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Peter N. Miller, *Peiresc's Europe: Learning and Virtue in the Seventeenth Century*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000. xvi + 234 pp. Figures, illustrations, notes, and index. \$40.00 US (cl). ISBN 0-300-08252-5.

Review by Zachary S. Schiffman, Northeastern Illinois University.

"For a long time I had no permanent employment." Thus begins Peter N. Miller's luminous study, *Peiresc's Europe: Learning and Virtue in the Seventeenth Century*. This personal observation in the "Acknowledgments" serves to introduce the impressive list of fellowships and institutions that sustained him in his research, but it can also stand as prelude to one of the book's fundamental questions: "WHY be a scholar?" (p. 4). Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580-1637) lived his whole life in answer to this question, to such an extent that the virtues he personified subsequently became known as "the Peireskean virtues." Miller uses this conjunction of learning and virtue to highlight the culture of the Republic of Letters in the early seventeenth century--before Cartesianism split natural from moral philosophy, before the salons bent learning to the service of fashion, and before enlighteners politicized letters. We are so far removed IN TIME from the germinal moment of that international polity--and yet so ineffably shaped by it--that its nexus of values must be "excavated," to use Miller's resonant term. Surely the Peireskean virtues sustained Miller, too, in his solitary archaeological labors, which he undertook with few guarantees for the future.

Although one may trace the term *respublica literaria* back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries--Erasmus was especially fond of it--consensus holds that an international community of scholars began to form in late-sixteenth-century Europe, and that it came fully into its own by the early seventeenth century. Peiresc stands arguably at the center of this germinating movement. Of course, other members are much better known to us--Grotius springs to mind--and claims can be made for the centrality of figures such as Pierre-Daniel Huet. But Peiresc's own contemporaries hailed him (in various political metaphors) as the "pilot" at the helm of the ship of learning or as the "stomach" of this new body politic, transforming the nutrients provided by its members into the "juice and blood" that circulates throughout. Indeed, he seems ideally suited for this role, scion of an ancient and wealthy Provençal family, member of the Parlement of Aix, and protégé of the royal keeper of the seals and acclaimed neo-Stoic philosopher, Guillaume Du Vair. Aside from his money and connections, he also benefited from his position as a provincial parliamentarian, which provided him access to royal records while insulating him from court intrigues. Finally, he wrote a staggering amount--the Peiresc archive contains 100,000 pages of letters, memoranda, and notes (and this is just extant material)--but he published virtually nothing, thus binding himself to his community while standing largely aloof from its scholarly squabbles.

For Miller, the oblivion to which Peiresc was consigned a generation or so after his death is just as significant as the fame that attended his life. In this regard, Miller contributes to an emerging consensus that the Republic of Letters and the learning it stood for underwent a transformation around the mid-seventeenth century, after which its founding fathers came to appear pedantic, old-fashioned, and antiquarian. Miller seeks to free the latter term in particular from its modern, negative connotations by examining not the life of Peiresc (Miller expressly disavows writing a biography) but the nexus of values that informed that life and animated the Republic of Letters in its first incarnation. To this end he begins most appropriately with an analysis of Pierre Gassendi's biography of Peiresc, which went through five Latin editions between 1641 and 1656 before it was translated into English in 1657. Its English title, *The Mirrour of True Nobility and Gentility*, epitomizes the nexus of learning and virtue that Gassendi memorialized just as it was beginning to pass from the scene.

Miller emphasizes two noteworthy, interconnected aspects of Gassendi's life of Peiresc: (1) its idealization of this antiquarian scholar as a hero of the New Science, cast in a Baconian mold, and (2) its celebration of Peiresc as a model of learned sociability. Gassendi's Peiresc brought to the observation of nature the same eye for detail and close description that he evidenced in his antiquarian scholarship. Indeed, what for us are two vastly different realms were for Gassendi part of the same broadly scientific undertaking--"scientific" in the classical sense of aiming at certain, assured knowledge through careful, minute study. And one of the chief goals of this Herculean labor was to enable the scholar to attain a true estimate of himself as a mere speck in the vast ocean of being and, thereby, disdaining all that is petty and parochial, to achieve the sage-like tranquility of the Stoics. Intertwining this ideal was a cosmopolitan one of learned sociability that shaped not only the free, broad-minded exchange of ideas and information but also the practice of enlightening patronage, whereby Peiresc acted as sponsor for protégés all across Europe.

In his second chapter, "Constancy, Conversation, and Friendship," Miller undertakes an "archaeology" of the Peireskean virtue of learned sociability, showing how it framed early modern ideas about "civil society," taken in every sense of the term. Once again, Gassendi's biography serves as Miller's touchstone, from which he casts back to the Renaissance and then forward, following the transmission and transmutation of the ideas that Gassendi would idealize. Some of this chapter covers the familiar ground of histories of *politesse* such as the magisterial work of Maurice Magendie, whom Miller acknowledges with admiration. Though its terms may sound familiar, Miller's story is nonetheless a new one, tying the polite society of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to the previous (and now buried) ideal of learned sociability that coalesced with the Republic of Letters in the early seventeenth century. Miller's highly nuanced analysis creates a genuine "history of ideas"--in contrast to its Whiggish simulacrum--a history that follows the twists and turns of cultural transmission from author to author, translator to translator. This history ends at the point where the Peireskean virtue of learned sociability begins to lose its luster after the mid-seventeenth century, when a new, more "fashionable" version of polite society begins to disdain it as mere pedantry.

The fate of this Peireskean virtue sets the stage for Miller's third chapter, "The Ancient Constitution and the Antiquarian," which establishes the political importance of an antiquarianism that was anything but pedantic to its practitioners and patrons. Here Miller sets Gassendi aside and attends directly to Peiresc's own research in the interests of both the Crown he honored and the parlement he served. Inevitably, these interests conflicted, and Peiresc felt himself pulled in opposite directions as the

centralizing aspirations of the monarchy clashed with the local interests of the provincial parlements. In the process of exploring this complex fault line, Miller drives home a simple but central point, that the political thought of the early seventeenth century was inseparable from its antiquarian scholarship. Of course, this is J. G. A. Pocock's point in *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, but, Miller argues, its full import has remained largely unrecognized.

Just as Chapter Three turns on Pocock's thesis in the *Ancient Constitution*, Chapter Four—"The Theology of a Scholar"—turns (at least implicitly) on that of William J. Bouwsma in his provocative study, "The Two Faces of Humanism: Stoicism and Augustinianism in Renaissance Thought." Miller carries Bouwsma's insights about the Renaissance forward into the seventeenth century by showing how a diffuse ethic of neo-Stoicism interpenetrated with a core of Christian values, creating a flexible, relatively non-dogmatic theology essential to the survival of the Republic of Letters. By the mid-seventeenth century, the intellectual center of gravity had begun to shift toward a countervailing, Augustinian tendency in learned culture, which asserted the power of original sin over and against that of reason. This challenge to Christianized neo-Stoicism undermined one of the fundamental supports upholding the Peireskian virtues, contributing to their eventual collapse.

The final chapter, "History as Philosophy," is subtitled "Time and the Antiquarian." Although Miller doesn't expressly pursue the point, we might well see in the antiquarian interest in time and change an extension of Bouwsma's "Augustinian" strain of learned culture. Of course, the theme of the passage of time—as a *memento mori*—has neo-Stoic overtones. But Peiresc's fascination with change itself, and the cultural oddities it can produce, speaks to what Bouwsma might describe as an Augustinian interest in social processes and their wild growths (as opposed to the rationally ordered universe of the Stoics). Miller devotes much of this chapter to a discussion of the perceived benefits of studying time, change, and the past. These benefits, as described by Peiresc and his contemporaries, have a superficially trite feel—the study of the past trains the mind, salvages precious debris from the wreck of time, gives us the proper estimation of our own lives. I've probably made these kinds of arguments to my own students, but they and I stand on one side of a mid-seventeenth-century divide, after which the study of the past increasingly needed to be rescued from the charge of "mere" antiquarianism. Miller's accomplishment is to tease out these arguments from the thought of people for whom the study of the past in general—and antiquarianism in particular—needed no justification. And the extent to which their views have become our "justifications" testifies to the afterlife of a learned ideal ostensibly long dead.

Miller's closing observations point toward a connection between antiquarianism and the modern practice of cultural history that would emerge in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Presumably—and hopefully—this connection will be the subject of his next book, rounding off his excavation of a lost culture. No doubt, though, this task will put Miller's considerable talent for refined analysis to the test, for Peiresc's antiquarian world seems cut off from the subsequent historical culture by the latter's inherent intellectual violence. For an example of this violence, witness my emphasis on Miller's opening line, with which I began the review. He may rightly think that I've built a proverbial castle in Spain by suggesting a link between his personal experience and his subject matter. But I have a building permit—I'm a historian—and my materials are as trustworthy as my workmanship: a line in Miller's text (which now becomes a primary source document), academic employment statistics for the 1990s, etc. With this evidence, I can reconstruct "what really happened." Miller can testify (if he so chooses) to the inherent violence of this conceit, to the fundamental distortion in the narrative I so blithely construct. Herein lies

the barrier separating Peiresc's Europe in general, and the antiquarian enterprise in particular, from the subsequent practice of cultural history. Peiresc chose not to publish the results of his voluminous research in part out of a noblesse oblige and in part out of an innate sense that historical narrative per se undercuts civilized discourse. The same cosmopolitan spirit that informs antiquarianism, as Miller so ably and gracefully demonstrates, also serves to separate the latter from the practice of history.

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