro Furtado and Jacome de Fonseca illustrate, migration to safe havens such as Cosimo I’s Tuscany and the Levant was, once again, an option. For those who stayed, instead, being a *nação* became a secret to hide, although the subordination of Portugal to Spain offered new opportunities for those capable of infiltrating not only the Curia, but also Portugal’s embassy in Rome. By providing financial support to the Portuguese ambassador, for instance, Fonseca acquired enough wealth to become perceived as a first rate gentleman affiliated with a prestigious Spanish confraternity and celebrated by a sumptuous chapel in San Giacomo degli Spagnoli. After the Spanish annexation of Portugal, Pinto—a Portuguese New Christian fully committed to the Spanish crown—became, quite ironically, the official representative of the same country he and his people had to flee.

The conclusions (“Beyond Rome”) suggest interpreting the lives examined in the volume within the broader history of Braudel’s “Jewish century” and offer a classification of the three ways in which members of the *nação* fashioned themselves. Between the conversion to Judaism or Islam and the concealment of Jewish origins, the status of New Christian thus emerges as an option that, at least for a short period of time, was available to Portuguese *conversos* in Rome. At the end of Novoa’s erudite and solidly argued work, one might wonder whether religious identity really surpasses—as stated in the introduction—the scope of the book (16) or is actually its main, albeit concealed, focus. Indeed, we will never know Jacome de Fonseca’s feelings in embracing his ancestors’ religion during his Levantine exile—but what is conversion if not a religious act? Likewise, the biblical prophets foreseeing the Resurrection immortalized in Antonio da Fonseca’s chapel responded to a social project—but doesn’t this choice also betray a particular interpretation of Judaism? Being the *nação* in the eternal city, in this perspective, might turn out to be not only a chapter in the history of the Jewish *diaspora* or the early modern church, but also a specimen of early modern religious pluralism.

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