

CONFESSION AND CONVERSION.
TRANSCENDING RELIGIOUS BOUNDARIES IN CENTRAL
AND EASTERN EUROPE, 1560-1700

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In recent years, research into the pre-modern religious environment has been characterised by a host of attempts at widening, in a thematic as well as a methodical regard, the scope of possible approaches. Crucial questions concerning, for instance, religious practice and experience, in particular in a situation where there is an acute competition between religious orientations and denominations, have been posed with unprecedented urgency. The present contribution deals with a phenomenon which is, one might say, at the focal point of the thematic sphere thus delineated, and with the phenomenon's personification. The phenomenon is "conversion," the change of religious denomination, and its personification, the convert. The operative question is what findings may be realistically expected by examining across the whole range of central and eastern Europe forms and conditions of becoming a Roman Catholic, and the ways in which this switch of denomination was "staged" with regard to its public effect. The findings are that conversion must not be interpreted as a purely religious or ecclesiastical phenomenon. It has to be approached as a compound of factors also concerning social history and history of everyday life, and it exists in multitudinous forms. Another conclusion is that the figure of the convert is not a marginal phenomenon linked to a chosen few or to some social or intellectual elite – it may be found across the whole range of society.