

## Book Reviews/ Comptes rendus



Anthony Grafton. *Bring Out Your Dead: The Past as Revelation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001. Pp. vii, 360.

In true Grafton style, this work is nearly as encyclopedic in spirit as the “universal savants” who people it. Part fireside companion, part painstaking explication, part commentary on the present state of the academy, in less skilled hands a compilation like this would suffer from a terminal lack of cohesion. Yet Grafton embraces, even champions, the notion that his is a scholarly miscellany whose ancestors, deep in the early modern past, themselves share a mixed genealogy. What holds this collection together beyond the fact that each essay deals with our methods of recreating the past is Grafton himself — the breadth of his vision, the confidence of his tone, and the precision of his perceptions. Running through the work is a sure understanding that while our motives for bringing the past into our present are varied, sometimes skewed, and frequently opaque even to ourselves, the results can be immensely important and beneficial in ways we are unable to predict. Grafton delights in pointing out the practical side of what many might see as arcane interest in the past, as he does in the case of Justus Lipsius, whose recreation of Roman orders of battle enabled Maurice of Orange to become “the first Dutch commander who could beat the Spanish in the field” (p. 130). Here, as elsewhere, Grafton takes the polymath bookworm out of the library and places him squarely in the ranks of early-modern military history, with very un-academic consequences.

Only two of the pieces in this work appear here for the first time. Others date from as far back as 1985, although most are more recent. Some are reviews of substantial works; others appear in high- or middle-brow journals, or as introductions to popular editions of an author’s works (*e.g.*, Vico) or chapters in collections of essays. Nearly all analyze a particular historian or group of historians as they ply their trade in early modern Europe; and Grafton’s intimacy with their lives makes it seem as though he is describing his contemporaries — which, as he suggests in several ways, is precisely the case. Concentrating primarily on Conti-

mental scholars of the High Renaissance, Grafton arranges his explorations into four categories: historians and traditions, humanism and science, the community of learning, and, finally, personal profiles. Throughout, he draws widely from disciplines allied with the textual recovery of the past, most notably painting and architecture. His review essay on German self-portraiture, “The Hand and the Soul,” for example, will have you reaching for a copy of Dürer’s self-portraits, and his piece on the attempt by Renaissance scholars to make sense of ancient monuments scattered throughout the ruins of early-modern Rome leans heavily on illustrations.

It would be difficult to select the most intriguing essays from Grafton’s collection, but certainly his section containing profiles of individual figures is among the strongest. Here we have not only characters but detailed contexts for their ideas, and one clearly senses that Grafton revels in demolishing reports of the demise of intellectual history. As he amply demonstrated in *Cardano’s Universe*, his earlier work on a fascinating Renaissance thinker, mapping the early modern mind through the lens of biography is an extraordinarily rich experience, and these “profiles” are no exception.

While essays in each category direct most of their considerable energy towards their common theme, they range freely, much to the reader’s delight. Above all, these are examples of scholarship in action rather than scholarship as theory: Grafton demonstrates historical method even while he dissects the methods of the past. Everywhere his agenda is sensitive to the unexamined and perhaps unseen techniques that determine our historical landscape, and expose the complexity of context and perspective: the topography of the past not only looks different from different perspectives — it is different. But Grafton is not, at heart, a post-modern relativist content to settle into the now commonplace observation that there is no neutral ground from which to view this terrain. While he clearly delights in displaying the “size and weight of the conceptual baggage that early modern intellectual travelers dragged behind them” (p. 86) — and, by implication, travelers of all ages and disciplines — Grafton points out where such baggage is useful, even laudable. His review essay, “The Rest versus the West,” is one of the most balanced treatments of not only the failures but the successes of early modern attempts to make sense of the new and startling worlds that emerged in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Any pool that contains such diverse figures as Dürer and Descartes, Alberti and Panofsky, is bound to be fairly broad, and *Bring Out Your Dead* roams far more widely than a mere list of names can indicate. For all this, the book feels integrated, doubtless thanks to a carefully considered selection process. Yet one doesn’t feel the essays were altered from their original formats in order to furnish appropriate cross-references. Rather, the unity is organic: we see one of our finest historians reflecting on the legacies and echoes of his own interests in this crucial period. And for anyone not familiar with Grafton’s inimitable style, this book is an excellent introduction. His narratives of the work of past historians are layered with wit, allusions, and references ranging from the Monty Python-esque title to

half-glimpsed snippets of Matthew Arnold. All in all, it is a fine volume, and one that should readily turn readers to Grafton's other works.

SEYMOUR BAKER HOUSE, *Mount Angel Seminary*

Monica Chojnacka. *Working Women of Early Modern Venice*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. Pp. xxii, 188.

*Working Women in Early Modern Venice* is an excellent read, which offers a multifaceted picture of Venetian women in the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries. The book certainly fulfils the expectations evoked by its title by focusing in particular on women of lower status — the *popolane*. Chojnacka traces their existence as married women, spinsters, and widows, and their experiences of living at home with their families, with female and male friends and acquaintances, in charitable institutions, or alone. She explores these women's domestic and public worlds, analysing household structures, marriage patterns, kinship ties, work and property relations, notions of community and civic space, migrations and movements, as well as the women's ethnic origins. Drawing on a multiplicity of different sources — parish registers, notarial and financial records, government tax indexes, and Inquisition documents — she adopts an approach at once quantitative and qualitative, which results in a comprehensive study of how *popolane*, as well as their male counterparts, interacted with the city and moved in and out of Venice, its Adriatic territories, and the Mediterranean. Chojnacka employs a clear and accessible style, which makes this a valuable book for a general as well as an academic audience.

One of the book's greatest merits is its assumption that women not of elite status enjoyed a degree of social power — economic resources, residential autonomy, and physical mobility — which gave them “the ability to make independent decisions as well as influence the actions of the other people” (p.xvi). Chojnacka examines the disadvantaged position of women in early modern Venice, underlining the crucial place of gender, status, and ethnic origins in shaping women's relationship with society, and stressing the power of the church, the state, and the family in directing their lives. At the same time, she successfully shows women's capacity to defy social norms, acting and moving around in accordance with their own resources and preferences. In doing this she challenges the idea of women as completely subordinated to the authority of men, whether fathers, husbands, guardians, confessors, state officials, or city governors. Instead, she provides a more complex narrative, according to which women were able to negotiate their lives with a certain degree of autonomy and work around social rigidities and material constraints.

Particularly relevant to this purpose is Chojnacka's analysis of household structures and of gender and property relations. She discusses the variety of living patterns available to women in early modern Venice, showing that they lived with