

their meaning into an erotic sense. He studies the implications of this poem and of the allegorical narrative that follows. But he ignores the most familiar and popular sense of the allegory: “Life, Life, Eternal Life” is an exclamatory statement that signals conversion, for some the climax of the Christian life; and whatever follows are challenges to that life. In referring to his own study of *Early Modern Asceticism*, McGrath asserts that “self-denial in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* affirms this book’s argument about the nature of early modern asceticism” (143). This theme is indeed supported by the preceding chapters, but each one is fully independent of the others and unique, thus making the book into a kind of anthology.

The book is well presented, and almost free of typological error: but see page 144, line 3, where *mean* should read *means*. The huge number of notes occupies over forty pages, representing the heavy reliance on many sources. The bibliography is correspondingly full, combining both primary and secondary sources. Finally, this book, with some reservations, is a useful contribution to the theme of asceticism, and it features a number of original readings of important works.

Paula Hohfi Erichsen. *Artisans, Objects, and Everyday Life in Renaissance Italy. The Material Culture of the Middle Class*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020. 364 pp. + 114 Illus. \$153.86. Review by R. BURR LITCHFIELD, BROWN UNIVERSITY.

This is a well written, detailed, and profusely illustrated, discussion of middle class Italian Renaissance household possessions mainly at Siena, although there are examples from other parts of Italy, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the period largely before the Siena was conquered by Florence in 1555–57. The illustrations are striking. The author is a professor of the History of Art and Culture at Aalto University in Helsinki Finland. By middle class she means the class below patricians who had established surnames and coats of arms, and were habilitated for office in the *Monti* of the city government, but were above the large class of poor “*miserabili*” in the suburbs or countryside who had little or no wealth and do not appear in the tax books. Examples of middle class occupations include goldsmiths,

tailors, weavers, carpenters, second-hand clothes dealers, shoemakers, barbers, and musicians. The most numerous were in textiles or clothing trades. The middle class is not much studied by historians. Most families owned a house, part of a house, or a shop that was located toward the city center, and perhaps a garden outside of the city. The middle class is not much studied by historians. The sources used to assess fortunes are the city's tax and its post-mortem probate records. Household objects were a means for storing wealth and also served as symbols of family status. They were acquired through the city markets, as second hand goods from Jewish traders or other hawkers, and often by barter in exchange for debts. Dowries (there was a Sieneese dowry bank) and marriage ceremonies involved a conspicuous display and exchanges of goods, as were other significant moments of family history and could involve the entertainment of numerous guests. Houses had only a few rooms. Household furniture was important and set the tone of interiors. The bedroom had a big bed fitted with mattresses, pillows, sheets, quilts, coverlets, and linen chests (often elaborately painted). The kitchen with a large fireplace and sink, and the dining room with a folding table, were usually in the same place. There would be a sideboard (*credenza*) to display dishes, glass, plates, Venetian crystal, and cutlery—forks first appeared in this period. Painted birth trays were used to serve snacks. There might be a separate “*studiolo*” for business and accounting with small sculptures, paintings (mostly of the Virgin Mary) and prints bought from street peddlers. Some families concocted coats of arms. About one fourth of households had mirrors and one third of the inventories include at least one book—a book of hours usually, but occasionally Renaissance classics such as Ariosto or Castiglione. Books were likely read aloud. Only a third of men, and 12–15 percent of women could read. An appendix to this study lists in detail the items found in typical inventories.

But some objects are missing, or are not mentioned by the author. No timepieces are listed in the inventories: clocks, sundials, or hourglasses. This seems strange since such must have existed in sixteenth century Siena. For instance, an hourglass (“*clessidra*” in modern Italian) appears prominently in Ambrogio Lorenzetti's Allegory of Good Government fresco, from the 1330s, in the Siena Palazzo Pubblico. Perhaps the author did not recognize this timepiece from whatever it

was called back at that time. In sum, this is a useful book for anyone needing to identify objects in Renaissance literature or works of art. The author shows that conspicuous consumption was not limited to the upper classes at Siena. Instead members of the “middle class” with their precarious place below the patriciate and above the working poor used possessions to distinguish their dwelling places and thus advertise their social place and aspirations.

Alisha Rankin. *The Poison Trials: Wonder Drugs, Experiment, and the Battle for Authority in Renaissance Science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021. vi + 329 pp. \$35.00. Review by CELESTE CHAMBERLAND, ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY.

In an era during which novel experimental methods intersected with fears of political assassination, experiments known as poison trials, which centered on demonstrating the efficacy of acclaimed antidotes, gained widespread support from natural philosophers and their patrons throughout Europe. Emblematic of a growing frenzy for wonder drugs in the Renaissance, poison cures generated widespread interest not only for their purported ability to neutralize toxic substances, but also because they held the promise of curing a variety of fearsome illnesses and ailments. As *materia medica* from new lands increasingly made its way into Europe in the sixteenth century, interest in the untapped curative potential of such remedies grew and inspired great optimism in the promise of mysterious preparations like Caravita's Oil and Silesian *terra sigillata*. Closely tied to the expanding drug trade and the increasing influence of print culture, poison trials flourished in response to the growing demand for pharmaceutical panaceas that captivated the courts and markets of Europe.

In this sharp and engaging analysis of these fascinating yet widely overlooked experiments, Alisha Rankin persuasively demonstrates that the poison trials shed much light on the shifting definitions of medical ethics and the relationship between the marketplace and scientific authority in the Renaissance. By couching the trials in terms of public utility and intellectual enrichment rather than profit, physicians effectively reinforced their occupational prestige and gained the patronage