

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Hohti Erichsen, Paula. Artisans, Objects, and Everyday Life in Renaissance Italy: The Material Culture of the Middling Class

Johanna Sinclair

Volume 44, numéro 3, été 2021

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1085852ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i3.38026>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Sinclair, J. (2021). Compte rendu de [Hohti Erichsen, Paula. Artisans, Objects, and Everyday Life in Renaissance Italy: The Material Culture of the Middling Class]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 44(3), 291–293. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i3.38026>

© Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2022

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

éerudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

members which they considered warranted by scripture. But the Puritans were not separatists: it is central to Hall's argument that Puritans believed in a visible, institutional church rather than independent congregations as the means to re-make their society along godly lines. Hall's admiration for the degree of democratic representation found in early New England is clear, as is his admiration for their separation of secular and religious authority. But the franchise in Massachusetts was restricted to freemen, and freemen had to be church members; church membership depended on giving an account of one's assurance of faith: the practical divinity had political, practical implications, and so the "two kingdoms" were entangled here too. Hall ends his narrative in 1662, with the ejection of non-conforming ministers from the Church of England; the "puritan movement" within the church gave way to separate denominations outside the state church. Unfortunately, this means that the "half-way covenant" controversy in New England falls outside the scope of this study and receives only a few pages of consideration.

Hall's prose is uncluttered, and he relates this history with a clarity of exposition that few scholars could equal. This makes *The Puritans* an invaluable help to any scholar of early modern history. But more importantly, the insights that it offers by drawing the transatlantic strands of Puritanism together will continue to enrich the debate about what Puritanism means.

MARY MORRISSEY

University of Reading

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i3.38025>

**Hohti Erichsen, Paula.**

***Artisans, Objects, and Everyday Life in Renaissance Italy: The Material Culture of the Middling Class.***

Visual and Material Culture, 1300–1700. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020. Pp. 364. ISBN 978-9-4637-2262-9 (hardcover) €119.

This book is derived from Hohti Erichsen's PhD dissertation; over the twenty years she has been preparing it, the subfield of material cultural studies has blossomed, not only expanding the quantity and variety of sources available for scholars but also introducing depth to economic, cultural, and social

history. Evelyn Welch (Hohti Erichsen's doctoral supervisor), John Styles, and Lisa Jardine among others have explored the role objects, fashion, and materials played in early modern European society, showing that "conspicuous consumption" was an important feature of Renaissance culture. However, the question remained how far this reached through the classes, and whether common people even had a material Renaissance.

Hohti Erichsen's study persuasively argues that, yes, artisans and shopkeepers also understood and participated in this Renaissance practice. Over nine chapters that progressively build on each other, she examines the lives of tradespeople in sixteenth-century Siena, through inventories, dowry records, wills, and taxes. The first half is primarily social and economic history, describing the geographic and financial lives of these tradespeople, their diversity, how they intersected with each other and other classes, and how and where they earned their incomes. The author shows that they were often more stable than the historiography has suggested, with high rates of property ownership as well as consumer goods, even if many earned barely subsistence incomes.

In the second half of the book, she argues that even those with low and unreliable earnings were able to acquire objects beyond just the basics of utility. Using a variety of means—inheritance, dowries, barter, second-hand markets, credit, and pawning—artisans could obtain possessions of beauty, economic worth, and symbolic value. While they were rarely as elaborately decorated or finely made as elites' goods, they were often made to a high standard, and showed similar patterns of use and display. Building on others' scholarship on credit, she suggests that deposits of goods were likely more common than cash transactions. Using the inventories alongside sales records and valuations, Hohti Erichsen also shows how pawnbroking and security-based credit allowed many artisans to build more wealth than they earned from their trade. The resale of these surety goods by both the state-sanctioned and private pawnbrokers allowed for more household possessions, and even luxury items, to be bought by tradesmen and shopkeepers at a fraction of the original cost.

Hohti Erichsen argues that artisans used these effects in similar ways to the affluent classes: building and passing on wealth between generations; decorating their homes with art and furnishings featuring classical allusions and coats of arms (surprisingly, since most artisans didn't even have last names, as is addressed in another interesting section); even displaying them in the

semi-public spaces of their homes as a way of showing their own status, honour, and wealth. In the final chapter, the author argues that the exhibition and use of these possessions even facilitated social climbing, although this is not sufficiently evidenced. Nevertheless, in examining their material lives, Hohti Erichsen presents a more nuanced and enlightened picture of this class than has been previously understood. Using case studies and other anecdotes from the archives, she demonstrates that there was a hierarchy of wealth and status within the class, who even at subsistence levels were able to acquire significant quantities of goods. Her work also allows for a greater understanding of the use of spaces within the home, for entertaining and negotiations, as well as daily living.

Part of AUP's series on early modern visual and material culture, this volume includes 114 large, full-colour images. However, they are rarely more than illustrative, and little analysis of the paintings or items pictured is included; they are not used as sources themselves, and only mentioned in passing in the text. Hohti Erichsen makes a point, fleshes it out using archival examples, and then adds visual representation: e.g., a discussion of the use of credenzas as central to the display of possessions is followed by lists of the luxury goods so displayed in two featured tradesmen's homes, and is then accompanied by details from unrelated paintings showing *credenze* displaying dishware (ch. 9). These images are often unrelated to either Siena or to the artisan class, and range from ca. 1300 to 1600 (likely due to the limitations in extant material). Their link to the study is tenuous, but on the other hand, this suggests similarity with other cities and periods, allowing some extrapolation of Hohti Erichsen's thesis to the rest of Italy and Western Europe more broadly. There are a couple of minor errors: a photo of bobbin lace (65) is not the one mentioned in the text; Joanne Ferraro is referred to as Joan (144); and there are a few typos (e.g., 92, 202). Otherwise, this is a well-structured and laid-out monograph that will benefit future studies into Renaissance social history. In particular, the quantitative work on possessions throughout the book, reproductions of several documents, and the nine inventories meticulously transcribed in the appendices will be very useful for other scholars.

JOHANNA SINCLAIR

Jesus College, University of Oxford

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i3.38026>