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he was an active participant in the intellectual ferment of the fifth century B.C., which included (e.g.) Anaxagoras, Gorgias, and Hippocrates. This idea is not entirely new (e.g., Herodotus's familiarity with pre-Socratic ideas was long ago advocated by A. B. Lloyd in his *Commentary on Herodotus Book 2* [Brill, 1975], Vol. 1, Ch. 4.7), but such an argument has not hitherto been sustained over this range and depth. There is a suggestion that Herodotus saw himself as engaged in the same sort of project as the philosophers—in his case, to research mankind.

There are nine chapters. Chapter 1 outlines Herodotus's intellectual and cultural milieu. Chapter 2 discusses medical ethnography in the Hippocratics and Herodotus, noting the application of the idea of a grid of "hot-cold/wet-dry," which is more familiar from works on physics. Chapter 3 concerns geography, with special emphasis on the relation of Herodotus's *Histories* to the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places* and the issue of geographical determinism. Chapter 4 concerns cultural factors, which, it is argued, Herodotus portrays as stronger than physical factors in producing "national character." Chapter 5 continues and develops the argument from Chapter 1 that Herodotus's work was part of contemporary intellectual study of nature per se, with particular emphasis here on biology and the four-elements theory. Chapters 6–8 compare the style and substance of Herodotus's arguments with those of the Hippocratics and sophists and, to lesser extent, the pre-Socratics. Chapter 9 is an extended summary of the arguments. There are case studies throughout, some of which are viewed from multiple, slightly different angles.

The basic tenets of the argument are sound. Thomas stresses the fact that contemporary ideas on different topics could and did interact simultaneously in a vigorously oral culture. We need to drop the assumptions that all influences are written rather than oral and earlier rather than contemporary. That argument is an important one, and it can be extended. It has been shown since Thomas's book was published that there was widespread familiarity in "ordinary" Athenian society with contemporary scientific and philosophical ideas (see T. E. Rihll, "Teaching and Learning in Classical Athens," *Greece and Rome*, 2003, 50:168–190).

I confess that I found parts of the book slow, perhaps because I think some of the established alternative views with which Thomas engages are tiresome and not worth the effort. I certainly agree that the purely literary approach is nonsense and that priority chasing is misguided.

Herodotus in Context fits well into a devel-

oping view of the ancient world that finds a more central place for Greek science in Greek life in general and in literary authors in particular. It should stimulate more work in the field. Meanwhile, scholars of Greek literature might profitably examine the poetics of Greek scientists like Eratosthenes (on doubling the cube) and Archimedes (on the cattle problem). Science and Art was a two-way street in antiquity.

T. E. RIHLL

■ Middle Ages and Renaissance

Rudolph Agricola. *Letters*. Edited and translated by **Adrie van der Laan** and **Fokke Akkerman**. (Neo-Latin Texts and Translations: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 216.) x + 435 pp., illus., bibl., notes, indexes. Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 2002. €64.50 (cloth).

Rudolph Agricola is a crucial figure in the rise of humanism in the Low Countries. Born in Baflo, near Groningen, in 1444, he studied in Erfurt, Louvain, Pavia, and Ferrara and was appointed secretary to the city of Groningen after his return from Italy in 1479. He stayed there four years, refusing prestigious offers of positions abroad. In 1483 he finally accepted the offer of his friend, Bishop Johann von Dalberg, to come to Heidelberg, where he died in 1485, from an illness probably contracted on a trip to Rome.

Readers of *Isis* who are interested in the history of pedagogy and humanist dialectics will certainly have come across his name, for his great book, *De inventione dialectica* (finished in 1479 but not published until 1515), was the most influential textbook on argumentation and pedagogy of its time. The fame of this work has eclipsed Agricola's other writings, which consist of speeches, poems, some notes on Seneca, Cicero, and Boethius, a life of Petrarch, a few translations of Greek dialogues, and some fifty extant letters. It is not an extensive *oeuvre*, but its quality and variety show a highly talented writer dedicated to the cause of humanism, a worthy predecessor of his more famous compatriot Erasmus. Compared to Erasmus's surviving correspondence of over three thousand letters, the fifty-five letters presented here (including four addressed to Agricola) are very meager indeed. As Adrie van der Laan and Fokke Akkerman note in their introduction, Agricola—unlike Erasmus—was not a publicist; nonetheless, the letters testify eloquently to the man and his humanist aspirations.

Most of Agricola's letters are addressed to his humanist friends from the Low Countries and

Germany (Rudolf von Langen, Anton Vrye, Dietrich and Johann von Plieningen, Johann von Dalberg, Adolf Occo, Alexander Hegius, Johann Reuchlin, etc.). Even though he spent over ten years in Italy, there is only one letter to an Italian correspondent. (Records of promotions in Ferrara confirm that Agricola and his friends formed a close group of Dutch scholars there.) The letters tell of his journeys, discuss Latin and Greek literature and vocabulary, praise Italy for its learning, express his feelings of friendship toward addressees, and exhort friends to dedicate themselves to humanist studies. Among them is the famous tract “De formando studio,” on education and the organization of one’s studies. Ten letters are addressed to his half-brother Johannes Agricola, and these generally strike a more informal tone, dealing with personal and family matters as well as his more usual concerns. Though devout, Agricola does not raise religious matters in his letters, and philosophical reflections are scarce.

From these letters Agricola emerges as a sympathetic man, one who feels responsible to his family, his friends, and his employer—even when he had already decided to leave Groningen for Heidelberg. He is a keen observer of his own moods and character. Though they remain within the limits of the humanist epistolary genre and style, the letters often strike a personal touch and show remarkable psychological insight.

Though only one of these letters was unknown before this publication, this is the first time they have been brought together (from thirty-two different sources). They are edited meticulously, each letter being preceded by full information on its date and textual transmission. The English translation is very well done. The annotation is copious, focusing primarily on philological and historical aspects of the letters, especially Agricola’s style and allusions to ancient literature. This volume is a major contribution to the study of Northern humanism, in which Agricola—as a humanist and pedagogue—played such an important role.

LODI NAUTA

W. R. Laird. *The Unfinished Mechanics of Giuseppe Moletti: An Edition and English Translation of His Dialogue on Mechanics, 1576.* viii + 222 pp., illus., figs., app., bibl., index. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. \$55.

From a major expert comes an important edition and translation of a prime exemplar of the pseudo-Aristotelian mechanical tradition of the Renaissance. In his incomplete dialogue of 1576, intended in part for a courtly audience, Giuseppe

Moletti offered a semi-rigorous grounding of Aristotelian mechanics and a science of practical machinery. W. R. Laird gives modern readers ready entry into a significant alternate account of the nature of mathematics, mechanics, and mathematical practitioners to consider alongside the works of more canonical figures such as Galileo.

In Moletti’s dialogue, a princelike figure educates a nobleman on the dignity and utility of mechanics. In the broadest sense, mechanics is defined as the science of overcoming great forces with smaller ones: not just artillery and fortification, then, but also the optimal deployment of soldiers. The first day of the dialogue offers some geometrical foundations for the fundamental principle of Aristotelian mechanics: the farther something is from the center, the less the force required to move it in a circular motion. The incomplete second day turns to problems typically reserved to natural philosophy, most notably the cause of the acceleration of falling bodies.

Laird’s lucid and compact introduction briefly describes the Aristotelian, Archimedean, and Jordanian mechanical traditions. He considers how Moletti aims to justify mechanics as a science and not merely an art. Proving its fundamental principles through geometry in principle was to demonstrate its subordination to mathematics. Although the dialogue claims a certain rigor, Laird notes that many of its proofs involve “intuition and common sense” rather than strict Euclidian mathematical rigor. The introduction ends with a balanced comparison with Galileo. Like Galileo, Moletti was involved in both courtly and academic life. Unlike Galileo, Moletti little knew or understood the Archimedean traditions of statics. Despite his evident sense that mechanics can be applied to natural processes, he never envisioned mechanics as an independent, universal mathematical science of motion. Regrettably absent from the introduction, given Moletti’s concern to defend the epistemic and social status of mechanics, is more consideration and citation of recent literature discussing the connections between the social status of mathematical practitioners and the epistemological status of mathematical disciplines.

Laird’s rich annotations primarily identify sources; he usefully cites early modern Latin and Italian versions of Aristotle and other writers as well as giving citations to modern editions. For readers of modern Italian, he helpfully provides a short glossary of archaic vocabulary. Although the translation is on the whole quite fluid, a few choices are somewhat infelicitous. Laird translates “*arte fattiva*” as “factive art” and “*habito*