

of Aragon referred to him as “her goldsmith” in the court of Ferrara. Though a gifted artist, Salomone regularly found himself in financial straits and political peril. Francesco Gonzaga accused him of stealing gold from the amount the marquis provided for an elaborate chain, and Mantuan Jews accused Salomone of sodomy, which led to his imprisonment and impending execution. Eleonora of Aragon ultimately intervened on her goldsmith’s behalf. In releasing him from prison, Eleonora could enrich her jewelry collection and ensure Salomone’s conversion to Christianity. From the baptismal font, Salomone the Jew became Ercole de’ Fedeli—one of the Christian faithful.

In a major feat of archival sleuthing, Herzig presents a study of conversion that will interest academics and the general audience alike. Through careful analysis of contemporary letters, inventories, payment records, notarial registries, guild regulations, and chronicles in eight Italian archives, Herzig provides a documentary description of Salomone’s life and that of his family as well as the events that led to their conversion. Conversion in early modern Italy most often came at a steep cost. For example, if a Christian man decided not to marry a converted Jewess following her baptism, the neophyte would most likely face destitution. Upon conversion she could no longer receive financial support from Jewish kindred and thus would lead a life of misery. In the case of Ercole (Salomone), Herzig underscores the benefits the goldsmith received from conversion, as princely protection saved the artist’s life and livelihood. Demand for his work continued throughout much of his life, until the Italian Wars devastated the economy.

The author focuses on the biographical travails of Salomone/Ercole, but his glittery objects steal the show. Conversion may have catalyzed his release from prison, but the inimitability of his art saved him from imminent death. In fact, Isabella d’Este imprisoned the goldsmith again—post conversion—to compel him to complete her bracelets. The fate of the subject (Salomone or Ercole) relied on the desire for his objects. Jean Baudrillard observes, “We have always lived off the splendor of the subject and the poverty of the object” (*Fatal Strategies* [1999], 111). In Herzig’s pages, the objects activate the subject to reveal their supremacy. It is through the world of the object, the commodity, the thing that we understand culture.

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Antisemitic Conspiracy Theories in the Early Modern Iberian World: Narratives of Fear and Hatred. François Soyer.

The Iberian Religious World 5. Leiden: Brill, 2019. xvi + 316 pp. €198.

Much has been written, and in various languages and different countries, about the nature and plight of the conversos, Jewish converts to Christianity, and their descendants in the Iberian world. Beginning with mass conversion in Spain in the late

fourteenth and throughout the fifteenth century, a new category was created of *Nuevo Cristiano* (New Christian). According to Christian doctrine, these converts should have been welcomed with open arms, yet the opposite was the case. First in Spain and then, following the expulsion of Jews in 1492, also in neighboring Portugal, where many sought refuge and later were forced to convert, Jewish converts and their descendants were subject to discrimination, persecution, and in many cases torture and death at the hands of the Inquisition.

The story of this centuries-long persecution in Portugal and its territories is the subject of this compelling and thoroughly researched book. The author quite correctly refers to the central theme of his study, the alleged anti-Christian conspiracy of descendants of conversos, as anti-Semitic. As he notes, many historians reserve the term for the racist theories advanced in nineteenth-century Europe, but the infectious theory of purity of blood (*limpieza de sangre*) of the Old Christians, which was allegedly being tainted by Jewish (converso) contamination, was as much anti-Semitic as any modern manifestation.

It is important to point out the differences between the situation of conversos and their descendants in Spain and those in Portugal. The author notes that while Spanish conversos suffered continuous persecution from the Inquisition, their Portuguese brethren were spared similar persecution from the time of their conversion in 1497 to the late 1530s, which “appears to have allowed them to form a stronger communal identity” than in Spain (12). However, even more important is that the Spanish converts willingly chose to become, and to remain, Christians, whereas the already demoralized Jewish refugees in Portugal were faced once again with expulsion or the alternative of forced baptism.

The innovative and compelling thesis of this book is that this hatred of all things Jewish unleashed a new category of “conspiracy theories,” according to which Jews (actually far-removed descendants of converted Jews) were engaged in local and international plots to undermine old Christian society socially, religiously, and economically. Most of the latter part of the first chapter is devoted to analysis of conspiracy theory in general and historical examples from ancient to modern times. In the case of Jews and conversos, this built on a long history of fabricated charges, such as ritual murder and blood-libel accusations, and formal and popular anti-Jewish attitudes, not only in the Iberian Peninsula, of course. What is impressive in this study is the detailed analysis of the interplay of these elements as they found renewal in Portugal and its colonies in the early modern period. Another myth with a long history, that of the Jewish doctor who poisoned his or her (yes, there were female Jewish physicians and even surgeons in medieval Spain) patients, was also repeated in Portugal (chapter 4, perhaps too much devoted to well-known cases from medieval Spain).

Hatred and fear of the conversos was not limited to sentiment but found expression in the actual torture and burning of accused heretics by the hundreds. Another very dangerous result was the accusation that these descendants of Jews were conspiring with the Protestant Dutch not only in economic competition but in planned warfare

with Portugal. Such charges spread to Peru and even Mexico, where the Inquisition was also hard at work against Judaizers. Not only church officials or the Inquisition but also various government officials and foremost intellectuals and writers, both in Portugal and Spain (such as Quevedo and Lope de Vega), were advocates of these conspiracy theories.

The author concludes with evidence of the continuation of much of this into later periods, including modern times, yet it may be dangerous to exaggerate anti-Semitism in modern Spain. The conclusions should nevertheless serve as a warning. The author is to be congratulated on an important, and highly recommended, contribution.

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Interreligious Encounters in Polemics between Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Iberia and Beyond.

Mercedes García-Arenal, Gerard Wiegers, and Ryan Szpiech, eds.
Leiden: Brill, 2018. viii + 344 pp. €75.

Mercedes García-Arenal, Gerard Wiegers, and Ryan Szpiech have edited a fine collection of articles regarding religious and cultural exchanges between Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the twelfth to seventeenth centuries from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. The ten authors who have contributed to this volume shed new light on the timely question of what kinds of interactions took place between members of the Abrahamic religions during the centuries considered: theological debates, shared scholarship, biblical studies, translations, Christian interpretations of the Koran, and notions of blood purity. Though the Iberian world is prominent in the scholarship in these pages, other contexts are also studied. As García-Arenal and Wiegers indicate in their introduction, the physical borders in medieval and early modern Iberia and the symbolic borders between confessions were surprisingly porous, even though they were undoubtedly real.

John Tolan opens the collection with a chapter in which he takes on the question of public polemics between Christians and Jews in the Middle Ages. These were not seen as an occasion for dialogue or exchange, but were rather held to be an opportunity for confuting Jewish error. In spite of these strictures, as Tolan shows, informal debates between Christians and Jews did indeed take place, as is evinced by the existence of apologetic texts on the part of both confessions. Intellectual exchanges between Christians and Jews and shared knowledge are the subjects of Gad Fruedenthal's chapter, in which he presents some telling examples of Jewish physicians who entered into contact with Christians to school themselves in medicine, relying on Christian medical knowledge and sometimes even studying at university and translating medical works from Latin into Hebrew.

In the third chapter Ana Echevarría presents a legal decision by the celebrated Spanish legal scholar Alonso Fernández de Madrigal (El Tostado), who defended the