Guido Ruggiero, ed. *A Companion to the Worlds of the Renaissance*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002. Pp. xii, 561.

A book called a “companion” may either be a small, thematically focused encyclopedia, like the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* and the other Oxford Companions which have followed it, or a collection of essays meant to give an introductory overview of a subject, like the *Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* and its many stable-mates. This book is of the latter kind, but is about twice the length of the Cambridge volumes; it is a collection of twenty-eight articles, running to just over five hundred pages of text, followed by another fifty pages of consolidated bibliography and index. It appears, then, to expect a slightly more sophisticated, or at least more ambitious, readership than the “student reader” at which some of the Cambridge Companions are aimed. A way to think further about the kind of reader to whom the book might be a companion is to ask another question: in what sense is it a companion to the *Renaissance*?

The five sections into which it is divided suggest an answer. The first is geographically arranged, with articles on Italy, Europe in general, the views from western Asia and from Spanish America, and “the historical geography of the Renaissance” (a typically brilliant piece by Peter Burke). The second deals with “worlds and ways of power”: government, law, violence, civility, kinship, gender, “the myth of Renaissance individualism.” Next comes “social and economic worlds”: the upper classes, the lower classes, the European economy, the Renaissance and the world economy. Then a long section on “cultural worlds” covers “subcultures,” “high culture” (in fact restricted to humanism), religion, art, literature, political thought, and science. Finally, “anti-worlds,” or what might more portentously have been called “the dark side of the Renaissance,” are covered in articles on disease and hunger, “Renaissance bogeymen” (rather an artsy piece by Linda Woodbridge on vagrants and other objects of fear and suspicion), violence and warfare, witchcraft and magic, and “illicit worlds,” especially stigmatizable sexual behaviour. All these topics are tied together by a scintillating introductory essay by the editor, in which he makes an eloquent case for the usefulness and indeed nobility of the concept of a “Renaissance,” and comments on the place of each essay in the overall scheme of the book and on the merits of each; Ruggiero has the gift of pointing alluringly to the most interesting implications even of the least remarkable pieces.

The contributors’ approaches are diverse, and this has its advantages. Moreover, the articles are not simply factual summaries: they all have their own arguments, and many of them suggest places where the present state of knowledge is inadequate, so that the book is rich in suggestions for further research. Some, though, are more concerned than others with presenting basic factual information. So, on the one hand, John A. Marino’s “Economic encounters and the world economy” is rich in, although by no means limited to, dates and statistics, and John M. Najemy’s “Political ideas” gives helpful summaries of the contributions of a number of Renaissance writers to the development of political thought, while, on

the other hand, Matthew Restall's "The Renaissance world from the West" focuses on two highly specific topics, city planning and literacy. Loren Partridge's "Art" is about twentieth-century approaches to the study of Renaissance art rather than the art itself, and "Religious cultures" by R. Po-Chia Hsia (who is editing a *Companion to the Reformation World* in the same series) offers a fine and stimulating treatment of four specific themes in the religious life of the Renaissance but expects the reader already to be familiar with, for instance, the history of the Hussite revolution and the conciliar movement. One result of this variety is that a sequential reading of the whole volume is pleasantly diversified by changes in pace and approach. Another, though, is that this book is something of a mercurial companion, which will sometimes tell one about a good number of the features of, and paths through, the landscape through which one thinks of travelling, but will sometimes talk only about a few particular objects, not necessarily the ones one wanted to know about.

This is true not only of individual articles, but also of the collection as a whole. For instance, the book has something of an Italian bias, for the appropriateness of which Ruggiero argues; it also has a soft spot for English literature, as a result of which Donne's observation that "new philosophy calls all in doubt" is quoted in four different essays. There is, as these biases may suggest, little on areas such as eastern Europe and Scandinavia: this is not the Renaissance of Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich's *The Renaissance in National Context*, or of Jozef IJsewijn and Dirk Sacré's *Companion to Neo-Latin Studies* (which in fact no contributor cites). The collection has no articles on, and says very little about, obviously important topics such as music, food (as opposed to hunger), or languages.

This brings us back to the word "companion": whom is *A Companion to the Worlds of the Renaissance* meant to accompany? It is, as should by now be clear, neither as straightforward an introduction as the Cambridge companions nor as conveniently encyclopedic as the Oxford ones. Does it fall between two stools? It would be unfair to say so. Rather, this collection might be compared to some of the big learned books of the late Renaissance: full of information but not comprehensive; an introduction to many topics of great interest but a text through which the beginner will need guiding; arranged so as to permit non-sequential reading, but most impressive when read sequentially; an important and useful resource despite its inconsistencies. All university libraries will have to have it, and everyone who teaches Renaissance topics will need to think about buying it (not least so as to be able to provide selected articles to students), although it is not cheap. Ruggiero asks his readers to "applaud if you have enjoyed our performance"; yes, it is greatly enjoyable.

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