Zemon Davis, a highly respected historian focusing on European history and feminist studies, presents the lives of three women, Glikl Bas Judah Leib, Marie de l'Incarnation, and Maria Sibylla Merian. Following the author's imagined dialogue between these three women and herself discussing the very book their "dialogue" prefaces, Davis devotes one lengthy chapter to each figure. The chapter on Maria Sibylla Merian, entitled "Metamorphoses," discusses the artist's basic biography while developing a connection between Merian and the other two women represented in the text. Working from primary sources as her starting point, Davis delves into the lives of these early modern women, focusing particularly on how they represented themselves in their writing and the relationship between their work and that of contemporaries, generally men, working in the same fields. Each of the three chapters sets the woman within a social and religious context, interspersed with relevant biographical details. The concluding chapter undertakes a comparison between the three women and includes a discussion of the reception and usage of their writing after their deaths. While the information Davis presents concerning the life and work of Maria Sibylla Merian is useful to a scholar interested in such matters, this text also serves as an illustration of a novel methodological approach to history, judged successful by the majority of critics.

-Lauren M. Freese

Reviews available for consultation:


