

A Day at Home in Early Modern England: Material Culture and Domestic Life, 1500–1700. Tamara Hamling and Catherine Richardson.

New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017. 312 pp. \$75.

The new social history of the late twentieth century concerned itself with quantifiable phenomena: birth rates and marriage patterns, family size and structure, kinship, sociability, literacy, and the distribution of wealth. Its practitioners looked down on the old social history, sometimes disparaged as the history of pots and pans. This yielded in turn to an anthropologically inflected cultural history, which developed a holistic, critical, and interdisciplinary account of conditions in Tudor and Stuart England. Hamling and Richardson's attractive new book from Yale, with almost 180 illustrations, marks a further advance, combining fresh analysis of the material and domestic setting of everyday life—including pots and pans—with sophisticated readings of diaries, inventories, witness statements, sermons, and books of advice on conduct. The integration of archival, architectural, and textual material is one of its most effective features. The treatment is cautious, informative, and sometimes eye-opening, offering materialism without the dialectics.

Other studies have exposed the competitive consumption and luxurious accoutrements of noble and aristocratic households. Streams of visitors are drawn to ducal palaces and estates. This work expands the social horizon to illuminate the world of England's upper-middling classes, substantial yeomen, successful merchants, and minor gentry. It shows us their homes, floorplans, workrooms, interior spaces, furnishings, and beds. The color photographs are well produced and generously displayed. Some feature items recovered from archaeological digs—including broken pots and pans—while others offer fine examples of tables, chests, and equipment in museums or in continuing use. Important structures still stand, somewhat modified, in England's ancient market towns; others are reconstructed in places like the Weald and Downland Museum. Archival traces give access to several that have been demolished. Hamling and Richardson treat early modern dwellings as sites of daily interaction, even of domestic dramas, rather than as relics or exhibits. They show us godly households as well as sites of routine utility and arenas of acquisition and display. Especially revealing are the moral and didactic messages in texts painted on plaster, carved in wood, or embroidered in textiles, alongside other surviving decorations.

The authors structure their book by reference to the hours and business of the day and night. This allows them to go room by room, considering occupancy, activity, and equipage. They begin in the bedroom, with daybreak and rising, and end there, six chapters later, with nighttime retiring and preparation for death. We meet husbands and wives, servants and workers, engaged in their tasks of washing and dressing, cooking and eating, making and doing, and ordering and obeying. We learn about domestic boundaries, the security and penetrability of dwellings, the importance of thresholds and locks. Every item tells a story, about civility, authority, sociability, and power.

Reports of disputes and transgressions yield evidence of household dynamics, of where people were and what they were doing when a disruptive event occurred.

Eschewing art historical connoisseurship focused on fine objects, or archaeological fixation on fragments, the discussion here addresses themes of privacy, piety, status, comfort, labor, identity, and gendered experience. Change over time appears to have been more subtle than abrupt, with increased use of private sleeping places, the gradual broadening and proliferation of stairs, and greater diversification of goods. The judicious use of court records, and citation of other scholars' work, adds authority to the exposition. The authors are widely read in primary and secondary sources, and well served by their publisher in what could be a coffee-table book.

The concentration on domestic interiors risks an element of claustrophobia. Early modern days were spent outdoors as well as in the home, but exits from the house are barely acknowledged. This book provides a model for similar treatment of time spent in the street, in the alehouse, in the courthouse, at the market, and in church. The spatial turn in Renaissance studies is moving in the right direction.

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A Business of State: Commerce, Politics, and the Birth of the East India Company.
Rupali Mishra.

Harvard Historical Studies 188. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018. x + 412 pp. \$35.

A Business of State should come to serve as the new definitive political history of the East India Company's first thirty years. Mishra meticulously lays out the organizational structure of the company's system of governance in the first part of the book and shows that system in action in the second part. She divides the political apparatus of the company into five components, each granted its own chapter: the patent, the company courts, clientelistic networks of influence, internal political rivalries, and attempts to influence public opinion, or what might now be considered the public-relations side of the company.

There is a tremendous richness of detail laid out in these chapters. At their best, they give a multifaceted account of the lived experiences that created and were created by the institutional structures of the company and its relationship to the early modern state. At worst, they devolve into summary—as in the blow-by-blow synopsis of the public debate between Robert Kayll, Dudley Digges, and two (I assume) anonymous authors, Tobias Gentlemen and E. S. On the one hand, Mishra offers an enlightening account of the company deliberations that arose around these works and the prospect of publishing replies to criticism of the company. On the other hand, the detail accorded to these