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Neil Kamil, *Fortress of the Soul: Violence, Metaphysics, and Material Life in the Huguenots' New World, 1517-1751*. Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005. xxiv + 1058 pp. Figures, maps, notes, and index. \$75.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-80187390-8.

Review by John McGrath, Boston University.

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Imposing in title as well as in length, *Fortress of the Soul* takes the reader upon a unique cultural journey. Persecution by the French Crown sent Huguenot refugees to scattered areas of the Atlantic world during the early modern era, especially after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Generally arriving as religious and ethnic minorities, they carried the values and outlooks that had enabled them to survive oppression in France. Employing a largely structuralist perspective, Neil Kamil examines how this shared cultural inheritance gave the international Huguenot community not only a powerful sense of unity, but also an energizing sense of purpose that can be seen in many of its material and intellectual accomplishments.

The author presents an intriguing interpretation of how the products of Huguenot artisans in England and colonial New York reflected the ethos developed during their persecution in France. Bernard Palissy, a ceramic artist, alchemist, and scholar from southwest France, played a central part in the evolution of this outlook. Employed and protected by the Catholic French court during the Wars of Religion, the Huguenot Palissy became the most influential advocate of a survival strategy that would become a dominant influence on the lives, work, and ideas of dispersed Huguenots for centuries. As they moved outward, vibrant and prosperous Huguenot exile communities maintained a powerful sense of who they were and how they got there, one that Kamil argues they had inherited from Palissy and like-minded Huguenots.

During Palissy's lifetime in war-ravaged France, two distinct responses to persecution had emerged among French Protestants, and these responses were often at odds, even splitting early Protestants factions within the same communities. While Calvin and others celebrated martyrdom and emphasized the need for an active, even military resistance to oppression, Palissy saw that path as leading to disaster. Greatly affected by the execution of his friend Philibert Hamlin, a former priest convicted of heresy when he refused to renounce his faith, Palissy's contemplation of the Huguenot dilemma led him to a different solution, one influenced by the natural philosophy of the Swiss scholar Paracelsus, which stressed the dualism of an individual's connection to the natural world. Palissy's solution, and the philosophy upon which it was based, gave a special character to the culture of Huguenot emigrants as they later made their way as refugees to England and colonial America.

The cornerstone of this philosophy was the concept of "the fortress of the soul." Palissy, along with other Huguenot leaders, believed that using nonconfrontational means was preferable to engaging in a hopeless violent struggle against overwhelming odds. Likening French Protestants to the "meek who shall inherit the earth," he argued that they should adopt a less militant response to their oppression. Endowed with neither military nor numerical strength, but instead with industry and faith, Huguenots must employ these God-given abilities to adapt and survive, rather than to rise up in towards certain defeat against the established authorities of the secular world. Although even some of their co-religionists disparaged this view as cowardly Nicodemism, it would prove, as Palissy had argued, to be the more successful of the two responses. As it did so, this survival strategy became an essential element of the Huguenot ethos, one richly expressed through their material creations.

In Kamil's view, Palissy accurately anticipated the setbacks later suffered by militant French Protestantism, especially the horrific siege of the fortress of La Rochelle in 1627-1628. This defeat convinced many Huguenots of the futility of walling off a place for themselves, literally and figuratively, and trying to defend it against attackers. The loss of La Rochelle demonstrated that Palissy had been right: his more covert and less confrontational strategy succeeded while the Huguenot militancy that emerged repeatedly between 1562 and 1628 had failed. Henceforth, a major instrument for Huguenot survival would be flexibility and accommodation to the majority, instead of confrontation. In other words, a more viable fortress for embattled Huguenots was the "fortress of the soul," often hidden from view, and occasionally even requiring the individual to publicly deny his or her own faith.

While it gave Huguenots more protection from persecution, it also encouraged them to pursue their livelihoods with increased vigor and success, further promoting the survival of the people and their culture. What these individuals sought in their exile was stability, not power, and the freedom to serve their own consciences through industry and creativity in a way that reinforced their Protestant convictions. Eschewing the dream of a powerful and militant Huguenot state, the world Huguenot community survived and even flourished by taking advantage of the special talents and abilities that were protected and fostered by their internal fortress: ingenuity, hard work, and intense faith. To some extent, Kamil's interpretation of the relationship between Calvinism and economic life can be compared to that given by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, but the former is both more historically specific and more nuanced.

One metaphor Palissy used to illustrate his strategy was the snail, a creature whose nature suggested a solution for the Huguenots' often perilous situation in France. He pointed out that the snail protected itself from predators by creating its own hard shell, giving it a portable defense against the predations of larger and more powerful foes. When confronted with violence, it could respond more successfully by withdrawing into this shell than it could by fighting. Though a snail cannot destroy its attackers, it can use the shell it has constructed to escape danger, and, according to Palissy, Huguenots can learn a valuable lesson from that. Palissy suggested that embattled Protestants, like the snail, needed to take advantage of the abilities given them by God—such as creativity and industry—to ensure their survival. This response could be channeled into artisanal accomplishments, which enabled their far-flung minority communities throughout the world to not only survive but to prosper. Thus, their skills could not only support them in a material sense, but also express their convictions and outlook; their "artisanal security" could provide for them in both a material and in a spiritual sense. According to Kamil, the spiral motifs prevalent in later Huguenot craftsmanship can be interpreted as a reference to the "weak" snail's ability to preserve itself against the attacks of more its powerful enemies.

Much of the book concerns the complex interrelationships among Palissy's Paracelsian concepts, on the one hand, and their later manifestations in various aspects of Huguenot life in both Europe and America, on the other. Kamil draws connections over a broad range of subjects, including pottery and ceramics, metalwork, architecture, technology, engravings, paintings, and theological and mystical tracts. In making these links he moves back and forth through time, and back and forth across the Atlantic, showing how the material lives of dispersed Huguenots reflected their innermost values as a people.

He devotes careful attention to the impact of Paracelsian ideas on the lives and works of particular individuals. Not all of these people were Huguenots themselves, and some were merely influenced by Huguenots. For example, he devotes thirty pages to an analysis of a chair built for John Winthrop, Jr., son of the Massachusetts governor, whom he credits with a "New World Paracelsian project." Of the chair Kamil writes, "Light and motion, purity and corruption, eschatological patience and the pressures of the human experience, three of the principal dialectics of Paracelsian science Palissy adapted to his experience, craft, and local history, materialize in this artifact" (p. 257).

Later, Kamil anchors a discussion of Paracelsian and Huguenot influence in the life of eighteenth-century London around the Hogarth painting "Noon, eglise de grecs, Hog Lane, Soho." In this chapter of 140 pages, he points out direct and implicit meanings in a range of the era's artistic and intellectual elements. In other sections of the book, he also finds Paracelsian impact upon, among other things, Quakerism, English political debate, Benjamin Franklin's philosophical observations, and various forms of early modern mysticism. The author makes original and often provocative connections among widely diverse cultural expressions, displaying a keen multidisciplinary understanding of the societies he examines.

Kamil is occasionally imprecise about some of the political and social developments that provide a context for his argument, especially those of the sixteenth century. His treatment of Admiral Gaspard de Coligny suffers from an overreliance on older hagiographic works, and he is inaccurate about the timing and process of the Admiral's conversion to Calvinism. This in turn creates some confusion about the nature of his designs on the New World, as the author insists on relying upon the rather discredited idea that Coligny intended his abortive settlements in Brazil and Florida to serve as some sort of refuge to "save" Huguenot society. This misunderstanding seems to be due to the author's acceptance at face value of the writings of the Huguenot propagandist Jean de Léry, apparently unaware of the intentional fabrications and exaggerations contained in his "history" of Fort Coligny. Moreover, his reliance on other outdated historical sources leads him to accept the spurious Parkmanesque claim that Spanish forces carried out "the genocidal massacre of over a thousand" Huguenots in Florida in 1565 (p. 139). For the most part, these weaknesses stem from the author's reluctance to acknowledge the distortions, demanded by political and religious expediency, that were commonplace in sixteenth-century Huguenot tracts.

To some extent because of its organizational scheme, the argument occasionally would benefit from some clarification. In terms of language, there are places where one wishes the author would be a bit more direct in expressing some of the relationships he discusses. To be sure, Kamil draws together many historical threads that are neither obvious nor simple, but it is difficult for the reader to put all of these varied threads together and keep a firm sense of direction. This is a book that requires careful reading, and at over 900 pages of text, one wonders how many people, even specialized scholars who are deeply familiar with the subject matter, will be willing to make the effort. Those who do are rewarded with an extraordinarily imaginative interpretation of a culture and its evolution over time and place, and whatever its flaws, one must conclude that *Fortress of the Soul* is an impressive work of cultural history.

186 illustrations appear helpfully alongside the text, instead of being relegated to separate sections. These, especially the many photographs of Huguenot artisanship that appear in the last couple chapters, greatly assist the reader in appreciating the author's observations. Over a hundred pages of detailed footnotes provide a firm sense of how the author employs his sources.

Throughout, Kamil suggests some fascinating and provocative links between locations and eras. As Huguenots dispersed through the Atlantic world, they remained united through a powerful cultural identity that was reflected in their material creations. To understand this society, Kamil explains, one must appreciate the common heritage of "artisanal security" that both protected and defined Huguenot identity.

Thanks to Kamil, the historical legacy of Bernard Palissy as an intellectual and cultural figure is assured, but *Fortress of the Soul's* accomplishments range beyond that. Kamil's intricate analysis makes a significant contribution to our understanding the development of the Atlantic world, and, more generally, the process of cultural diffusion.

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