

*A Day at Home in Early Modern England: Material Culture and Domestic Life, 1500-1700*, by Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson (New Haven and London: Yale U.P., 2017; pp. vi +311. £40).

In this lavishly illustrated book – with 178 illustrations, many in colour – Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson use the conceit of a day and all its activities to illuminate the material culture of the middling sort in early modern England. An interdisciplinary team, they use a wide range of sources, from the buildings and images used in the history of art and architecture, to inventories, wills, household manuals, diaries and account books. The result richly demonstrates the benefits of such interdisciplinary collaboration.

Hamling and Richardson proceed through the day in six chapters whose titles show the richness of their analysis: ‘At the Sun Rising’, ‘Going Abroad’, ‘Dinner Matters’, ‘Everyone to his Calling’, ‘When the candles or Lampes be Light’, and finally ‘The Sleepe of Death, the Bed of my Grave’. Each of the chapters engages both with the physical structure of houses and their relation to the environment, the material contents of houses – furniture, tools, clothing – as well as the substance of daily activities. In each chapter, a particular issue or aspect of material culture provides a focus, linking the themes of the book. For example, the discussion of family devotions in chapter 1 is linked to the presence of biblical texts on wall paintings in surviving houses and records; chapter 3 links dining to the spaces where it took place and their decoration, as well as the way marriage constituted a critical moment in the accumulation of goods. The integration of work in household spaces is explored in chapter 4, while leisure and recreation become a focus of chapter 5. Chapter 6 offers a lengthy exploration of the links between sleep and death, and tender beds and coffins. Furthermore, some sites and people appear

throughout the book. Thus we encounter the house of Thomas Arden of Faversham in chapter 1 to illustrate a particular shape of house and in chapter 3 to illustrate the re-use of monastic buildings; in Chapter 5, the play *Arden of Faversham* is used to illuminate the early evening hours of leisure and the spatial arrangements within which they take place, and includes images of both Arden's house and a woodcut depicting his murder. Then in Chapter 6, the play is used again to depict the normal tasks at the very end of the day. These choices create a rich set of internal links, and ensure that aspects of daily life that are not strictly tied to one time of day (work, religion, eating) are situated both in space and in a cultural world.

Hamling and Richardson are explicitly writing about the middling sort. This focus simultaneously provides coherence and reflects the surviving sources: the rich combination of sources they use is not available for the lower orders. Their discussion shows, however, that the middling sort were not isolated. The boundaries of middling sort houses were porous, with servants and labourers from "lower" classes as residents or workers in them, and a wide range of people coming to the businesses of the middling sort to purchase or sell goods; in addition, as *Arden of Faversham* demonstrates, middling sort leisure often included those lower on the social scale. They also distinguish between urban and rural middling sort households, which include similar ranges of goods but function in different contexts. The book therefore illuminates a broad range of middling lives, and illuminates the social order of early modern England.

The integration of art and architecture, and the rich visual record that Hamling and Richardson discuss, makes a major contribution to our understanding of middling sort lives, complementing existing studies of material culture based exclusively on written sources. While the authors are attentive to gender

differences in the use of space, they have little to say about the material culture of birth, an event that was of at least as much significance in the household as death; from the pre-reformation beads and girdles that offered fertility to the later collections of childbirth linens, women collected and passed these goods on to each other. Furthermore, the documentary sources on which they rely largely begin in the second half of the sixteenth century, making less visible the links between the medieval and early modern that have recently been an increasingly rich area of investigation.

Such caveats are inevitable with a book of this scope and ambition. The work that Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson have done illuminates again the advantages both of deeply interdisciplinary scholarship, and scholarly collaboration. Their work is indispensable in helping us connect social history and visual culture. The link between visual and material objects and more conventional documentary sources, makes this an exceptionally revealing book.

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