

Taste and Knowledge in Early Modern England. Elizabeth L. Swann.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. xii + 268 pp. \$99.99.

Of the many substances we taste every day, corpses, books, or urine are not likely on our list. Yet throughout the Renaissance scholars sampled these and many other materials as a way to gain new knowledge. In Elizabeth Swann's captivating account, the act of tasting was laden with cultural and philosophical resonances that shaped the early modern period's epistemologies. In *Taste and Knowledge in Early Modern England* Swann reveals how both the physical sensation of taste and its role as a discriminatory faculty contributed to new ways of understanding in early modern England. Seeking to capture the connotative expansiveness of taste, Swann uncovers how the sense intersected with cultural discourses surrounding the theater, anatomy, religious experiences, natural philosophy and experimentation, and erotic knowledge. *Taste and Knowledge* powerfully articulates how early modern thinkers ascribed a positive valence to sampling the varied materials of their world.

Although scholars have isolated taste as a distinctly eighteenth-century aesthetic phenomenon, Swann demonstrates that taste's definitions as a proximity sense and as a discriminatory faculty were mutually constitutive throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Taste was not simply a marker of refinement, but beyond this was associated "with the production, evaluation, and communication of knowledge in a number of spheres, including but not limited to the aesthetic domain" (16). It is precisely taste's fungibility that enabled experiential knowledge and contributed to new configurations of subjecthood. Taste's "proverbial idiosyncrasy" (27) signaled its value in forming Renaissance subjectivity.

One place we might look for the imbrication of physical and literary good taste includes commonplace books and anthologies. As Swann amply demonstrates in chapter 1, this genre, alongside anti-theatrical tracts and defenses of poetry, positions the reader as a fastidious bee that selectively gathers the sweetness of rhetorical flowers. Not just a metaphor, the extraction and combination of discrete flavors from literature drew from the physical properties of tasting: "literary discrimination is experienced as gustatory preference and aversion, and bibliophagic metaphors are rooted in material practices" (41). This focus on taste and judgment in reading flows naturally into the attention devoted to anatomical dissection in the following chapter. In Helkiah Crooke's *Mikrokosmographia*, taste is an unstable form of sensation and yet also a method for acquiring anatomical knowledge. Particularly when the senses are the subject of analysis, the language of taste—sampling, savoring, even digesting—plays a prominent role in a self-reflexive loop among sensing subjects and those attempting to understand the senses empirically.

Taste was also an object of censure in the period, and its contested moral status arose from theologians who blamed Adam and Eve's Fall on the seductions of tempting fruit. At the same time, taste was central to ceremonies of sacral redemption through the

Eucharist, as Swann demonstrates in chapter 3. Because taste might at once intimate a sinful desire and a means for transcending the fallen status of the human condition, Swann argues that its contested status allowed for generative debates along confessional lines regarding a morally inflected act of consumption. These ideological nuances carried over into the period's experimental sciences. Chapter 4 traces the experimental uses of taste in seventeenth-century natural philosophy. Taste is redeemed as a valuable diagnostic and experimental sense primarily through the work of Royal Society members Nehemiah Grew and Robert Boyle. From the rational knowledge of early science, Swann moves to the erotic language of sweetness and its connections with intuitive knowledge in chapter 5. Here, Swann argues that sexual tasting was a language that interrogated the properties of the beloved and their senses. Authors experimented with a type of intersubjective, intuitive knowledge of the desired body through the language of taste in their treatment of the beloved individual.

Although scholars have worked to challenge the supremacy of a Platonic hierarchy of the senses in early modern habits of thought, Swann's historical and literary account of the many valences of taste shows how much more we have to learn. This study tackles some of the more vexing questions about early modern theories of embodiment in the period, particularly in how both literature and science influenced the reader's embodied experience of subjectivity with taste. Swann ultimately offers a convincing historical account of this neglected sense and the knowledge gained through taste.

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Beyond Ambassadors: Consuls, Missionaries, and Spies in Premodern Diplomacy.
Maurits A. Ebben and Louis Sicking, eds.
Rulers and Elites 19. Leiden: Brill, 2020. x + 224 pp. \$119.

The purpose of this book is to examine the role of non-state agents in early modern and medieval diplomacy. The editors admit that such an approach in an age before nation-states and standard diplomacy can be considered anachronistic. Nevertheless, the book has much to contribute to both the history of the state and diplomacy. The essays situate themselves in the tradition of the new diplomatic history of recent decades that has focused on the nature and culture of diplomatic practice—the networks, institutions, rhetorical strategies, identities, personal interests, and cultural exchanges that underlay the negotiations between political systems. Although the title does not indicate this, it is worth noting that all essays focus on European agents.

The first chapter, by John Watkins, examines the historiography of diplomacy in recent decades in the context of international relations. He suggests that early modern historians switch from looking at diplomacy as an institution to diplomacy as a behavior