

of the office of sheriff, rather than of the sheriff himself. As McGovern shows repeatedly, many of the sheriff's duties were discharged by undersheriffs, bailiffs, and jailers. One reason some sought to avoid being pricked must have been that the sheriff was liable for much that lay outside his direct control. In the courts over which he notionally presided, the sheriff usually delegated to legally qualified deputies. The second reflection on the title concerns the name "Tudor." More perhaps than most current scholars, McGovern inclines to the realist, rather than to the nominalist, position. The "Tudor sheriff" is conceived as a distinct entity. In a comment redolent of Geoffrey Elton, McGovern contrasts the efficiency of Tudor government with what he sees as the vitiation of early Stuart government (8). That the sixteenth-century sheriff differed greatly from his forebears or successors may be doubted, at least in respect of England. (McGovern acknowledges the expansion of the shrievalty across Wales in the 1530s and its role in the contested government of Ireland, but his focus is England.) The conclusion identifies changes to the office over the sixteenth century. Few of these developments seem momentous; most were procedural. McGovern singles out the partition of eight joint shrievalties in Elizabeth's reign; even with this reform, however, the consequences are difficult to discern. Continuity seems stronger than change. Nevertheless, McGovern establishes convincingly his central contention that "the shrievalty was alive and well in the Tudor period" (220).

McGovern makes the case for administrative history also by commenting on the missteps (as he sees them) of recent historical writing on early modern Britain. These can be summarized as an emphasis on the interpersonal at the expense of the institutional (embodied in the term *faction*); reliance on specious terms that skew scholarly agendas (such as *monarchical republic*); a tendency to imbue ordinary people with an anachronistic sense of class; and a preference for obfuscatory terms from the social sciences (such as *agency* and *negotiation*) over contemporaries' understanding of what they were doing. These salutary views are stated with some courage. (It is a brave historian who describes Elton's reactionary *Return to Essentials: Some Reflections on the Present State of Historical Study* [1991] as "an underappreciated polemic" [13]) McGovern's research into the office of sheriff may not prove or disprove every contention that he makes. The shrieval system could have been "generally fair and functional" (222). Yet faction and abuse of power were not generally present or absent, but rather situationally and locally so. Ordinary people possibly did feel this system to be supportive, rather than oppressive; yet the evidence examined here is not of the kind that would inform us one way or the other. In McGovern's trenchant commentary, industrious research, and explanatory clarity, *The Tudor Sheriff* is an Eltonian book. For McGovern, if not for all historians of the period, that would seem an unqualified compliment.

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JEANNE NUECHTERLEIN. *Hans Holbein: The Artist in a Changing World*. Renaissance Lives. London: Reaktion Press, 2020. Pp. 288. \$22.50 (cloth).
doi: 10.1017/jbr.2023.92

In the wake of the wonderful exhibition of Hans Holbein the Younger's portraiture at the Getty Research Institute and the Morgan Library & Museum in 2021, new admirers of the artist and long-term fans alike will be pleased to find an affordable new biography of the artist, most famous to readers of this journal as a court artist to Henry VIII. Jeanne Nuechterlein's contribution to Reaktion Press's wonderful Renaissance Lives series, *Hans Holbein: The Artist in a Changing World*, is a thorough account of the many facets of Holbein's oeuvre (to be

transparent: this reviewer is also participating in the series, writing on Lucas Cranach the Elder). In its breadth of coverage, Nuechterlein's book is one of the most robust offerings in the series.

Each of the five chapters consists largely of chains of close readings of paintings, prints, and drawings along a given theme. Nuechterlein's readings are extraordinarily meticulous in her attention to detail, leaving no cranny unswept. Commendably, this meticulousness extends well beyond Holbein's major works, or even his works in the media mentioned above: Nuechterlein addresses, for example, metalcut illustration cycles, a design for a metalwork cup, and a hitherto relatively obscure small watercolor fragment depicting a ship. To these, she applies an intensity of attention one might expect would be due mostly to altarpieces or high-end portraiture.

Nuechterlein's thoroughness produces unexpected delights. For example, the watercolor of the ship occasions a fascinating excursus into ship construction practices of the time. This excursus includes a rumination, removed from Holbein's known interests, on the ships used in what Nuechterlein calls "voyages of discovery" (175). Here she is presumably referring to certain Europeans' fifteenth- and sixteenth-century travel to the Americas and elsewhere outside Europe, lands generally well populated and thus not truly discoverable; this phrase, excluding all but the European point of view, unfortunately resembles her previous comment about how much Asia "was then known" (154). Nevertheless, even more planetarily oriented enthusiasts of the early modern period will enjoy, as this reviewer often did, the detailed detours guided by Nuechterlein's confident command of broader history.

Rather than take a chronological approach to a figure who is, as Nuechterlein notes, far less well documented than is the typical major early modern artist, she proceeds according to themes that cross conceptual frameworks; she organizes some chapters around early modern key concepts like Reformation or observation, and others around patronage, for example. Prudently, in the book's first chapter, "Techniques, Materials, Skill," Nuechterlein lays the foundation for understanding Holbein's flexibility and virtuosity throughout the following chapters. This exhaustive analysis of Holbein's artistic process with a wide range of examples outside painting should prove eminently teachable for students whose entry to art history comes through an interest in making.

In the next chapter, "Education, Knowledge, Styles," Nuechterlein draws on her expertise in the context of Renaissance humanism, building on frameworks from her previous book on the artist, *Translating Nature into Art: Holbein, the Reformation, and Renaissance Rhetoric* (2011). The fluidity of authorship as print culture began to negotiate questions of intellectual property and the ease with which, as Nuechterlein observes, print designs could be reused for multiple projects feels very much in line with the kind of changeability and flexibility she identifies as Holbein's principal attribute, though she does not make this connection explicit. Similarly, rather than come to overly strong conclusions about Holbein's navigation of various styles, she usefully documents the many twists and turns of his stylistic choices.

In the third chapter, on "Religion, Reformation, Politics," Nuechterlein covers Holbein's work in service of the traditional visual culture of the Roman church and cautiously suggests evidence of potential expressions of reformist ideas in later religiously oriented works. (Some accounts of theological positions here may occasionally feel reductive or overstated to scholars of the Reformation, but will no doubt be helpful as general orientation for less specialist readers.) Though Nuechterlein is not one for wild speculation, this reviewer is grateful that she directly raises and answers the question of why Holbein, with all his experience and skill in the art of woodcut illustration, almost never participated in the crudity-flinging tropes of Reformation propaganda: he was probably too committed to the sensibility of a more sophisticated market to do so.

The range of subject matter presented in "Science, Observation, Manipulation," the fourth chapter, makes it the stand-out section of the book alongside the final chapter. Aside from the opening reference to the Americas, which again seemed superfluous to Holbein's ambit, in this

chapter Nuechterlein collects fascinating, often off-art examples that demonstrate her central thesis of Holbein's adaptability and versatility. Her analyses also reinforce her long-held conviction that Holbein's interest in observation of the natural world always came in service of artifice, of the artistic effects that so dazzled his wealthy patrons.

Much of the final chapter, "Patrons, Status, Court," serves as an excellent visual history of London's elite from the late 1520s onward. Full of insight into the many forms of portraiture commissioned from Holbein, from the highest royalty to the upper middle class of merchants, especially from London's Hanseatic community, this chapter will be a rich resource to scholars working on this period and the nonspecialist readers Nuechterlein seems to target with her straightforward writing style throughout.

Although there are occasionally questionable attributions left largely unquestioned (see, for example, pages 87 and 111), art history is, after all, more interesting when it is inclusive than when not. Nuechterlein's biography overall presents the most solid foundational text on Holbein yet, for readers both new to and familiar with the artist's work. Scholars of British art in particular will find this a helpful account of a changeable artist who left behind image-skeptic Reformed Basel to cultivate a new audience for impressive feats of mimesis as the great artificer of the English king.

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SCOTT OLDENBURG. *A Weaver-Poet and the Plague: Labor, Poverty, and the Household in Shakespeare's London*. Cultural Inquiries in English Literature, 1400–1700. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020. Pp. 275. \$99.95 (cloth).
doi: 10.1017/jbr.2023.93

William Muggins is not a household name. Among scholars and students of early modern English literature and culture, he is known, if at all, as the author of a brief plague epic, *London's Mourning Garment* (1603). But for Scott Oldenburg, Muggins's marginality and that of his text are precisely the point. Shifting from a single-minded focus on Muggins as a plague writer, in *A Weaver-Poet and the Plague: Labor, Poverty, and the Household in Shakespeare's London* Oldenburg creates a rich and engaging portrait of a silk-weaver by trade whose craft and labor literalize the notional kinship of weaving and writing. Pursuing a composite method, Oldenburg offers a microhistory that delves deeply into the archival traces of his subject—in parish registers, wills, lay subsidies, and records of the Worshipful Company of Weavers—while an expansive and sensitive literary criticism encompasses a wide variety of texts and genres, including Muggins's poem, to flesh out these archival details, bringing a compelling portrait of the weaver-poet to life. This method, furthermore, enables Oldenburg to capture the perspective, vulnerability, and empathy of those on the lower end of the middling sort. As he points out, "[t]he general poverty of many weavers coupled with . . . the way the craft of weaving lent itself to the production of poetry, meant that weavers were uniquely prepared to speak out about London's social problems" (46). Alongside the pain and pathos of loss the poem conveys is a call for compassion for laborers and the vulnerable poor: a call from below.

A substantial introductory chapter opens with the grim scene of the Muggins household in quarantine following the death of two apprentices who lived with the family—one a ten-year-old girl—and the death of Muggins's daughter, Elizabeth. Here, Oldenburg surmises, Muggins wrote his plague epic. The reader follows the text from composition to print with a degree of detail that typifies Oldenburg's microhistory and demonstrates his keen critical