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# Fosi, Irene. Inquisition, Conversion, and Foreigners in Baroque Rome

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**Fosi, Irene.**

***Inquisition, Conversion, and Foreigners in Baroque Rome.***

Catholic Christendom, 1300–1700. Leiden: Brill, 2020. Pp. vi, 260. ISBN 978-90-04-42265-0 (hardcover) €125.

From its beginning and in its different forms, the Inquisition forged and absorbed religion, culture, and politics. It is a crucial, world-wide theme because of its *longue durée* and geopolitical extension. Scholars have investigated heresy and heretics from the Middle Ages to the early modern period (e.g., Henry Charles Lea, Christina Caldwell, and Kimberly Lynn); they have published noteworthy inquisitorial trials (e.g., Massimo Firpo on Giovanni Morone) or have shed light on the bureaucratic structures of the Inquisition (John Tedeschi) or on its image (Edward Peters). With this new book, Irene Fosi gives us a very interesting portrait of “the conversion politics of Rome from the late fifteenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries as they relate to foreigners arriving from European countries infected by heresy” (11). Her insightful analysis points out the world-political framework in which some relevant cases took place; Fosi notably succeeds in situating the history of the Roman Inquisition within a larger horizon. Thus far, however, the historical research on conversion needs to connect more with what we know about the converted. This book explores contradictions between theory and practice, and the places where political needs intertwined with personal experiences (2), in the period from 1570 to 1750. Fosi unearths important sources held in several archives across Europe and meticulously frames them, challenging some paradigms.

In this intriguing history, Rome, *patria comune* (13–42), attracted people from all over the world, as both a refugee town and a destination for pilgrimage. After 1527, with the Sack of Rome, things changed: the city’s presumed inviolability fell (to tell the truth, Rome was sacked several times before). From the second half of the sixteenth century, after the Holy Office began, foreigners (students, merchants, soldiers) travelled through the Italian peninsula with their ideas and propagated the heretical contagion—a fear held by many theologians. Thus, they were not welcome anymore. After the Council of Trent, the situations for foreigners in Italian territories became more and more difficult: for instance, to get a degree, students were obliged to sign the *professio fidei*; in 1596, Pope Clement VIII tried to stop the circulation of merchants in both directions, in and out of Italy. The outcomes were not

successful. Gradually, Roman attitudes towards contact with foreigners in Europe changed, triggering revolts and protests. Fosi argued that this change depended on the declining political status of Rome in the seventeenth century. During this age, the relationship between the Inquisition and the sovereigns was highly conflictual, as the case of Stefan Lussuro, English ambassador in Florence, showed. Alexander VII Chigi (1655–67) adopted a new politics of “*carezze e cortesie*” (152) towards foreigners, shifting his methods between repression and receptivity, persuasion and condemnation.

Slowly, the Roman Church began to see the presence of foreigners as an opportunity for conversion. Interest in the topic of conversion has grown in recent years; conversion is one of the main themes in religious history. Important questions emerge from the intimate process of conversion (religious crisis, familial impact, economic consequences, etc.) as well as its more public side: i.e., the propagandistic use of conversion in a period characterized by religious antagonism. Conversion affected people very differently according to their place in society: while poor people did not lose property, and sometimes even benefited from welfare help, nobles risked a negative impact that counteracted any Inquisitorial efforts.

True religious convictions aside, stories of conversion can reveal the strategies and ambivalences associated with a change of religion: cathartic ritual, daily concerns, and conflicting interests. Engaging both political and religious history, Fosi traces some of these stories, accurately selected as significant, in a wider framework. In chapter 4, she focuses on Johann Faber, a Lynchean physician who held a large correspondence with European scholars and who played an important role (patronage and mediation) in relationships between Rome and the Holy Roman Empire. Faber was also suspected to be a spy; a complex net enabled him to integrate into the Catholic world and to cooperate to “save” other souls. The social and economic implications of this conversion are examined, and further research will show them more clearly over time. Other, outside factors undermined the success of the Roman strategy, and Fosi reveals those patterns influencing Roman policy. For instance, a memorial written in the 1690s suggests that some converts might have helped the revitalization of the arts and business, as remedies to the widespread poverty in Rome (195). Welcoming heretics was not only a matter of faith.

In her book, Fosi provides a stimulating analysis that sets out broader questions about how the decline of the papal role in Europe helped the growing

force of the Inquisition, and how the church abandoned its persecuting attitude. Some might wish for more on theological issues, but the choice of a wider focus—on how the Inquisition and its conversion strategy were experienced—is justified. The answers to the question of why the pragmatic line prevailed are more satisfying. A critical consideration of the cosmopolitanism attributed to Rome, found in the eighteenth century in the framework of the rediscovery of Italy and Rome (think of the Grand Tour), deserves more debate.

Fosi's book is firmly rooted in classical and noteworthy historiography but looks at the new historiographical trends—revealing a strategy of the Roman Catholic Church, and its contradictions. Although it appeared in Italian in 2011, this volume, published by Brill in the series Catholic Christendom, 1300–1700, takes a much revised form, “fuller and richer than the Italian original” (12), now in English. This is highly interesting to students and scholars working on early modern Europe.

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### **Galluzzi, Paolo.**

***The Italian Renaissance of Machines.* Trans. Jonathan Mandelbaum.**

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020. Pp. xi, 276 + 107 ill. ISBN 978-0-674-98439-4 (hardcover) US\$39.95.

Based on the Bernard Berenson Lectures delivered at Villa I Tatti in 2014, Paolo Galluzzi's book explores the personalities and advances in knowledge that contributed to the transformation of the technical arts in the Renaissance. Using the historical category of artist-engineers to rethink the Renaissance, Galluzzi traces their transformation from obscure mechanical practitioners to in-demand influencers at princely courts over the course of his three chapters. He therefore joins the likes of scholars such as Daniela Lamberini and Pamela Long in shifting Renaissance historiography away from the artistic and literary achievements of the age toward often overlooked developments in technical knowledge and production.