

Jonathan Reinartz. *Past Scents: Historical Perspectives on Smell.* Studies in Sensory History. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014. xi + 279 pp. \$95.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-03494-7; \$27.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-252-07979-5.



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Jonathan Reinartz's expansive cultural history of smell, *Past Scents*, marks a significant and timely contribution in sensory scholarship. In centering on a singular sensory mode, smell, Reinartz sets out to reconceptualize the way we understand the past, nose first. Organized thematically, each chapter in *Past Scents* moves between temporal moments, traversing the ancient world to the contemporary city, in pursuit of the scent trail. Chapter 2 alone traces the perfume trade from the earliest perfume practices in ancient Egypt to the creation of "fragrance-free zones" in North America during the last twenty-five years. And in exploring the role of smell in the city (chapter 6), Reinartz draws on examples of odorizing and deodorizing practices from every world region. In crafting such an expansive cultural history and geography of smell, Reinartz draws on a vast body of literature, with key contributions from the fields of history, anthropology, sociology, geography, and medicine. With such historical depth and interdisciplinary breadth, *Past Scents* is a valuable compendium of olfactory scholarship.

Reinartz begins the book with an overview of the philosophical and scientific status of smell in Western thought ("Introduction: Picking Up the Scent"). Here, he emphasizes the shifting physiological and cultural understanding of our sense of smell in the Renaissance,

Reformation, and Enlightenment periods. Importantly, Reinartz emphasizes the long intellectual history of ignoring and denigrating the senses generally, and smell specifically. Owing to visceral ephemerality and cultural devaluation, olfactory knowledge is largely absent from the historical record. But scent leaves indelible memories, and Reinartz tracks these "scent trails" through medical records and cultural texts in piecing together a new olfactory understanding of the past. The introduction serves as a springboard for Reinartz to demonstrate that cultural perceptions of smell have always had profound and consequential effects for people and place. Smell, Reinartz argues, has been a critical yet largely ignored dimension in the construction of social identity. Smell is an invisible and fleeting sense yet it has engendered enduring boundaries between longstanding cultural views of good and evil, sickness and health, rich and poor. Our sense of smell, Reinartz demonstrates, has always been integral to the organization and demarcation of social groups based on religion (chapter 1), race (chapter 3), gender (chapter 4), class (chapter 5), and geography (chapter 6). Yet the very amorphous quality of odor, he argues, also makes smell a volatile marker of difference, susceptible to shifting cultural beliefs. Reinartz elaborates on many historical instances in which scent transgresses

boundaries, for example, between animal and human, heaven and earth.

Through synthesizing previous work and adding new insight to understudied areas, *Past Scents* makes a timely contribution to, what is now, an extensive body of smell scholarship. Rather than rewrite the history of scent in the Greek and Roman civilizations, for example, Reinartz points the reader to influential scholarship undertaken by Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott in *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (1994) and he takes up the lesser-known history of scent in ancient Egypt (chapter 2). This strategic approach, which is continued throughout the book, establishes *Past Scents* as a singular text that both synthesizes previous research and generates new understandings of the past. Each chapter is chockablock with citations of well-known smell-related scholarship and obscure olfactory references in medical texts. While this is a plus for academics interested in particular olfactory topics, it also evidences the central weakness of the book. An expansive survey and synthesis of this kind necessarily lacks nuanced theoretical analysis and prolonged reflection on any particular theme. Moreover, the thematic organization and density of content lends *Past Scents* to nonsequential reading and index searching: a plus for those using the book as a resource, a drawback for those new to the subfield. And while some readers might find Reinartz's jumps between times and places disorienting, others might find the comparative juxtapositions generative.

For scholarship investigating the contemporary so-

ciality and spatiality of smell, *Past Scents* will surely serve as a valuable resource. Urban olfaction has risen in the popular imagination through the publication of Victoria Henshaw's *Urban Smellscapes: Understanding and Designing City Smell Environments* (2012) and media coverage of Kate McLean's beautiful and expressive smell maps.[1] Reinartz makes generative connections on the topic of urban smellscapes by linking the history of smell mapping, traced to the grandfather of public health Jean-Noël Hallé in 1794, to contemporary efforts to carry out "scented cybercartography" by Tracy Lauriault and Gitte Lindgaard (p. 186). As cities grapple with *this* olfactory moment, there is much to be gleaned from the past. *Past Scents* anchors contemporary smell discourse to past cultural practices, and their attendant ethical implications. For example, recent contestation over the manufacturing of Shiracha, the Vietnamese hot sauce with a cult following, in Southern California reveals that race, ethnicity, class, and smell remain entangled. Or consider the ways religion, law, and morality inform the olfactory politics of marijuana growing, processing, and storage in Colorado. The "reek of sin" (p. 36), explored by Reinartz remains a pervasive trope in such debates (chapter 1: "Heavenly Scents: Religion and Smell"). For these reasons, *Past Scents* will endure as a valuable compendium of smell scholarship, inspiring, as Reinartz intended, many others to "sniff" through the past (p. 218).

Note

[1]. Kate Mclean, "Sensory Maps" (2016), <http://sensorymaps.com>.

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