

---

**Renaissance and Reformation**  
**Renaissance et Réforme**



**Baldassarri, Stefano U., and Fabrizio Lelli, eds. Umanesimo e cultura ebraica nel Rinascimento italiano**

Daniel Stein Kokin

---

Volume 43, Number 1, Winter 2020

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1070186ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i1.34098>

[See table of contents](#)

---

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

Cite this review

Kokin, D. (2020). Review of [Baldassarri, Stefano U., and Fabrizio Lelli, eds. Umanesimo e cultura ebraica nel Rinascimento italiano]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 43(1), 207–209.  
<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i1.34098>

of this anthology as a companion text for undergraduate students, who are sure to derive immense pleasure from detecting the resemblances among, and differences between, Shakespeare's plays and these folktale traditions, are well worth exploring for those instructors looking for ways to engage novice students in texts all-too-commonly regarded with fear and dread. Moreover, readers even remotely familiar with Shakespeare's plays are sure to be struck by how fully rounded and realized his characters are by comparison with their folktale iterations, whose actions frequently lack comprehensible motivations. This tendency of Shakespeare's—to borrow well-worn plots and motifs from folktale traditions, but also to round characters that tend in those stories to be rather two-dimensional figures—provides further explanation for the widespread veneration and longevity of his dramatic works. Populating the plots of Shakespeare's dramatic tales as old as time are characters whose faces and functions already seem familiar but whose hearts and minds we yearn to fully know.

MARK ALBERT JOHNSTON  
University of Windsor

**Baldassarri, Stefano U., and Fabrizio Lelli, eds.**

*Umanesimo e cultura ebraica nel Rinascimento italiano.*

Florence: Angelo Pontecorboli Editore, 2017. Pp. 200. ISBN 978-88-99695-40-8 (paperback) €20.

What is truly lovely about this edited volume is how its wide range of themes and approaches together exemplify the richness and enduring fascination of its field of inquiry: the intersection between the Italian Renaissance and Jewish culture. This book may be of modest dimensions, but it covers a tremendously rich territory: humanism, the history of the book, philosophy, Kabbalah, intellectual biography, belles lettres, and visual culture are all on prominent display, and each contribution opens a small window into a fascinating world worthy of far more extensive exploration. In particular, contributions such as Emma Abate and Maurizio Mottolese's intensely textual and philological exploration of the vernacular kabbalistic manuscripts in the possession of the noted theologian and Christian Kabbalist Egidio da Viterbo, Saverio Campanini's dazzlingly

erudite reconstruction of the Renaissance transmission of the kabbalistic *Sefer ha-peli'ah* (particularly exciting here is his discovery [102–03] that one of the copies of this text was likely prepared for the renowned Hebrew printer Daniel Bomberg), and Guido Bartolucci's illumination of David de' Pomis's one-of-a-kind apology for Judaism demonstrate just how much remains in this field of research to be explored and explicated.

Space constraints permit only a few detailed remarks. The essay by Vito Andrea Mariggiò on the *Machbarot* or *Notebooks* of Immanuel of Rome is beautiful, highlighting the literary character and adventurousness of its protagonist. While rich in literary citations, these tend more to illustrate aspects of the author's biography and network, as opposed to illuminating his literary practice, in particular his intertextuality. More of this would have been welcome, especially in light of Mariggiò's suggestive statements on this front. In addition, quite confusing here—albeit of relatively minor importance—is the treatment of the year in which Immanuel's wife died. Indication of her passing in 1321 is used to set the *terminus ante quem* for Immanuel's first encounter with his patron (172n45), but just two pages earlier, in the body of the text, we are informed that her death took place sometime after this year.

I very much admire Rita Comanducci's *longue-durée* exposition, prompted by Judah Moscato's first sermon (dedicated to music), of the significance of the term “resonance” in science, Platonism, and Kabbalah. However, when treating the theme in the *Zohar*, she assumes (137–38) that the correspondence mentioned there between the terrestrial and heavenly *shofar* (or ram's horn) represents a “Zoharic metamorphosis of the Plotinian lyre and of the oud of the [pseudo-Aristotelian, but actually Plotinian—DSK] *Theologia*.” In light of note 45, however, it seems eminently possible that the *Zohar* here mainly, if not exclusively, draws upon rabbinic sources that emphasize the correspondence between song down below and that above. And this observation leads to a more important point, namely, that this article actually seems to be concerned with two rather different approaches to “resonance”: one more explicitly technical and (often) horizontal, chord to chord; the other, more consistently vertical and metaphysical, the world below and that above. It seems to me that it would have been worthwhile to thematize and address this contrast explicitly, as opposed to simply subsuming both aspects under the general heading of “resonance.”

Critiquing both the early reception and more recent scholarship on Leone Ebreo's *Dialogues of Love*, Brian Ogren delivers a powerful and convincing case

against hermetic or kabbalistic interpretations. At the very least, the onus is now on those who wish to sustain such claims to demonstrate why they are necessary for understanding this work. At the same time, Ogren might have stepped back a bit to explore the broader significance or context of his argument. What can we learn about Ebreo, his cultural context, and his goals from the absence in this text of doctrines that so many (including some of Ebreo's contemporaries) are convinced they find therein?

The restraint advocated by Ogren in interpreting Ebreo calls to mind the otherwise fascinating contribution on Hebrew texts and the visual arts by Fabrizio Lelli in this same volume, in which it appears simply assumed that in equating Beauty and Wisdom, the author of the *Dialogues* reworks the traditional associations of the kabbalistic *sefirot*, in accordance with the longstanding tendency of mystical and midrashic materials to be continually reshaped and rearticulated in light of new intellectual trends (154). This article also undertakes a wildly speculative attempt to show that a passage in the *Dialogues* draws inspiration from Giovanfrancesco Rustici's *Predica del Battista*, a trio of bronze statues created for the northern doorway of the Florentine baptistry. It is not at all clear why a physical template is needed for (or enhances our understanding of) Leone's reference to Enoch, Elijah, and John the Evangelist as figures "immortal in body and soul" (153), and the suggestions as to how John the Evangelist might have been substituted for John the Baptist do not convince.

These caveats aside, this volume marks a worthy contribution to the Renaissance bookshelf, most especially for the manner in which it highlights again and again just how much the Jews and Christians of this period had access to and deeply engaged with each other's texts and doctrines.

DANIEL STEIN KOKIN

UCLA/Universität Greifswald