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Review of Rundle, D., *The Renaissance Reform of the Book and Britain: The English Quattrocento* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. 362 pp. £75.00. ISBN: 9781107193437

A most welcome contribution to Renaissance palaeography, David Rundle's book lives up to its ambitious title – with the caveat that 'and Britain' is used as a shorthand for 'by Britons and in England' (273), without claiming that the reform was 'British': the Renaissance humanist reform of the book, Rundle argues, was truly cosmopolitan. The study therefore has implications far beyond the study of the Renaissance in England.

A brief introduction to palaeographical terms and principles precedes the main chapters, and will be helpful to make the book accessible to readers without palaeographical training, and a useful refresher for those with. Chapter 1 discusses the humanist campaign to 'reform', or 'renovate', the written page; in particular, the introduction of new scripts, and their relation to the humanists' intellectual agenda. Rundle makes a convincing case that rather than seeing the innovations as originally a purely Italian affair, in reality they were cosmopolitan from the outset, with participants from Germany, from the Low Countries, from England, as well as from Italy itself. In Chapter 2, Rundle describes the introduction of the *littera antiqua*, the humanists' new script (picking up many of its characteristics from the Caroline minuscule), into England; of particular interest is the description of a varied range of dynamics of transmission and the formation of a local tradition of writing, which included journeys to various locations on the continent (primarily Italy, but also Paris and Cologne), but also both imported books as well as locally produced prototypes from which English copyists learned. Chapter 3 treats the activities of British scribes in Italy, and is the somewhat narrow basis on which Rundle can claim the book to be about 'Britain', rather than more narrowly England: it includes discussion of 'Scotland's first humanist', George of Kynninmonth – whose fully formed humanist script is contrasted to the gothic hand (albeit with some humanist influences) of his compatriot Robert Pringil. Chapter 4, 'The Dutch Connexion', discusses the activities in England of two remarkable scribes from the Low Countries: Theoderic Werken and Pieter Meghen (in earlier chapters, Rundle also discusses Petrus Lomer as a 'Dutch' scribe, but I am unconvinced by the evidence for Lomer's origin – this little detail, however, does not in any way distract from Rundle's very impressive sleuthing about Lomer's manuscripts (65–71)). Through their work, we also encounter the first responses of producers of manuscripts to the introduction of print: Werken's final known manuscript was copied from a printed exemplar, but shows 'not a rejection of print but a respect for it' (140); Meghen, on the other hand, deliberately sought to contrast his manuscripts with print, answering print's commercial challenge to manuscript production with what Rundle describes as books serving 'codicological conspicuous consumption' (153); 'a print-influenced triumph over print' (164). Chapter 5, an 'interlude', deals with an early buyer and commissioner of books produced in the humanist style: John Tiptoft, earl of Worcester, presenting a case study how participation in the decidedly cosmopolitan humanist programme could be meant to serve patriotic ends. The chapter concludes with an appendix listing the manuscripts owned by Tiptoft – its striking placement between chapters, rather than at the end of the book, reminding the reader that this is a book about books before anything else. Whereas the previous chapters have focused on the development and impact of the *littera antiqua*, in chapter 6 Rundle discusses how likewise the humanist cursive, or italic, came to be used as diplomatic script. The book's conclusion, rather than merely drawing together the various arguments that run through the book, highlights the importance of the activities of 'fellow-travellers': the impact of Renaissance humanism outside the immediate circles of its movers and shakers, emphasizing that 'humanism was never "pure".' (290) I whole-heartedly endorse Rundle's argument that we should pay attention to the ways contemporaries read –or often misread– humanist innovations as they responded to them; rejected them, or adopted them and adapted them.

The figures and plates, of which there are seventy in this very richly illustrated book, are all well-chosen and beautifully reproduced. Considering the pertinence of the various samples of script to

the arguments and discussions, however, it would have aided the reader if references to the figures and plates had been provided in the text, rather than being relegated to the notes.

Some ambivalence persists throughout the book: while speaking of an ‘English Quattrocento’, Rundle is most convincing when rather than approaching Northern humanism as a distinct entity defined along national borders, he conceptualizes a cosmopolitan Renaissance, more accurately describing the development and propagation of humanist ideas and forms in the period. This in spite of the complication that, as Rundle notes, the palaeographer’s very tools –such as the term ‘italic’– can pose national distinctions as essential (279–80). It appears that our apparatus, informed by modern nationalisms, does not serve us well in our understanding and description of humanism’s cosmopolitanism. I, for example, am not certain whether Meghen’s self-identification as belonging to the ‘Teutonic nation’ counts against an identity as a Netherlander (121–2); to come to a closer determination we would need to interrogate his conception of markers such as ‘Diets’, for which we lack surviving evidence. Fundamentally, the challenge is for us to become aware when (meaning not just on the basis of which evidence, but more particularly in which contexts) we call historical individuals who lived cosmopolitan lives nevertheless by a national identity. Thus, for example, for Werken, Meghen, Erasmus: when do we bring up their Dutchness, and when don’t we? Was the ‘Dutch Connexion’ really a connection to the Netherlands, or is what Rundle describes in fact a series of disjointed anecdotes of lives of individuals who happened to have originated in what we call the Netherlands? Was there, as Rundle calls it, ‘a Low Countries diaspora’ (170), or did these men’s cosmopolitanism occupy the place of their sense of patria? A related question, though pushing in the opposite direction, is whether attendance at the universities of Louvain and Cologne –the nearest two available– can really be described as ‘emigration’ (170) for men from, e.g., Brabant and Holland. In the case of John Tiptoft, Rundle makes the case that his ‘route to being English lay in travelling abroad: the true patriot must be a cosmopolitan.’ (213) It appears to me that in the case of the Dutch scribes Rundle discusses –as, in his own way, to Erasmus– the opposite was true: in order to be cosmopolitan, they let go of their patriotism.

Similarly, Rundle rightly asserts that the real achievement of Renaissance humanism was not one of replacement, but one of cohabitation (11, 70), the code-switching between different scripts that various scribes were able to execute, which Rundle compares to multilingualism (141). It is here that I felt Rundle’s arguments have great potential to be extended to the introduction of print into England: for example, what did it mean for Caxton to opt for letter shapes based on Burgundian (and thus, Yorkist) court models first, and further, how does the radical humanist cohabitation of letter shapes on the page complicate views of later uses of blackletter as ‘nostalgic’? Several such questions will no doubt be addressed in the book Rundle is planning next, *England and the Identity of Italian Renaissance Humanism*, which promises to be a welcome second part of a diptych with the current book. I suspect the second book will also be an occasion for Rundle to shine his light on Humfrey, duke of Gloucester’s apparently crucial role nurturing humanist activity in England; I thought it odd to see two occasions where Humfrey was the recipient of documents in humanist script described here as ‘isolated incident[s]’ (232) – surely, that each were addressed to the Duke *is* a connecting factor.

Was what Rundle describes really a reform of the *book*, or more specifically a reform of the *page*? The reforms listed (27-9) describe an aesthetic ideal including script, illustration, abbreviations, orthography; even the material reforms –the nature of the parchment used, dry-point ruling, marking of quires– are all strictly limited to the page; once closed, the codex remained the codex. This may seem mere semantics, and with a book as full in wealth of detail as this, it is always possible to find something to nit-pick over, but in fact, the choice for ‘the Book’ in the title appears to undersell what is perhaps the work’s most important and convincing argument: David Rundle’s *Renaissance Reform of the Book and Britain* is a truly exemplary study putting forth an impassioned and persuasive case that the import of palaeographical study, i.e., the study of handwriting, can extend far beyond the page.