

Kim Sloan, ed. *European Visions: American Voices*.

British Museum Research Publication 172. London: The British Museum Press, 2009. viii + 142 pp. illus. tpls. map. bibl. £40. ISBN: 978-0-86159-172-5.

This volume contains fifteen essays on the famous watercolors John White made during his brief visit to the Roanoke colony in the 1580s. Edited by Kim Sloan, curator of drawings at the British Museum, the volume provides a fresh contribution to a field already blessed with plenty of good scholarship. Yet *European Visions: American Voices* still manages to offer something new. It is subdivided into four sections — “Economic and Cultural Contexts,” “Nature and Natural History,” “New Visions of a New World,” and “American History” — a division that reflects the interdisciplinary character of an international conference held in London. The conference aimed to demonstrate that “a Eurocentric viewpoint and traditional approach to history are no longer the only viable ones” (1). I am frankly a bit puzzled as to why the editor has singled out the correction of an Old World perspective as the main purpose of the conference, since historians of early modern encounters have by and large accepted that European visions have received a disproportionate amount of scholarly attention — and not only because the primary sources are more readily available.

The real value of this volume, to my mind, lies in bringing together different disciplines and different approaches, while maintaining a sharp focus on the productions of John White, the scientist Thomas Harriot, and the Frankfurt engraver and publisher Theodore de Bry, who operated more and more independently as the project progressed. Their combined efforts between 1585 and 1590 ensured that White's images made an impact on early modern Europe's imagination of native Americans which remained influential until well into the eighteenth century. The images, in the collection of the British Museum since 1865, have been the subject of investigation ever since. It is hence no surprise that some of the articles included here follow strands already explored in the historiography of the Roanoke representations — such as the deployment of iconographic traditions in late sixteenth-century Europe or the contribution of John White's images to the field of English antiquity. Additionally, at least three contributions have been previously published in slightly altered form. Several other papers, however, provide refreshing and sometimes entirely new perspectives. The final essay of the volume by Audrey Horning on the archaeological traces of native Algonquian towns in eastern North Carolina, for example, thoroughly complicates the existing views of the White drawings as relatively reliable representations of indigenous life in North America.

The New World exhibition of 2007, which provided the opportunity to hold the conference, also inspired curators and other specialists to reexamine the White drawings. Using modern techniques, their analysis raises a number of questions that should encourage future research. Their findings — and almost all authors here insist on the preliminary nature of their work — are presented in a section that, slightly confusingly, is called “New Visions of a New World.” It is this part of the volume, with five articles concerning the physical aspects of the watercolors, that not only brings to life the drawings as material objects, but in some cases adds new layers of interpretation to the analysis of historians and art historians. The contributions here study the conservation of the material, the analysis of the paper and pigments used by White, and present observations on the Renaissance practice of copying through the eyes of a practicing botanical artist, Sally Birch, who offers a comparison of the two surviving versions of the drawings. The pick of the bunch is perhaps Katherine Coombs's article on the social connotations of the art of limning in England, which eventually offers a new look at the gentlemanly background of John White, as well as a better understanding of his artistic environment.

Kim Sloan is to be commended for presenting us with this myriad of perspectives, and the British Museum Press deserves credit for including many high-quality illustrations. Together with *A New World: England's First View of America*, the catalogue of the exhibition published in 2007 by the same team, this volume will provide a new platform for the study of European representations of North America.

MICHIEL VAN GROESEN  
University of Amsterdam