ship,” it is possible to argue that “the innate qualities of princes and kings, that is issues of rulership, triumphed over issues of ‘race.’” Kate Lowe’s discussion of stereotyping, for example, leaves it unclear whether it is the lived experience of black Africans in Europe that is limited and stereotypical, or the representations and documentation of that experience—but it does bring out some still recognisable racialised characteristics: the “laughing black,” the tattooed or scarred slave, bling jewellery, promiscuous sexuality. Lowe’s final suggestion, that the encounter with blackness enabled “a definition of whiteness to crystallise in Europe,” is suggestive but under-explored. Paul Kaplan’s discussion of works by Mantegna skilfully interweaves a narrative of artistic patronage with the biblical subject of Judith—accompanied in Mantegna’s drawings by a black maidservant—although he leaves implicit the appropriateness of this concatenation of *femme fatale* and black assistant. Elsewhere other contributors make revelatory use of visual material—much of it reproduced in the volume—from portrait medals to sculptural relief, from broadside woodcuts to cartographical marginalia. In its range of contributors and material, *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe* begins to catch up with the long interest of literary studies in the traces of race in the past, but the edgily present-day significance of this act of retrieval needs to be confronted.

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Katherine Crawford. *Perilous Performances: Gender and Regency in Early Modern France*. Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 2004. Pp. x, 297.

The extraordinary experience of the French monarchy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when three women effectively ruled, despite the famous claims of Salic Law that the French crown could not pass through the female line, has received remarkably little sustained or serious scholarly attention. A series of female regents, mothers of minor kings, held important constitutional positions: Catherine of Medici (regent of Charles IX from 1560 to 1563), Marie of Medici (regent of Louis XIII from 1610 to 1614), and Anne of Austria (regent of Louis XIV from 1643 to 1651). In each case, the queens’ political roles were signified by edicts and ceremonies. Moreover, as French kings assumed their majorities on their thirteenth birthdays, their mothers continued to have considerable political influence long after their formal regencies had ended. At last, Katherine Crawford’s fine book recovers and interrogates the common threads that linked the female regencies that dominated French politics for much of the early modern era. She also examines the career of the period’s only male regent, Philippe of Orléans, who governed for Louis XV in the early eighteenth century and concludes with an examination of a queen who did not become regent, Marie-Antoinette. When Louis XVI was executed in 1793, leaving two minor sons as his putative successors (although the monarchy had already been abolished), a

debate about who should be regent ensued in which the infamous queen's potential claims made her yet again a lightning rod for revolutionary debate.

Crawford is aware that she is re-telling stories that are familiar, albeit usually presented separately, and that she relies on what she notes are "familiar sources" (8) to do so. In seeking to explore the patterns of the decisive moments in which political precedents were established and issues about gender and power were contested as well as with the great range of written and visual sources consulted, this book brings an impressive freshness to the phenomenon of early modern French regency, even if the facts of the lives of individual characters are well-known.

Moreover, *Perilous Performances* has far more ambitious analytical goals than to re-tell the stories of regents. It is in fact a book with three quite distinct parts: a highly theorized and conceptually sophisticated introduction, a section about the female regents where the chapters are more conventional in their approach than the introduction might suggest, and a section on the eighteenth century that deals with a male regent and a minor's mother who was not a regent. The introduction lays out large claims for the significance of female regencies, among them making the case that the regencies "were integral to emergent state structures" (6) and that "politics and gender performance combined to transform the French monarchy through effects intended and otherwise" (12).

While historians have often dismissed the regents as stereotypically female and devious (Catherine), hapless (Marie), or a pawn of ministers (Anne), Crawford's book focuses firmly on their agency. In particular, she argues that the queens' self-consciously repeated public performances of gender roles by which they sought to enhance their power and elide tensions over feminized authority. The chapters about the female regents construct a regency paradigm in which the precedents established in the dynamic, path-breaking actions of Catherine of Medici were appropriated and institutionalized by her two seventeenth-century successors. Catherine, Crawford argues, "created a new logic of political entitlement based on conformity with accepted notions of gender and power" (24). In particular, Catherine justified female regency—over all the anxiety and unease powerful political women aroused in France—by rooting the appointment in maternal affection. She reiterated this link in her actions, in her promotion of a familial visual iconography, and in her management of political ceremonies. Her two seventeenth-century successors built on this strategy to confirm a logic of female regency. Crawford acknowledges that all the queens' efforts could not guarantee that others saw them as they wanted or that tensions over female power could be successfully deflected. There is more attention here to the coherence of the strategies together with a presumption about the self-awareness of the women in pursuing them than to the well known political instabilities that characterized French politics during their ascendancy. Nevertheless, the latter might suggest a wide gap between queenly aspirations and achievements.

Catherine, Marie, and Anne had much in common as female foreign parents of minor kings and in Crawford's powerfully argued interpretation of their regency strategies whereas the eighteenth-century subjects of the closing chapters, the French

male uncle who became regent of a minor to whom he was himself also the heir and the female foreign mother who did not and whose son did not become king, are more difficult to weave into the same framework. Crawford argues that Philippe faced a significant gender challenge: how could a royal prince reconcile expectations about the appropriately masculine performance of that role with a regency role now signified as female? The short answer is that although Philippe sought to appropriate some of the tactics of his female predecessors, such as emphasizing his familial tie as justification for his position, the challenge was beyond him, and the disjuncture between the roles opened up room for criticism that Crawford argues “distended royal authority in significant ways” (141). Marie-Antoinette’s role as a potential regent contributed to the potent and poisonous debate about her, an angle the numerous recent studies of her have missed.

This insightful and stimulating book that positions gender as central to political power in early modern France has much to recommend it. Crawford provides a powerful interpretative framework for the regency phenomenon: that successive regencies were not simply aberrations, but that from Catherine’s appointment in 1560 “regency government now had its own set of logics, a rudimentary ceremonial structure, and a complex history of performance” (57). It is less clear whether readers will be persuaded by the book’s broadest claims about the relationship of these changes to state formation, such as “change in regency worked like a series of propagating cracks; not systematically, but opportunistically and incrementally changing the entire edifice” (58). Nevertheless, *Perilous Performances* is a major contribution to the early modern historiographies of gender, politics, and monarchy.

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Franz Posset. *Renaissance Monks: Monastic Humanism in Six Biographical Sketches*. Leiden: Brill, 2005. Pp. xx, 196.

This excellent collection of short biographies is volume CVIII in the occasional series *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions: History, Culture, Religion, Ideas*. As such, it is scarcely intended to be definitive or exhaustive. Rather, Posset invites us to glimpse, through the lens of what amounts to bio-bibliographies of its lesser known denizens, the world of scholarly Renaissance monks. For many students of the period, specialists included, only the name of Henricus Urbanus will be familiar. As these biographies document, Urbanus was hardly an isolated phenomenon: the world of monastic humanism was broad, perforce international, and relatively well-populated.

Yet one cannot escape the awareness that in the accounts of these men—citizens of the Church, their particular Orders, and the Empire in the early decades of the sixteenth century—we are seeing a society that will be utterly changed within a generation. It is as if we are reading an account of Edwardian Britain on the eve of the First