

The Renaissance Reform of the Book and Britain: The English Quattrocento.

David Rundle.

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Scholars have long been dissatisfied with the traditional account of the early reception of Quattrocento humanism in the British Isles. For all their pioneering labors at the parchment face, the classic authorities carried with them too rigid a definition of Renaissance values, which caused them to misunderstand, and sometimes simply to miss, the books and original compositions of fifteenth-century Britons. Their detachment of Britain from the Continental mainstream, and their apparent *de haut en bas* disdain for the traces of a learned culture they had found, has been challenged on many different grounds. England and Scotland have been shown to have maintained European networks as active as any others as channels for cultural exchange. The patronage of their princes and prelates, its commissioning power and consumption, was comparable in its cultural impact to those of Italy, France, and Flanders, even if its cash value was never in their league. The prodigious output and originality of their vernacular voices has also been revealed.

Now, David Rundle urges a material turn in the argument; or, rather, a return, since it was the manuscript witnesses that first informed the cultural profile of late medieval Britain. Drawing on two decades' pursuit of British books, and applying the cataloger's painstaking attention to the complete codex, he offers fresh testimony to an engagement with Italian novelties. His focus is the vehicle their originators created to convey them to the world, the *littera antiqua*. His contention is not only that traces of the script signal Britain's interest in the *studia humanitatis* but also that it captures, perhaps more expressively than other evidence, the true character of a relationship that was not merely imitative but assimilative.

Rundle's opening is less a revision and more a refinement of the traditional view. The script of the humanists entered Britain in the second quarter of the fifteenth century with expatriate Italians recruited by the prominent secular and clerical patrons. Rundle's roll-call is familiar: Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester; William Gray, bishop of Ely; and John Whethamstede, Benedictine abbot of St. Albans, lead the consumers; Poggio Bracciolini, Tito Livio Frulovisi, and Piero del Monte were among the creatives. Yet he casts light on a handful left in the shadows, such as the prior of Malvern (Worc.) for whom the Milanese Stefano Surrigione wrote, and focuses clearly on del Monte's personal network of foreigners as another stimulus for scribal practice in the humanist style. A "roster of scribes" (65) was put to work by the papal collector in England, among them Dutchman Petrus Lomer, an adept and adaptive writer, capable in *littera antiqua* but inclined also to frame its forms with the Gothic lingua franca of local books.

It was the English output of these expatriates that brought about the first insular practitioners of the script. Reception was driven forward less by patrons than by the

“potency of books” (76) themselves. Manuscripts penned in the thirties and forties formed a common fund of inspiration for the rising generation of clerks. By midcentury some also encountered the script at source as the reinvigorated Roman Curia generated career opportunities. Rundle reconstructs the scribal career of Scot, George of Kynninmonth, who served in the household of Pius II, although he places greater emphasis on the output of his countryman, Robert Pringil, whose script suggests a response to humanism on strictly British terms.

The continuing conversation with the Italian script was assured by a second and subsequent wave of foreign visitors. Rundle considers the careers of two Dutchmen whose names are already well known to the field: Theodoric Werken, arriving in 1449, and Pieter Meghen, whose hand supplied the last Tudor generation of manuscript patrons. Their careers, Rundle suggests, reveal a key feature of the era’s cosmopolitanism: their works were not souvenirs of another culture. Kept in institutional libraries, they catalyzed insular innovation. This extended to experimentation in cursive forms, led by clerks in government service; they were also drawn to Rome, and Rundle sees their scribal development in the registers of the English hospices. A chapter on John Tiptoft is acknowledged as a diversion, and is an intimation that Rundle cannot quite detach himself from the classic authorities, which accorded Worcester, the Yorkist “butcher,” a starring role. Rundle’s rationale is that Tiptoft’s cultural patronage further clarifies British cosmopolitanism. It was not an adornment to a public career but a part of its armory, to guide him “to thynke what oure estate publique shal be” (219).

This book is a lively challenge to the lingering view of Britain’s limited Renaissance, and a sharp reminder to notice the nuances of reception, the capacity of the receiver to carry as much agency as the matter received. It is a pity that reform, after the subtitle, passes out of sight; shadowy in the conclusion is the specter of its failure and the stark evidence that continuity prevailed. Given that it carries the reader to the eve of the Henrician Reformation, this implicit insight might have called for more.

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The Ties That Bind: Siblings, Family, and Society in Early Modern England.

Bernard Capp.

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We have come to expect a great deal from any work by Bernard Capp, and his most recent book, *The Ties That Bind*, does not disappoint. Family is such an important part of understanding the history of early modern England, and there has been much important scholarship done on the subject. But much of it centers on the relationships between husbands and wives, and parents and children. Capp’s new study is a