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Richard Yeo. *Notebooks, English Virtuosi, and Early Modern Science.* xviii + 398 pp., illus., bibl., index. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2014. \$45 (cloth).

Protagonists of early modern science, such as Francis Bacon, Galileo Galilei, and René Descartes, famously warned against reading books as a way to acquire knowledge. The only book worth reading, they argued, was the book of nature. In spite of this well-known antibookish rhetoric, historians of the book and of early modern science, following the lead of the work of Ann Blair, have pointed out the importance of bookish, humanist methods of reading and knowing for the “new science” of the early modern period. Notebooks and practices of note-taking have been proven essential to the information and knowledge management of states (Jacob Soll) as well as households (Elaine Leong). Precisely for the management of empirical information by physicians (Michael Stolberg) and practical mathematicians and engineers (Alexander Marr), practices of annotating and note-taking have been shown to be important, supplementing earlier work on annotating and note-taking in less empirically minded contexts of learning by, for example, university students.

In the book under review Richard Yeo zooms in on the practices of note-taking in the context of the early Royal Society of London. The historical records of the first members of the Royal Society also allow Yeo to connect their practices of note-taking to their reflections on their practices, especially on the role of memory. The early Royal Society is a particularly significant context to establish the importance of practices of note-taking for the new sciences, given that the English virtuosi in the first decades of the Royal Society attempted to institutionalize a Baconian program. Yeo argues that they consciously adapted earlier practices of commonplacing in order to manage empirical information and knowledge (originating in observation and experiment, but often gained through reading). Given that Bacon and his followers considered notes stable and exact records, observations and experiments had to be recorded in order to compare, evaluate, and test them over the long periods of time required for undertaking Baconian natural history. Moreover, since empirical information consisted of (lots of) particulars and particularities, all this was impossible to memorize but instead had to be noted down. Yeo argues that by the end of the seventeenth century the function of notebooks had changed: “once repositories of the material that individuals sought to memorize, or recollect, they came to be seen as ways of securing and retrieving information that could never be memorized” (p. 68).

The individual chapters analyze the practices of note-taking of prominent members of the early Royal Society. Chapter 2 appropriately, opens with Bacon, who (Yeo argues) became the guide in matters of note-taking for early Royal Society members. Bacon showed them that notebooks could be put in the service of discovery, an essential part of the new empirical sciences. Yeo shows that all the English virtuosi discussed in the book agreed that empirical information could be taken from texts and processed. Samuel Hartlib is the focus of Chapter 4, Robert Boyle of Chapters 5 and 6, John Locke of Chapter 7, and Robert Hooke of Chapter 8. Yeo convincingly argues that Boyle’s “empirical attitude” particularly shows in his fear of a premature systematizing of empirical information. The absence of such a system made the problem of memory even more pertinent. In fact, Boyle preferred to make notes on loose sheets of paper. Although this increased the risk that notes would get lost, it also made it easier to move them around and to compare them, a process that was considered a touchstone in the necessarily collaborative and long-term process of writing Baconian natural history. In the two last chapters Yeo moves from Locke’s personal note-taking to collective note-taking and Hooke’s creation of a dynamic archive for the Royal Society. An institutional archive was a way keeping information that the individual could not memorize, but at the same time members of the early Royal Society did not view institutional archives as a replacement for

personal note-taking. Personal note-taking continued to be seen as an important practice that would lead to intellectual breakthroughs in the new sciences.

In sum, Yeo has delivered an excellently researched and beautifully crafted book. In its painstakingly detailed analysis of the practices of note-taking of the early Royal Society, *Notebooks, English Virtuosi, and Early Modern Science* is an important addition to recent work on paper technologies. Here is the evidence that the new sciences of the seventeenth century could not be made without paper—books and texts. This is a thought-provoking book, especially in making us think about what “empirical” means. We can expect much more exciting work on practices of note-taking and notebooks in contexts other than that of the early Royal Society in the coming years, but it will be impossible to write them without taking note of the insights offered by Yeo in this significant work.

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