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**Anthony Hobson**, *Renaissance Book Collecting: Jean Grolier, Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, their Books and Bindings*. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1999. xix+275 pp. Appendices, notes, bibliography and index. \$125.00 U.S. (cl.). ISBN 0521651298.

Review by Charlotte C. Wells, University of Northern Iowa.

Former Sotheby's director Anthony Hobson here expands his 1991 Oxford Lyell Lectures to complete his trio of books on Renaissance books and bindings. He features the collections of two noted bibliophiles, the Frenchman Jean Grolier and his Spanish contemporary Diego Hurtado de Mendoza. The pair lived at the same time, early to mid-sixteenth century, and their lives ran in similar paths. Both caught the "bug" of Humanism during lengthy stays in Italy as young men, both spent vast sums on their books (Mendoza had to call on Charles V to pay off his debts to book sellers and binders), and both lost parts of their libraries to unreasonable hostility from their monarchs. Treating them in tandem could have provided the book with a graceful structure had Hobson not unbalanced it by adding a catalog of Mendoza's books and a lengthy chapter on Venetian book binders that is related only peripherally to his main topic.

Jean Grolier, though well-known in his own day as a patron and book lover, was otherwise a bureaucrat whose passage left few footprints on the sands of time. Hobson's treatment of him constitutes the first biography in English since 1907, doubtless why it spreads over three of the book's five chapters. Hobson has drawn details from a variety of sources to reconstitute a life whose outlines will seem curiously familiar to anyone versed in recent scholarship on the development of the robe nobility in early modern France. Grolier could almost have been constructed as a model of how social mobility worked in the sixteenth century.

Hobson has less to say about Mendoza, probably because he has merited several other modern scholarly treatments. The sketch here fails to satisfy the reader about anything beyond the bare bones of Mendoza's career. One question the author signally fails to address is how a Catholic Spanish grandee of the court of Charles V came to acquire and also, apparently, to read the works of Martin Luther and other Protestant reformers. On the other hand, we do learn a good deal about the parti-colored bindings in which he had those works encased.

Indeed, Hobson has directed this work towards the small and exclusive audience made up of people who understand the artistry of early book binding, and it is they who will be its most appropriate readers. He does not explain technical terms, such as "plaquette" binding, and assumes a thorough knowledge of early printing and binding on the part of the reader. Though he describes and illustrates many beautiful bindings, the reader is never told why connoisseurs like Grolier and Mendoza were willing to spend so

much to make their books beautiful objects—again, perhaps because Hobson assumes his reader already understands the Renaissance concept of magnificence. The chapter on Venetian bookbinders sits oddly with the stories of the two wealthy bibliophiles and is frustrating in that Hobson devotes much space to identifying the shops and works of various binders and very little to discussing exactly how they did what they did and why moderns should consider it art.

This is a beautiful book, handsomely printed and enriched with clear, detailed illustrations. Hobson's Mendoza catalog will be of service to scholars who want to examine the covers or the contents of Mendoza's books. But since Hobson does not take up the broader social and cultural questions addressed by those who practice the French style of *histoire du livre*, *Renaissance Book Collecting* is not essential reading for scholars of the Renaissance or early modern French history. The price of \$125.00 U.S. makes it prohibitively expensive for individual purchase, and I would not recommend it to any but the largest libraries with strong rare book collections.

But if your library should happen to be such a one, the Grolier biography is worth a look. Grolier interested me as an excellent example both of the way Italian humanism took root in France and of the development of the noblesse de la robe. His story will provide a lively lecture the next time I do an undergraduate course in Renaissance history.

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