recuperated the original spirit of Aby Warburg’s interest in the “Nachleben der Antike,” that ongoing cultural struggle between the unmediated animations of paganism and the abstractions of rational, distanced thought.

One consequence of Barkan’s approach is an emphasis on the ways in which the hermeneutic adventures provoked by antiquities opened a realm of aesthetic autonomy that stands as an alternative to function, referentiality, narrative, and symbolization. This is a realm where motifs migrate independent of context, and art itself emerges as the main preoccupation of art. The Bed of Polyclitus and the Spinario — enigmatic and anonymous antique works that cast a spell over generations of Renaissance artists and connoisseurs — become, in Barkan’s hands, emblems of withdrawal and self-absorption, in which an erotic undercurrent thematizes the viewer’s engagement with intractable and ambiguous aesthetic experiences.

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Julius R. Ruff’s book is a solid addition to Cambridge University Press’s New Approaches to European History series. Comprehensively surveying the modes of violence and its representation in “a society far more violent than that of [early modern Europeans’] modern descendants” (p. 2), the book is both an excellent comparative introduction to a significant area of early modern cultural and historical studies and a useful reference work for those already familiar with the scholarship in the area. Ruff argues that during the early modern period in Europe levels of violence, measured in a number of ways, dropped dramatically. Drawing heavily on the work of Norbert Elias and positioning himself in opposition to Foucault and E. P. Thompson, Ruff explains the drop in violence as the result of the emerging state’s increasingly secure monopolization of the means of violence and of the social and physical disciplinary mechanism that Elias has labeled “the civilizing process.” Ruff does not, unfortunately, examine the problematic teleological assumptions and historical elisions of Elias’s grand narrative, adopting it more or less as a given. Consequently, the book gives the impression that Europe’s march into modernity has been a movement into the sweetness and light of societies with low crime rates, while only cursorily gesturing at the new modes, locations, and scales of the violence that structures modern European and North American societies.

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