Amilcare’s unconventional decision to send Sofonisba and her sister Elena to study first with Bernardino Campi and then with Bernardino Gatti. Nor is he the first to consider Amilcare’s vigorous promotion of his distinctively accomplished daughter. What Cole offers is a complex contextualization of Amilcare’s motives that, in turn, lead him to provocative discussions of, among other issues, the part Sofonisba played in the decision to pursue and promote her career, the perceived relationship of loom and needle to brush, and an analysis of the only known work in which Sofonisba depicted her father. It is with the juxtaposition of the latter, a canvas featuring full-length portraits of Amilcare with only two of his seven children—one being his sole son—with Bernardino Licinio’s portrait of his brother’s family that Cole begins to peel back the many and frequently conflicting layers of the world through which Sofonisba maneuvered.

Cole’s discussion of Sofonisba’s images on paper that feature a broadly smiling young girl and an old woman, who is quite possibly the artist’s mother, is especially rich. Here, Cole places some of the painter’s most sophisticated works within a pedagogical framework complicated by the interpretive eye and modifying burin of Jacob Bos, whose engraving La vecchia rimbambita muove riso alla fanciuletta preserves Sofonisba’s composition but probably not her narrative sensibility. Here, too, Cole reflects on process, individual portrait studies drawn from life that were then assembled to “imply a narrative context” (105). Sofonisba’s well-known painting The Chess Game (1555), a “kind of montage” (28), is just such an assemblage, one rife with expression that invariably extends beyond the frame to engage viewers, the first of whom was most likely her father. The reader may not always be convinced by Cole’s reading of Sofonisba’s works, but it is impossible to come away without a different view of this accomplished woman.

Fredrika Jacobs, Virginia Commonwealth University

Maarten van Heemskerck’s Rome: Antiquity, Memory, and the Cult of Ruins.
Arthur J. DiFuria.

Maarten van Heemskerck’s drawings are ubiquitous in studies of sixteenth-century Rome. His neat depictions of the vestiges of Rome’s antiquity are unique for their precision, poetic quality, and artistry. With unmatched immediacy, they evoke Rome’s former glory and the transience of human history. This prolific artist from Haarlem has recently been the subject of considerable scholarly scrutiny, and this book constitutes a major contribution to our understanding of Van Heemskerck’s
depiction of ancient Roman ruins. DiFuria’s book is divided into two parts. The first contains an in-depth critical discussion of the importance of drawings of ruins in Van Heemskerck’s career and oeuvre, and of the role they played in affirming his identity as a pictor doctus (learned painter) in Flanders. The second is a catalogue of eighty-six drawings, preserved for the most part in Berlin, depicting Roman ruins.

Part 1, in turn, is divided into three sections. The first elaborates on the artist’s pre-Roman period and on the origins of his fascination with Rome’s antiquities in the Netherlands. Here, DiFuria examines the echoes of the ancient Roman monuments that Van Heemskerck could glean from drawings by Jan Gossaert, who visited Rome in 1509, and from the work of Jan van Scorel, who was in Rome in the early 1520s as papal antiquarian. The second section is dedicated to Van Heemskerck’s sojourn in Rome in 1532–1536/37, and analyzes his antiquarian drawings. Particularly insightful here are an extended discussion of the drawings’ techniques and an examination of the inventive means through which the artist altered the urban landscape to suit his pictorial goals. The third section analyzes the strategic use that Van Heemskerck made of his drawings after his return to Haarlem, where his Roman vistas served as springboard for inventing antiquarian backdrops in paintings and prints.

DiFuria maintains that Van Heemskerck used his Roman drawings to establish his own authority as a learned painter. This part of the book, which comprises 286 out of 524 pages, is rich in interpretations of the artist’s works. These are understood as performances of artistry and interpreted as repositories of visual memory and vehicles for portable pictorial knowledge. The discussion around the historical context in which the drawings were executed, however, is not as developed; for instance, conjectures on the patronage of the Panorama with the Abduction of Helen are not convincingly substantiated. Deliberately presented as a critical study, the text does not avail itself of any new archival research. The focus of the discussion becomes more historically grounded in chapter 8, which is dedicated to the debate on the image and the eruption of iconoclastic outbursts in Flanders. This chapter sits oddly in the book, as it focuses little on Italianate landscapes with ruins, and is a piece of research that could have been published separately.

Part 2 of the book is a catalogue of Van Heemskerck’s drawings depicting Roman panoramas, ruins, and antiquities in their architectural contexts. These drawings, which are excellently illustrated, are grouped topographically and also include sheets by other artists, such as the controversial “Anonymous A/Hermannus Postumus,” which are preserved in the Berlin albums in which most of Van Heemskerck’s Roman drawings are located, and drawings that DiFuria no longer considers to be autograph. The structure outlined above makes it quite laborious to refer to the images while reading the first part, which is visually footnoted with miniature details of the drawings: a solution that only partially makes up for the need to refer back to the images of the catalogue, especially if the reader is not exactly eagle eyed, or is above fifty. I am stressing this problem
because the text delves into a visual analysis of the drawings, and images are therefore fundamental for following the discussion of Van Heemskerck’s creative processes.

In conclusion, this is an important contribution to our understanding of a defining aspect of an artist who translated the Roman antiquarian landscape into an idiom that was meaningful to a wide Netherlandish audience, instigating a radical change in the local visual language. However, the ponderous volume is not always easy to navigate, in terms of both its visual apparatus and its linguistic flourishes, which, in their virtuosity, can at times detract from clarity of expression.

Guido Rebecchini, Courtauld Institute of Art
doi:10.1017/rqx.2021.14


Every year sees the publication of yet another book on Pieter Bruegel, as well as several essays. What is the source of his constant appeal? As art historical approaches wax and wane, Bruegel is subjected to different waves of interpretation: issues of connoisseurship, stylistic analysis, iconographic decipherment, phenomenology, social history, and so forth. This is not the case with this book. Rather than another demonstration of scholarly imagination offering an original perspective on the work of a great artist, we have something both more accessible and informative. Honig reviews Bruegel’s paintings, drawings, and engravings with an eye to synthesis: what can one conclude about this artist, and which of the perspectives offered best stands the scrutiny of time? Aimed at a general audience, Honig’s arguments are both succinct and clear. If the book is not as ambitious as some of its predecessors, it makes a virtue of common sense. Rather than propose a unifying thesis, the book is better described as a series of judicious meditations on Bruegel’s works of art.

A thread, rather than a thesis, links Honig’s observations: she suggests that Bruegel’s artistic strength lies in his observation of human nature. Honig believes that human nature is both constructed by individuals and something to which humans are themselves subject. Human beings may present themselves to others by creating a personality, but they are also subject to urges, desires, and aspirations that cannot be openly acknowledged. The basis for this view lies in Erasmus’s extraordinary transformation, in the Praise of Folly, of the idea of human foolishness from one associated with moral failing, as in Sebastian Brant’s Ship of Fools, to an inherent but ambivalent characteristic of the species. Discussing the sixteenth-century science of physiognomics to account for Bruegel’s fascination with the facial features of his subjects (are they a key to their nature?) allows her to draw attention to the arresting quality of Bruegel’s faces without necessarily concluding that he believed them legible.