

a robust challenge to historians to pursue these questions further with comparable subtlety and learning.

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NEIL KAMIL. *Fortress of the Soul: Violence, Metaphysics, and Material Life in the Huguenots' New World, 1517–1751*. (Early America: History, Context, Culture.) Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2005. Pp. xxiv, 1058. \$75.00.

This is an ambitious, unsettling, initially stimulating, but ultimately tedious and unconvincing book. Over a thousand pages long, it ranges across the cultural and intellectual history of early modern Europe and North America, connecting (or claiming to connect) the metaphysics of sixteenth-century Paracelsianism to the furniture made by craftsmen of Huguenot origin in seventeenth and eighteenth-century New England and New York. Essential to the connection is the fact that many of the Huguenot joiners active in the American colonies hailed from the province of Saintonge, home during the first generation of the French Reformation to the potter-chemist-architect-author Bernard Palissy. Palissy, in turn, is the central figure in the first third of the book, which offers an extended reading of his oeuvre and presents him as the founder and ur-expositor of a distinctive tradition of rural Saintongeais artisan Protestantism, heavily inflected by pietism and Paracelsianism, that parted company with orthodox Calvinism in permitting believers to dissimulate their deepest convictions and in encouraging a focus on inward spiritual transformation. This world view, Neil Kamil suggests, was passed down to subsequent generations of artisans from the region, who found it particularly appealing in times of persecution.

The book does not move in a straight line from Palissy to colonial leather side chairs and the joinery of the Friends Meetinghouse in Flushing, New York. Kamil also discerns important echoes of Palissy's world view in the ideas and activities of John Winthrop, Jr., Robert Fludd, Kenelm Digby, William Hogarth, the Huguenot *galérien* Elias Neau, the anonymous artist who engraved a view of Neau for the 1749 London edition of *A Short Account of [His] Life and Sufferings*, and even Menocchio and Jacques-Louis Ménétier. Extended hermeneutic riffs on texts or objects made by these figures or by colonial North American craftsmen alternate with briefer sections that contextualize them. (One chapter devotes fully 145 pages to a single painting by Hogarth, *Noon, L'Eglise des Grecs, Hog Lane, Soho*.) The best way to convey the author's main argument—and the character of his prose—is to cut and paste from the first three pages of the book. “Beginning with the French civil wars of religion in the 1550s, Huguenot artisans from the southwestern regional culture that supplied the vast majority of French refugee craftsmen and women to New Amsterdam and New York in the seventeenth century mastered an apocalyptic shift from the corporate and militaristic ‘place of security’—epit-

omized by the massive, immobile (and hence militarily vulnerable) medieval fortress system protecting La Rochelle—to a reformed program of protection based on the skills construction of portable and individualistic modes of personal security, deployed mostly in domestic space.” This artisanal security was rooted in mastery of manual skills and natural materials and deeply informed by models of Paracelsian natural philosophy. “This program also promoted natural camouflage through personal and religious dissimulation, inner spiritual knowledge of local earth materials, and socioeconomic and spiritual cooperation across confessions and especially refugee groups exiled by persecution.” New York became the site of “social, cultural, economic and spiritual interaction between Huguenot artisanal networks and the many other Protestant, spiritualist, and artisanal traditions that developed in similar New World historiographies based on experience of religious violence, enlarging an international process of soulful convergence.”

Kamil is at moments a gifted expositor of unfamiliar world views. He convincingly shows that Paracelsian themes were more widely diffused in sixteenth and early seventeenth-century French and English culture than historians unfamiliar with this tradition are likely to have suspected. But he does not successfully establish that a common, well-articulated outlook consistently informed the texts and artifacts he examines. His readings of individual paintings, prints, and pieces of furniture often seem forced and unconvincing. His prose can be strained and difficult. And while the book ranges across an incredibly broad range of topics, its treatment of the topic I know best, Old World Huguenot culture, contains enough small misunderstandings to sap my faith in the author's mastery of the rest of the topics he examines as well. What is one to make of the sentence “Everyone adumbrated the economic historian Warren Scoville's primary assertion of the baneful effect of religious persecution on French economic development” (p. 545), when the chief argument of Scoville's *The Persecution of the Huguenots and French Economic Development* (1960) was that the revocation of the Edict of Nantes was not as harmful to the French economy as previously thought? To call the royal siege of La Rochelle of 1628–1629 “confessional genocide” (p. 409) is overheated. While many French Protestant families certainly possessed copies of the Beza-Marot psalter, François Perrin's printer's mark of the narrow and wide gate only appears on the title page of one among many editions that circulated, and so can hardly be deemed the “most familiar [image] in Huguenot culture” (p. 624, Fig. 14.16). Examples such as these could be multiplied. On first picking up this book I was excited and challenged by its vast ambition and bold thesis. By the end I was laboring to finish it.

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