Review of Convent Times: A Social History in the Foundations of Modern Spain, by A. Atienza

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of the Hebraists, Agostino Giustiniani, met Erasmus in 1518, a year after falling victim to an attack that ‘showed Erasmus at his ill-tempered and nasty worst’ (p. 239). Erasmus objected to Giustiniani’s appeal to cabbalistic, Talmudic and rabbinic sources in his annotations on the Psalms. The better-known Cardinal Cajetan, ‘bold, confident, and independent in his judgments’ (p. 260), in pointing out mistakes in the Vulgate and expressing opinions about the canon of the New Testament, resembled Erasmus as a controversial exegete. In Agostino Steuco, Ronald Delph shows us an astute Italian Hebraist, philologist and textual critic capable of blending ‘cutting edge scholarship and conservatism’ (p. 316). Steuco proposed several emendations to the Vulgate Old Testament while paradoxically clinging to the essential reliability of the Vulgate translation. His clashes with Erasmus were humanist in nature as he argued that the Vulgate approximated the original Hebrew more than the Septuagint and that it was the work of St Jerome. After reading this and other essays in the volume, readers might wonder whether humanists among themselves as much as scholastics arrayed against humanists marked the dawn of modern biblical scholarship with lively and acrimonious controversy.

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Ángela Atienza’s Tiempos de conventos is an important contribution to the study of monasticism and society in early modern Spain. She analyses the creation of almost 2,400 convents and monasteries in Spain in the period from 1474 to 1800. Her central contention is that these institutions were centres of power. Drawing on an impressive archival base and a survey of existing scholarship (albeit almost exclusively in Spanish), she argues that a full understanding of the socio-political landscape of early modern Spain is incomplete without an examination of how the crown, nobles and local elites used religious foundations to fashion and propagate their power.

Atienza devotes the first half of the book to an examination in turn of royal, noble and non-noble foundations. The chapter on royal foundations proficiently notes the differences in the reigns of various monarchs – with Charles I’s activity, for example, paling in comparison to that of his predecessors, Isabel and Ferdinand, and his son’s grand accomplishment at El Escorial. This chapter, however, is a bit short on analysis of what the crown gained from such efforts. In contrast, the chapters on the institutions founded by nobles and local elites contain excellent examinations of how the creation of convents and monasteries allowed these individuals and families to enhance their power and prestige. The closing chapters of the book also demonstrate Atienza’s keen analysis as she isolates several intriguing subtopics within her larger study. Among these is the phenomenon of women founding religious institutions for other women. She also examines cases of conflict and resistance, originating with town councils and the secular clergy that surrounded the foundation of some houses. Focusing on issues such as these adds complexity to her analysis and conclusions. This is a solid and very thorough account of the creation of religious houses in Spain.
in the early modern period. In a field that is dominated by local studies, studies of single institutions or particular religious orders, the chronological and geographical scope of Atienza’s project is welcome and impressive. Although the depth of the analysis is a bit uneven over the course of the entire volume, Atienza has none the less provided a sophisticated interpretation of how the founders of convents and monasteries used these institutions to wield power and influence. In so doing, she has made an important contribution not only to the field of religious history but also to the study of early modern Spanish society.

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Based on a conference that took place in Zurich in 2005, this volume begins with a helpful overview by Anthony Grafton, and offers a number of studies on the use of textbooks in early modern educational settings, from collections of Latin dialogues intended for schoolboys (Barbara Mahlmann-Bauer) to works used in teaching the humanities, law or theology, to an end-piece that orients readers to eighteenth-century pedagogical ideas. Although the volume is divided into two broad categories (liberal arts and philosophy on the one hand and medicine, jurisprudence and theology on the other), the contributors’ interests range widely. Four of them do focus on textbooks used in instruction in Zurich, among them Hildegard Keller and Hubert Steinke’s fascinating study of Jakob Ruf’s two textbooks on conception and childbirth (one in German, the other in Latin), intended for a dual audience of midwives and physicians. Ruf, who worked as municipal surgeon in Zurich from 1532, was also responsible for examining and licensing midwives, and wrote in German to provide aspiring and current midwives with the expert knowledge that they needed to practise their craft effectively. Other contributions, including those by Ann Blair and Jürgen Leonhardt, highlight the important role played by students in both creating and adapting textbooks, whether by taking down lectures verbatim and then having these copies circulate, or by using the margins and interlinear spaces to take down the professor’s commentary on a given text, so that a student would have both the text and the commentary in one handy volume. Many of the contributions were translated into English from other languages, with at times some loss of meaning, as in the contribution by Daniel Tröhler on the Heidelberg Catechism. Overall, this work will be of particular interest to colleagues and graduate students focusing on early modern education and on the transmission of ideas in the early modern setting.

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