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Meg Lota Brown, Kari Boyd McBride. *Women's Roles in the Renaissance.* Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 2005. xxxviii + 335 pp. $59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-313-32210-5.

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Renaissance Roles for Women in the Holy Roman Empire

Meg Lota Brown and Kari Boyd McBride of the University of Arizona's English and Women's Studies Departments have undertaken a daunting task in their contribution to Greenwood Press's Women's Roles through History series. They have attempted to synthesize the research of the last decade on European women in the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries and make it accessible to "young scholars" (p. xv) or "students and the general public" (back cover). In the process, Brown and McBride have provided a generally readable, topically arranged survey that reproduces a rather Anglo-centric image of the period and the topic. Students of the early modern Holy Roman Empire can cull from this work references regarding individuals and obtain bibliographic orientation to much of the recent Anglophone scholarship on related topics; they should be aware, however, that the authors' strengths and specializations lay farther to the west. The disputed western reaches of the Empire in the Low Countries are comparatively well represented in the book, as are some of the borderland regions to the south on the Italian peninsula.

The structure of the book is apparently a standard one for the entire series. There are eight chapters and an introduction, with titles all beginning "Women and ..." Topics covered include "Women and Education," "Women and Work," "Women and Politics," "Women and Religion," "Women and Literature," "Women and the Arts," and "Women and Pleasures." (This last chapter contains particularly little about women in the Empire.) A twenty-page timeline, taken to some unknown extent from the website decades.com (p. xix, note) precedes the introduction. It begins in 1294 with Dante Alighieri's *La Vita Nuova* and ends in 1689 with the birth of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.

When discussing women and the Renaissance, a number of issues have to be addressed at the outset, and Brown and McBride do not fail to refer to the thorny nomenclature issue of "Renaissance" vs. "early modern" (p. 4), as well as to the always-cited essay by Joan Kelly Gadol which asked that immortal question, "did women have a Renaissance?" (p. 4, n. 1). While acknowledging that most scholars now characterize the period under discussion as "early modern" and do not believe that women (or indeed most people living in the period) had a Renaissance as traditionally defined, the authors justify using the term "Renaissance" because it "has a currency and familiarity to those even outside academia" (p. 4).

The book, especially at first, refers both to printed sources and to on-line source collections. At times the text obscures the specific author of cited secondary passages through the use of phrases such as "one scholar notes" (p. 178). Significant amounts of primary evidence are adduced through the often lengthy quotation of English sources or of English translations of non-English sources. These quotations should serve to provide the target audience with at least a taste of the written evidence being used to support the general conclusions so often made in the text.

Students wishing to understand more about the roles of women in early modern Eastern Orthodox, Muslim or even Uniate cultures should not turn to this book. Brown and McBride resolutely concentrate their attentions on the followers of Latin Christian and Jewish denominations, with more details provided concerning the former than the latter. A short section also touches on European interactions with the Amerindians (pp. 171-172). Much of what is written about the lives of the Ashkenazi Jewish women in the Empire is derived from the autobiographical writings of the woman who has become known as "Glückel of Hameln" (1646-1724) (see, for example, pp. 183-185).

Given the book's thematic structure, it should come as no surprise that it jumps around chronologically as well as geographically, and that some figures appear in various locations. For example, there are six separate references to Glückel of Hameln in the index, two more than

to the Holy Roman Empire. The Empire is only explicitly mentioned in the introduction and in the chapter on religion. Scholars may take exception to statements such as the definition of the Thirty Years War as "a horrific series of battles in central Europe among Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists that involved the leaders and peoples of the Holy Roman Empire ... against France, Germany, Denmark, and Sweden" (pp. 166-167). For those interested in a study of the Holy Roman Empire, the text is marred by a general usage of terms such as Germany, Italy, or even the Netherlands, a practice that obscures which parts of these places are being discussed, and how the specific places relate to the Empire. (Of course, this problem is in no way limited to the text currently under review.)

It is clear from the text that the authors' knowledge of imperial geography and history has limits. For example, the limited references to Bohemia are always explained as "what is now the Czech Republic" (for example, p. 164). This is a problem when someone such as the poet and translator Kata Szidónia Petröczi (or Katarina Sidónia Petröciová, mentioned in the text as "Petrczi,") is identified as coming from "what is now the Czech Republic." Yet it appears she actually came from Upper Hungary–a part of the historic Kingdom of St. Stephen and outside of the Empire's borders–in the area near today's Považská Bystrica, Slovakia (pp. xxxvii, 163-164). Also, the authors state that the Silesian astronomer Maria Cunitz (c. 1610-64) dedicated her 1650 work *Urania propitia* to Emperor Frederick III (pp. xxxiii, 218). But Emperor Frederick III was crowned in Aachen in 1442 and died in 1493. The dedication was actually to Emperor Ferdinand III, who had been crowned King of Bohemia in 1627 and ascended to the imperial throne in 1636. He died in 1657.

These relatively minor errors aside, Brown and McBride have provided students with an array of examples of creative and influential women who lived in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries within the (oft-obscure) boundaries of the Holy Roman Empire. These women include schoolteachers, engravers, poets, painters, and scholars from the Low Countries such as Anna Bijns, Geertruyd Roghman. Magdalena van de Passe, Clara Peeters, Levina Teerline, Maria von Oosterwyck, and Anna Maria van Schurman. They also include writers, religious visionaries, painters, and musicians from northern Italy such as Camilla Faà Gonzaga, Osanna Andreasi, Catarina de Ricci, Lucrezia Gonzaga da Gazuolo, Artemisia Gentileschi, and Francesca Caccini.

Within the territories where the majority of the population spoke German, the religious poetry of Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg, Freiin von Seisenegg, is mentioned by Brown and McBride, as are the political writings of Martha Salome von Belta and the scholarly achievements of Caritas Pirckheimer. The artist Maria Sibylla Merian and Martin Luther's collaborator Katharina von Bora also show up in the discussion, but the general impression with which one is left after reading about this collection of heroines, is that the German lands are less explored when it comes to English-language scholarship on the topic of "Women's Roles in the Renaissance." This is partly due to the orientation of much of the Anglophone scholarship on the German-speaking lands, which has concentrated on working women and social history. A survey such as the one currently under review integrates much of this work (see especially chapter 3, "Women and Work"), but it does not fit well with the attempt to find "great women" to stand next to the "great men" of history. This is obviously related to differences in fields: an art (or music) historian or theologian, a literary specialist, or a musicologist often looks to individuals; a social historian may look more to a class or group.

Brown and McBride have also provided a number of examples of powerful and important women in the Empire. These women's roles have been, to a large extent, political and conflict, in some ways, with the image of the "Renaissance" as tied to culture. For example, Countess Elizabeth of Nassau-Saarbruecken, while an important translator of French epic literature into German, was the ruler of an influential county while her son was a minor. Another Elizabeth, this one the third child of Elisabeth Stuart of Scotland and England, and her husband the Elector Palatine, lived for some time at the Elector of Brandenburg's court before becoming a correspondent with Rene Descartes, who dedicated his *Principis philosophie* (1644) to her. She became a prelate of the Empire with her election as Abbess of Herford in 1667.

Two of the most influential women mentioned in Brown and McBride's text are the Habsburg princesses Margaret and Mary of Habsburg. Margaret is an important figure in chapter 4, "Women and Politics," and Mary appears in chapter 7, "Women and the Arts," as the patroness of the painter Caterina van Hemessen. As regents of the Netherlands, both Margaret and her niece Mary played important roles in establishing spaces where female rule and achievements could be established. They were aided by the Habsburgs' tradition of relying on female as well as male family members to govern dynastic holdings. Other important Habsburg princesses such as Isabella Clara Eugenia, another ruler of the Netherlands, could have been similarly discussed, but were ex-

cluded from this volume. The Renaissance empresses, whether they were Habsburgs or Jagiellonians, from northern Italy, Iberia, or German-speaking imperial territories such as Braunschweig-Lüneberg, also exercised influence in various ways. Often, their particular multiple positions as queens (and electresses) of the important imperial territory of Bohemia influenced the ways these empresses' power was projected and the avenues through which it was exercised.

As an introduction to some of the themes relating to the study of the roles of women in the early modern period, particularly in western Europe, this work is to be recommended. The extensive bibliography of around 340 titles does provide the reader with many more references to works dealing with England than that island kingdom's role in early modern European history probably warrants (it must of course be remembered that both authors' academic affiliations are to a Department of English), but the titles listed relating to lands of the Holy Roman Empire where German was predominantly spoken (approximately one-tenth of the total) do provide a good overview of much of the Anglophone scholarship of the last decades dealing specifically with women.

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