connect to history. Smith says the “sensory recreation of the past” may produce “an ahistorical understanding of the senses” that “tells us more about our modern conceits and attitudes towards consumption and the ‘use’ of the past than it does about how people — and not ‘us’ — experienced and attached meaning to sensory world” (p. 117). Yet, doesn’t history reveal much about the historian anyway? Also, will historians agree with Smith that some ways of engaging with the past are more authentic than others? His argument does raise important questions about historical methods and goals concerning artefacts. For example, how do museums charged with sharing knowledge about the historical significance of art approximate or otherwise convey information attuned to intersensorial dimensions of seeing and looking? How do they calibrate this with preserving fragile works of art and addressing visitors’ desires to know the past through embodied types of experience?

Sensing the Past unintentionally raises additional interesting questions about the work of the historian that will hopefully inspire Smith to continue publishing on sense history. His book’s lack of pictures is one example. Would they have undercut or aided Smith’s efforts to rectify claims that vision predominates in modern culture? Smith acknowledges that “structurally the book replicates the traditional sensory hierarchy”; however, he says “it does not reinscribe or empower that hierarchy” (p. 17). Can this be avoided? Also, what does his replication of a sensory hierarchy reveal about the complexities of putting his arguments into practice? Finally, “at the point where historical sources stop,” Smith is wary of “using our imaginations to capture and recreate tastes” (p. 125). How do historians use their senses imaginatively? How do they imagine they use their senses?

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At first glance, the book under review may seem to cover a wide range of historical issues. Power, Gender and Ritual in Europe and the Americas is a collection of short essays in Richard Trexler’s honour written by a variety of scholars indebted to him. Richard C. Trexler (1932-2007) was a prolific and a remarkable historian over the past decades. His interests ranged widely from Renaissance Italy to colonial America, from ritual to gender. His influence has been considerable, and it is remarkably well illustrated in this book. Seventeen scholars propose short essays that demonstrate the impact of Trexler’s scholarship on Renaissance studies and even beyond. Articulated around four proportionally unequal parts reflecting Trexler’s career, this volume is directed at Renaissance
specialists and non-specialists, but also at social historians.

The first part of the book, and almost half of it (eight essays), is devoted to Renaissance Italy and deals with Trexler’s favourite subjects: rituals, sexuality, and public life. The authors offer a meaningful journey into Renaissance Italy and more precisely into Florence. There, Michael Rocke’s fantastic essay about male prostitution deals with the culture of sexuality and gender, and the attitudes of older men toward young male prostitutes. Thanks to a rich sample of sodomy reports to the Florentine Office of the Night, this contribution slightly repeats what Rocke has published elsewhere, but remains nonetheless a major contribution to the history of sexuality and sexual rituals. Among these eight contributions, the piece by Christiane Klapisch-Zuber is perhaps the most remarkable. She seeks to understand the world of Florentine prisons in the fourteenth century, giving a powerful insight into this world by tracking down one prisoner, Neri di Messer Giamozzo Cavalcanti, “a delinquent kid from a powerful magnate lineage” (p.97). Through his story, Klapisch-Zuber examines the functioning of justice, the meaning of class, power, and the very contemporary topic of sex in prison. She argues that the social division of society was transposed in prison. Overall, this part appears mostly as a journey into Renaissance Florence, and the reader might find the focus on this particular city a bit too restrictive. It would have been nice to see Trexler’s scholarly influence on scholars studying other places.

The second part is devoted to political and religious rituals. In a particularly well-written essay, Peter Arnade studies the sack and sieges of cities in the Netherlands by Spanish armies during the Dutch revolt of the sixteenth century and particularly the meaning of rites of violence and their mechanisms. Building upon Trexler’s interest in warfare, Arnade aims to examine how violence was “registered, interpreted, memorialized, and put to historical use” (p. 169). He argues that civilian households were threatened by marauding soldiers and were, in fact, their main target. Soldiers pillaged and extorted money from the citizens, massacred male heads of the households, and raped women with such violence that contemporary testimonies used horrified epithets to describe it. This essay is an important contribution to the history of violence. In a particularly well-articulated essay about religious ritual, Joelle Rollo-Koster deals also with violence but focuses on the pillages that occurred during papal elections and the period of the sede vacante. She argues that there were two different phases of pillaging, both of which look like a form of celebration. The first referred to the early medieval sacking of the dead pope’s residence whereas the second referred to the late medieval period, when the popolo sacked the newly elected pope’s house (and/or the cardinals who were suspected of having elected him) as a means of interference in the election. She notes that the turning point between the two types of pillaging was the creation of the conclave in the thirteenth century, which did not allow the popolo to influence the election anymore. Kollo-Roster also remarks that the creation of the conclave certainly altered the universal conception of Christian election and that the meaning of popular participation in religious matters as the “Christian people’s lost its voice” in this process (p. 238).
The next part deals with gender and collective representation in the Americas and offers three essays about the early colonial period, Trexler’s latest interest. Cecelia Klein and Pete Sigal both propose to examine the rituals of sacrifice and, more specifically, the significance of the androgynous character of the victim. As these two essays seem to be very close topically, many repetitions occur, and both authors defend the same thesis, which is that sacrifice ritual, gender, and sexuality were intrinsically linked. The third essay, written by Louise Burkhart, deals with humor and theatre in colonial Mexico. The author explores how the world of missionary theatre reflected the balance of power in Mexico between the Spaniards and the natives. She argues that the missionaries never fully controlled their message in dramas, as alternative and subversive meanings and interpretations could take place.

The fourth and last part of the book is the shortest and most surprising, for it focuses on nationalism and historiography in the modern world and has little to do with the other parts. In a fascinating essay, Anthony Mohlo makes parallels with the career of Trexler himself, who received his PhD from Frankfurt am Main in Germany. Mohlo examines the role that the United States played during World War II for the immigration of European scholars — especially Jewish — working on the field of the Renaissance in the United States. Through significant examples, Mohlo shows notably the gap between two teaching and researching traditions. He also states that the United States was in need of a new dynamic in this field and that both foreign and American scholars benefited from the collaboration and the arrival of those specialists to America.

Overall, the book is full of information and insights. However, the diversity of its essays makes it difficult for the reader to identify unifying themes and logics. The parts seem connected only by Texler’s own diverse and disparate interests. Moreover, some articles are aimed at specialists and are very specific, while others seem more accessible and target a wider audience. Nevertheless, for those who are familiar with Trexler’s career, this anthology reflects his influence. The quality of the contributions and their high level of scholarship make this volume a significant collection of essays and a hugely informative book.

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Alejandro de la Fuente’s study of Havana in the sixteenth century is a welcome addition to the bookshelves of scholars of the early Atlantic. The author’s concentration on the Iberian Atlantic in a field that continues to be dominated by