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

World War: we see a world that is precious, confident, corrupt, and doomed. Posset does not dwell on the elegiac, nor does he need to. When we read the biography of Leontorius, a monk of Maulbronn, who was employed to produce “spontaneous verse” for his bishop’s drinking parties in 1496 (43), or read that in a direct inversion of the impulse that drove St. Benedict from the decadence of Rome to Subiaco, the Benedictine monk Chelidonius moved to Vienna to be closer to the imperial court of Maximilian I (65), we sense the storm brewing that eliminated, almost overnight, roughly half the 1,500 Benedictine monasteries in Europe.

Posset’s sketches make it clear that the scholarship generated by these monks was far from trivial, the occasional verse for drinking parties aside. Humanists in the Renaissance, and regulars among them, long laboured under the stigma of being mere ornaments while the real heavy lifting was done by scholastic theologians. But that stigma itself quickly evaporated as the century’s interest in biblical criticism and patristic scholarship deepened. The philological interests of men such as Reuchlin and Erasmus, whose names frequent these accounts, were taken up by lesser known authors, and despite the lamentable overenthusiasm for classical terminology, such as describing the eucharist as “panis olympicus” (72), the monks described here made significant contributions to the Christian humanist corpus which was even then redefining ecclesiastical scholarship. Posset’s encapsulated studies go a long way towards modernizing the image of early modern monks by positioning them as the forerunners of modern academic authors—they network incessantly, they are impressively mobile in an age not known for easy relocation, and they are both passionate and painstaking about their books.

Posset obviously kept an eye out for the telling details as he mined the letters of these obscure men. We are treated to many morsels that in themselves speak volumes: Leontorius asking Amerbach for a hair shirt—not for himself, he protests, despite Amerbach’s heady religious influence—but for a nun of his acquaintance, to be sent in plain wrapping so as to prevent gossip (47) or writing to Froben about needing new glasses: “When I put two pairs of these spectacles together on my nose, I see much further and more clearly; if I add a third, they are almost equal to a thicker and more curved lens” (55). The thought of this scholar labouring under three sets of spectacles as he helps to edit the complete works of Augustine in eleven volumes gives us pause.

But clearly the main contribution of this volume lies in an area none of its subjects anticipated. These men stood astride a watershed in European history, and were only dimly aware of doing so. This is best seen in the case of Vitus Bild, a monk of Augsburg, whose blend of Biblicism and monasticism was at the time unremarkable. He lived a monk in the heartland of the reform, and died eight years after Luther’s formal rejection of religious vows in 1521. Posset identifies him as “an evangelical Catholic monk,” something of a contradiction to the common wisdom of reformation scholars. Bild wore several hats—bishop’s secretary, Latin teacher, poet, priest, polymath (he studied astronomy, music, philology, theology), cartographer, historian, and procurer of sundials for Frederick the Wise. In none save perhaps the last was he

especially distinguished, and perhaps therein lies his interest to us: he may have been quite ordinary. With dozens of his co-religious, he certainly moved along the bright periphery of Augsburg, corresponding with those in the center like Oecolampadius, Spalatin, and even Luther himself while remaining decidedly in the background. After the Peasants' War his contact with the chief reformers died out but his interest in the kernel of their message did not. In his own words, taken from a letter to Spalatin, he accommodated the new Biblicism of Luther while retaining his monastic calling: "The Gospel in which God instructed me through Martin [Luther], the most faithful servant of his vineyard, is so deeply rooted in my heart that I despise everything else" (154). Whether Bild would have remained a monk had he lived longer is hardly the point and is in any case unknowable. Yet Bild's accommodation should warn those who would engineer a conflict where men such as he saw none.

Posset's short concluding chapter highlights the salient features of these monastic *umanisti* and draws out common features with their non-monastic peers, chief among which were love of language and a reinvigorated Biblicism. It could have been the most useful of the book had he consolidated these individual studies within the context of the changes even then unfolding in the scholarly world and the wider context of Western Christendom. But necessarily that would have entailed a much longer work. As it stands, Posset leaves this for his readers, although one suspects he would have been as adept at it as he is in drawing our eye to these fascinating, and seldom seen, individuals.

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