

Short Notices

Benigno, Francesco, *Mirrors of Revolution: Conflict and Political Identity in Early Modern Europe* (Late Medieval and Early Modern Studies 16), Turnhout, Brepols, 2010; hardback; pp. x, 332; R.R.P. €70.00; ISBN 9782503528977.

Is there anything more dead than a controversy that has been abandoned for more stimulating approaches? Forensic investigation can, however, contribute to our understanding of what went wrong and why or how the snares of contemporary ideas and politics can and should be avoided. In some cases, those looking in from the outside, like Professor Benigno, see more of the game than the participants.

This is high-level historiography, clarifying, but not for the most part judging, how the canonical explanations of events designated ‘Revolutions’ came into being and why in a different age a different viewpoint has led to a rewriting of the established narrative. Whether the ‘reality’ of such complex events can be recovered or whether the image reflected in the historian’s mirror will always shape the story remains problematic. Benigno is optimistic that from the ashes of revisionism, the Phoenix of understanding can rise. While the human race has always been captivated by theoretical models, Benigno thinks that, imperfect as they turn out to be, they provide the springboard for further research and new insights.

This is an updating and translation of his 1999 book, *Specchi della rivoluzione: Conflitto e identità politica nell’Europa moderna*. The book contains four studies – an account, familiar to those who lived in it and through it, of the debate over the English Civil Wars and the French Revolution, as good a summary as one could expect of debates that consumed the lives of many distinguished historians. More illuminating to historians who do not read widely in languages other than English, are his re-examinations of the French civil war known as the Fronde, where he shows how events can be written out of history when they do not suit those creating a political identity, and the Neapolitan uprising of 1647–48 that has been marginalized simply because the focus of European history in the period has made it so. In both these studies, Benigno provides the historiography alongside his own reconsideration of the multiple centrifugal events that formed part of what happened. He makes clear why these events are ‘hard to fit into the traditional political categories with which the sociopolitical conflict was evaluated’ (p. 322).

His final conclusion that both English and French revisionism resolved into a ‘traditional, reassuring empiricism, and a no less traditional set of implicit theoretical assumptions’ (p. 325) suggests that the ‘battle of the pens’ has not yet resulted in a new paradigm. Nevertheless, he argues that the struggle was not in vain as it has uncovered a complex, hitherto concealed stratification of events, as well as insights into how history is written.

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Calzona, Arturo and Daniela **Lamberini**, eds, *La Civiltà delle Acque, tra Medioevo e Rinascimento: Atti del Convegno internazionale, Mantova, 1–4 Ottobre 2008* (Centro Studi L. B. Alberti, Ingenium 14), Florence, Leo S. Olschki, 2010; paperback; pp. xviii, 718 (2 Vols); 11 figures, 72 b/w illustrations, 11 colour plates; R.R.P. €78.00; ISBN 97888222596911.

Almost all of the thirty-six papers read at this ‘pluridisciplinary’ conference on a fascinating array of topics relating (mainly) to the rivers and waters of Italy’s Val Padana appear in these proceedings. Daniela Lamberini introduces the contributions, while Salvatore Ciriaco’s concluding remarks sketch the opportunities for further research opened by the presenters and the discussions. The collection offers a dazzling variety of topics produced by leading scholars from Italy, Europe, Israel, Japan, USA, and, last but not least, Australia.

The proceedings are arranged under five broad headings. Part I, ‘Letteratura, e immaginario’, has contributions on relevant texts and ideas found in Virgil (*Georgics*, *Aeneid*, and *Eclogues*) and Dante (*Commedia*), as well as Leonardo’s theories on the flow of water and its place in his vision of the structure of the cosmos, and Pirro Ligorio’s unpublished treatise (after 1565) on the properties of running waters (in rivers, springs, lakes, and so on).

Part II, ‘Gestione politica ed economia’ examines legal, administrative, and political issues during medieval and early modern times as well as the economic importance of water to agriculture and transport and the like, principally in Mantua, Cremona, and Tuscany.

Part III, ‘Arte, architettura, paesaggio e territorio’ brings together studies of the impact of the rivers on the various communities of the Po Valley over the centuries, artists who depicted the waters of Tuscany, and Leonardo’s post-1482 texts on the behaviour of flowing water in Lombardy. Also included are an analysis of the building of the fountain of Neptune in Bologna (commenced in 1563) and the instructions for its maintenance, the

efforts of the Medici dukes of Tuscany to control the Arno, and an account of the way in which water from the aqueducts of Rome was administered, bought, sold, and traded from the 1560s onwards.

Part IV, 'Ingegneria, infrastrutture, scienza e tecnica', concentrates on theoretical and practical aspects of hydraulics and its associated technology, while Part V, 'Giardini, feste e spettacoli' describes the use of the Arno as a vehicle for spectacle from 1305 onwards.

Besides their interest as a collection of scholarly articles directed at a common theme, these volumes provide material not easily otherwise available that is relevant to research in other fields. In my case, research on the development of the Borgo Pio and its fortifications in Rome under Pius IV (1559–65) led me into issues relating to Rome's floods, drainage, drinking water, and the politics of the city's water supply. Katherine Rinne's article in these proceedings (followed by her book *The Waters of Rome* recently published by Yale) helped resolve a number of important questions. There are other unexpected insights: Giuseppe Adami's paper, for example, throws fascinating light on the cultural interests of P. P. Floriani who is better known as a military engineer. I am sure many other scholars will make similar 'finds'!

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Cislo, Amy Eisen, *Paracelsus's Theory of Embodiment* (The Body, Gender and Culture Series), London, Pickering & Chatto, 2010; hardback; pp. 166; R.R.P. US\$99.00; ISBN 9781851969951.

Paracelsus has always been an enigmatic figure: a physician, botanist, alchemist, astrologer, and occultist, with a reputation for both extreme drunkenness and piety. In his system of thought though, the body was the microcosm of the macrocosm. He believed that the body could suffer from chemical imbalances of mercury, sulphur, and salt and was affected by astrological powers. Amy Eisen Cislo extends knowledge of these connections in Paracelsus's work by a close study of the relationship between his concept of the physical body and those aspects of the body that were invisible and divine. Through a close reading of his texts on conception and gestation, she reveals his theory of the natural body as being separate from the spiritual self.

According to Cislo, Paracelsus struggled to come to terms with religious ideas about the body and theorized that it was a scientific object not subject to divine control. In a time when women were perceived to be easily swayed into pacts with the devil through coitus, fears of witches and monstrous births

were prevalent, and the topics of conception, gestation, and birth occupied the thoughts of many. These concerns drew attention to understandings of pregnancy and the workings of the female body. Since in the Bible women were created from Adam's rib they were considered physically the same as men, but, for instance, with the womb considered as an inverted penis. The learning of the day on reproduction followed the classical texts of Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Galen: men were warm and women were cold or men were agents and women were receptacles for the man's seed. However, Paracelsus rejected classical teachings and developed a unique theory of embodiment.

Cislo examines three groups of Paracelsus's texts through time: the first group of texts is on conception; the second on the body of Mary; and the third on the bodies of Adam and Eve. Her studies of the texts show inconsistencies in his theory; however, there are fundamental ideas that underpin these three groups of texts. They are that birth involves a divine element and that men and women play different and significant roles in the process of reproduction. There was a relationship between the spiritual being and the physical self in the human body. This raised questions on the nature of the bodies of Mary, Christ, Adam, and Eve, whom Paracelsus claimed had physical bodies possessing different earthly or chemical qualities from those of ordinary human bodies.

Paracelsus's Theory of Embodiment is an extremely interesting and scholarly study and Cislo has untangled Paracelsus's complex theory of embodiment with a good deal of clarity.

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Cregan, Kate, *The Theatre of the Body: Staging Death and Embodying Life in Early-Modern London* (Late Medieval and Early Modern Studies 10), Turnhout, Brepols, 2009; hardback; pp. xvi, 349; 35 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. €70.00; ISBN 9782503520582.

The aim of this book is to demonstrate some of the ways in which the understanding and experience of embodiment changed during the seventeenth century in London. Dr Cregan approaches this topic by analysing the performative aspects of death in three specific contexts: judicial, medical, and theatrical. Her attention is therefore directed to those corresponding sites of practice that involved a straightforwardly public dimension – the courtroom and scaffold, the anatomical theatre, and the urban playhouse.

An investigation of these venues, concentrating on their respective practices relating to death, provides much concrete information for Cregan's study. I think, however, that she exaggerates the interrelatedness of these locations by treating them all as 'authorised sites of knowledge production in seventeenth-century London' (p. 26), thus attributing the same epistemic status to dramatic representations on the stage as to court findings or anatomical investigations.

Her cross-comparisons between the 'performance of death' in the playhouses and in the other sites under consideration are sometimes weakened by this tendency to place theatrical 'knowledge' on the same epistemic plane as juridical or medical knowledge – an equivalence that the inhabitants of seventeenth-century London would never have countenanced. Nevertheless, this issue aside, the wealth of empirical material that Cregan brings forward is valuable and suggestive, making the book a useful contribution to the cultural history of the period.

Broadly speaking, the work also makes a contribution to the more general question of the transition 'from the dominance of traditionalism to the dominance of the modern' (p. 4), but it is not clear that the theoretical apparatus which Cregan deploys for this purpose is entirely helpful. The key concept used in this regard is 'abstraction', on which topic Cregan has previously published a sociological study. My reservation about the centrality given to this concept in the present work is that it seems to be so widely and omnivorously applied that it soon ceases to do any real conceptual work. When virtually every social transaction discussed is glossed as an instance of abstraction, the repetition of the term tends to yield diminishing cognitive returns. I would not wish to suggest, however, that this theoretical quirk should be a deterrent to potential readers, since for anyone interested in the history of early modern culture many other aspects of the book are highly rewarding.

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Dickenson, John, *Greene in Conceit: New Raised from His Grave to Write the Tragic History of Fair Valeria of London (1598)* (Barnabe Rich Society Publications 19), eds Donald Beecher and David Margolies, Toronto, Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2008; paperback; pp. 151; R.R.P. US\$19.00; ISBN 9780772720436.

Described in David Margolies's lucid-yet-detailed introduction as an example of late-Elizabethan 'popular tragedy', *Greene in Conceit* (1598) is a work typical of the period but largely neglected. It illustrates, in an engaging narrative, major features of English fiction in the age of Lyly and Greene. It is to the latter – 'the most popular writer of the day' – that John Dickenson (c. 1570–1636) referred in the title. The swift, 60-page narrative proper, 'a sexual scandal with moral lessons for the reader', also being preceded by a prefatory dream–vision of the narrator's encounter with Greene's ghost, moral exemplar, and drawcard (p. 14).

Dickenson, Margolies explains, avoided the excesses of Lyly's poorer imitators and adopted 'the superficial characteristics of euphuism' while 'writing with energy and (usually) with commendable restraint' (p. 22). Moreover, Dickenson struck a balance 'between conventional rendering of the tale and the move toward realist individuation of characters' (p. 38). In one instance of Dickenson's innovative approach to narrative fiction, he 'paradoxically ... creat[ed] the appearance of truth' by 'mov[ing] from *dubbio*' ('the form of internal dialogue') 'to third-person narration', thereby presenting 'a more naturalistic reporting of moral reflection as internalized thought' (pp. 36–37).

The storyline exemplifies the period's patriarchally nuanced moralism, illustrated in a characteristically descriptive long title, the latter part of which advertises '*the Rare and Lamentable issue of a Husband's Dotage, a Wife's Lewdness, and Children's Disobedience*' (p. 62). Yet, despite the narrator's conventional pronouncements regarding female perfidy – and a notable emphasis on the supposed dangers of providing females with a liberal education – Margolies rightly highlights the significant responsibility attached to the patriarchal figures who arrange the ill-fated marriage – the father 'unnaturally' matching young Valeria with the doting, much older Giraldo, so that Valeria's 'subsequent failings, while not at all condoned ... arise from circumstances not of her own making' (pp. 45, 47).

Although some flaws are apparent at the proofreading stage – namely, inconsistencies in spelling, with the heroine's husband, Giraldo, rendered 'Geraldo' (e.g. pp. 75, 76, 77, 78), and the author dubbed 'Dickinson' (Introduction and pp. 28, 29, 43) – this edition is highly recommended as

distinctly suitable undergraduate course material, all the more so for Donald Beecher's modernized spelling and punctuation, helpful and comprehensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources, and painstaking annotation of archaic terms and of the Latin proverbs and other expressions so dear to early modern writers.

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Gade, Kari Ellen, ed., *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 2: From c. 1035 to c. 1300* (Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 2), Turnhout, Brepols, 2009; hardback; pp. cvii, 916; R.R.P. €120.00; ISBN 9782503518978.

This second volume is the companion to *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*. The whole series is to comprise nine volumes: eight of text (Vol. VII, *Poetry on Christian Subjects* appeared in 2007) and a ninth that will contain indices and a general bibliography of medieval Scandinavian poetry. The present volume, edited by Kari Ellen Gade from Indiana University in Bloomington, aims at providing a critical edition along with English translation and notes of the corpus of Scandinavian poetry from the Middle Ages (excluding only the Poetic Edda and closely related poetry). Space limitations prevent me from discussing the whole project at greater length – more can be found at <<http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au/db.php>>.

Technically, this edition comes in two solid volumes which respectively hold the following sections: I. *Poetry by Named Skalds c. 1035–1105* (pp. 5–432) and II. *Poetry by Named Skalds (continued) c. 1105–1300* (pp. 467–914).

This wonderful compilation is based on a thorough examination of all the known manuscript evidence and on previous editions and commentaries including *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* by Finnur Jónsson, the standard edition of the corpus in question since the beginning of the twentieth century. It is a long-awaited result of cooperation between many researchers from leading academic institutions in a number of countries including, for instance, Australia and Iceland.

The poems compiled and edited in this publication commemorate the lives of Scandinavian rulers from c. 1035 to 1280 (i.e. from the reign of Magnús inn góði ('the Good') Ólafsson, King of Norway, up to the reign of Haraldr Maddaðarson, Jarl of Orkney) and events which occurred during the time.

This volume offers an immensely useful and intricate analysis of Skaldic poetry, accompanied by elaborate commentary, explanatory notes, and

translations. It is intended for a variety of users from students to more experienced scholars of Old Norse and other medieval European languages and literatures. It will also be accessible to scholars in related disciplines such as history and archeology. The whole nine-volume compilation will ultimately offer a fantastic resource to a wide range of scholars, and I for one will be impatiently anticipating its completion.

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Hollingsworth, Mary and Carol M. **Richardson**, eds, *The Possessions of a Cardinal: Politics, Piety, and Art, 1450–1700*, University Park, PA, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010; cloth; pp. xvi, 441; 71 b/w illustrations, 16 colour plates; R.R.P. US\$85.00; ISBN 9780271034683.

What were the possessions of a cardinal? This book's prize for the best documented, if not the most, possessions must surely go to Ippolito d'Este (Cardinal 1555–66). Ippolito, whose ecclesiastical career started when he was nine, seems to have had everything he wanted – except the papacy: royal connections, status, wealth, benefices, mistresses and children, houses and villas (notably Villa d'Este at Tivoli). Mary Hollingsworth (Chapter 8) draws on the letters and account books in the Este archives to analyse Ippolito's conspicuous consumption and provide glimpses of the material circumstances of his life: his furnishings, table wear, and, especially, clothes, all of which demonstrate a marked leaning towards secular tastes. She concludes, however, that the very superabundance of the documentation makes it difficult to assess Ippolito in relation to his peers.

Indeed, at the opposite end of the spectrum is John Casimir Wasa, half-brother of the King of Poland. After an erratic earlier career he became a Jesuit in 1642. His Cardinalate lasted less than two years (1646–48), for when his brother died, he succeeded and married his widow. His sojourn in Rome as Cardinal was too brief to result in tangible possessions of his own, but Susan Russell (Chapter 15) mounts a convincing case that the frieze decoration in the Sala degli Orientali of Palazzo Pamphilj (Piazza Navona, Rome) was hastily painted in honour of a visit, on the occasion of his installation, by the new Cardinal to Pope Innocent X's family residence.

This contrast perhaps begins to give an idea of the scope and themes of the collection, which ranges from the better- to the lesser-known figure, the aristocrat to the humble friar, the papal nephew to the cardinal with nephews, personal to family ambition, seeking to elucidate such contrasts in the context of 'an era of ... fundamental change in the political landscape

of Europe and in the Church' (p. 12). The book is explicitly conceived as a contribution to art history. The authors are primarily interested in the cardinals' patronage and promotion of the arts, their building and rebuilding of churches and *palazzi*, their establishment and endowment of chapels, their antiquarian collections, and in one case, even the foundation of an Academy (the Ambrosiana, Chapter 13). At the same time, the aim is to define the cultural and political significance of these activities for each figure discussed.

They are: Guillaume d'Estouteville (c. 1412–1483), Francesco Todeschini Piccolomini (1439–1503), Gabriele Rangone (d. 1486), Oliviero Carafa (1430–1511), Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena (1470–1520), Giulio de' Medici (1478–1534), Ippolito d'Este (1509–1572), Giovanni de' Medici (1543–1562), Carlo Borromeo (1538–1584), Ferdinando I de' Medici (1549–1609), Odoardo Farnese (1573–1626), Federico Borromeo (1564–1631), Antonio Barberini (1607–1671), John Casimir Wasa (1609–1672), Camillo Massimo (1620–1677), and Giovanni Battista Patrizi (1658–1727).

As David S. Chambers shows in his useful preliminary survey, since the 1950s there has been an enormous growth of interest in cardinals and the papal curia in Renaissance and Baroque Rome and beyond. This volume, attractively bound in hallmark red and meticulously produced, is an important and useful demonstration of the vitality of such research.

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Martin, A. Lynn, *Alcohol, Violence, and Disorder in Traditional Europe* (Early Modern Studies 2), Kirksville, MO, Truman State University Press, 2009; hardback; pp. ix, 269; 8 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. US\$48.00; ISBN 9781931112963.

There is much that is interesting about this book. Lynn A. Martin has collected a vast array of material from a wide geographical and chronological spread and this gives a vivid and complex picture of the problem that he sets out to explore. Taking as his starting point modern studies that demonstrate uncertain links between consumption of alcohol and violence and not assuming a physiological response to ingestion of alcohol, Martin sets out to question if there was a link between alcohol and violence in 'traditional' Europe (1300–1700, England, France, and Italy) using an anthropological approach. This is an admirable and ambitious aim.

Martin amply demonstrates that most studies of violence and society in early modern Europe do not devote enough space to the role of alcohol while

undoubtedly assuming a connection between the consumption of alcohol and violence. *Alcohol, Violence, and Disorder* then examines the views of moralists who firmly believed that alcohol did lead to disorder and violence. Detailed chapters follow on the types and consumption of alcohol and the place of alcohol in recreation and celebration. The two chapters on violence and disorder associated with alcohol consumption and venues that sold alcohol are based on published court records, primarily from England. His final substantive chapter examines various regulations that aimed, with limited success, to put limits on the sale and consumption of alcohol because of the belief that it was associated with antisocial behaviour.

In his conclusion, Martin equates the divergent pieces of evidence that he has presented to the pieces of a jigsaw that do not necessarily fit together. In an attempt to impose some order on his findings, he divides his findings into four elements of the puzzle in turn: the agent (alcohol); the host (primarily young men); the environment (alehouses and celebrations); and observers (moralists/lawmakers). He then concludes that it was not consumption of alcohol that led to violent behaviour, and if anything violent behaviour, particularly among men, was linked to questions of masculine honour.

There are several factors of his methodology and approach that provoke more questions than answers. While an approach covering 400 years and a very wide geographical area presents possibilities for analysis of incremental change and continuities over time, it also has inherent weaknesses that are understated. Were community attitudes and perceptions to drinking and violence really static over such a long period? Although Martin acknowledges the importance of the point of view of the 'observer', there remain unanswered questions about the meanings that different community members placed on violence and the role of alcohol in that violence. If moralizing elites sermonized about the evils of alcohol, did that mean that they had different understandings of honour, violence, and disorder than did the crowds that they addressed? Were the views of the individuals in these crowds uniform? Martin includes evidence about men and women as both perpetrators and victims of alcohol associated violence yet again there remain unanswered questions about the different ways that men and women might have understood and interpreted the role of alcohol in that violence.

In his conclusions about the importance of masculine honour in understanding interpersonal violence, the meaning of honour is under analysed. Was this concept of honour the same in all the communities under study – from thirteenth-century England to seventeenth-century Italy? Concepts of masculine honour were important, as many of the studies that

Martin has relied upon argue, but a stronger case needs to be made that its meanings were as static as is suggested here.

The questions Martin raises about the history of the understandings of violence are important. He has combed published source collections and the work of other historians for many fragments of evidence and his findings provide intriguing challenges to scholars of violence and disorder in early modern European communities. Whether his conclusions will stand up to detailed, localized archival research and analysis remains to be seen.

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Metzler, Irina, *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Physical Impairment in the High Middle Ages, c. 1100–c. 1400* (Routledge Studies in Medieval Religion and Culture 5), New York, Routledge, 2010; paperback; pp. 356; R.R.P. US\$39.95; ISBN 9780415582049.

Disability in Medieval Europe foregrounds itself as ‘the first book that comprehensively describes disability and physical impairment in the Middle Ages’. You open the cover, and there that sentence is, raising the reader’s expectations. It is perhaps then both understandable and a bit disappointing that so much of the book is essentially a reiteration of that claim.

Disability in Medieval Europe is an adapted thesis, and it reads as such. It is heavy with theory and academic language, as rarefied and arcane as one of the medieval theological texts it later utilizes in considering spiritual approaches to the body. The prose seems to be almost too intellectual and too steeped in linguistic turns and analysis, as if the text wishes to justify its own existence on every single page through telling you its origins rather than showing its strengths. Irina Metzler first argues at length why no other text actually provides a decent framework or background for her purposes, apparently in order to demonstrate why previous research has lacked depth or real academic purpose.

Ultimately this is disappointing. Not because much literature dealing with the historical construction of ‘disability’ or ‘inability’ is undoubtedly weak or without a solid theoretical background, but because Metzler appears to be grabbing at many different theoretical foundations and previous research, and finding flaws with each. Her own approach seems more grounded in a negation of what has gone before, and an attempt to fill this ill-defined ‘hole’, than in trying to emerge with a clear theoretical or purposeful framework of her own. When she reaches her analysis of particular texts and exemplars,

the language and framing are highly equivocal and deeply ensconced in theoretical norms, making the reader almost wonder why the attempt was needed in the first place.

The potential importance of this work cannot be understated: with growth in research of the experiences of a variety of disenfranchised groups (women, LGBT citizens, refugees, migrants) across our current political situation, the ways in which we have defined, treated, and engaged with notions of 'the Other' historically become crucial to an understanding of social contexts and the evolution of particular discourses. Sadly, this text fails to catch alight, but it does provide an important beginning for the reappraisal of the experiences of this particular marginalized group.

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Papaconstantinou, Arietta, Muriel **Debié**, and Hugh **Kennedy**, eds, *Writing 'True Stories': Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East* (Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 9), Turnhout, Brepols, 2010; hardback; pp. xi, 230; R.R.P. €60.00; ISBN 9782503527864.

Writing 'True Stories' is a rather enjoyable collection of essays. Well-written and chosen, the collection builds on each successive essay, leaving as many questions as conclusions in the reader's mind when the collection has been consigned to the shelf.

The collection builds on a panel organized for the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies, with additional papers and revisions commissioned for publication under the 'Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages' series. The collection clearly embraces the themes and potential of the series, expanding on cross-cultural research that considers interactions of genres to illuminate a series of texts chosen from a multiplicity of traditions.

Ostensibly, the essays examine the 'relation between history and hagiography as the main two narrative modes of representing the past in the late antique and medieval Near East'. Conceptually, the essays are contextualized by a fine Introduction by Catherine Cubitt that provides the 'view from the West' – situating the essays and texts examined not simply within their own milieu but also within larger discourses of the construction of history, hagiography, and historiography from across the late classical and medieval West. This grounding not only helps those unfamiliar with the interactions of Byzantine and Islamic cultures, or the myriad traditions of

Coptic and Syriac churches but implicitly spurs the reader to ask questions about the construction of history, purpose, culture, influence, and identity across multiple fields and eras.

In ‘stirring the pot’ of the Late Antique and Medieval Near East, the reader leaves the collection confronted by key concerns for any academic: What is history? Who defines it? Who uses it? To what purposes is it, has it, and can it be put? The articles of Binggeli, Bray, and Davis are particularly solid in examining similar tropes or stories used across multiple faiths and traditions. Muriel Debié spends the opening section of her article on East Syriac historiography by examining the vocabulary used to describe and determine ‘history’ in East Syria, and the implications that the vocabulary had for its framing of both historical and hagiographical narratives. Genre is also a major field of exploration, with the boundaries and uses of saints’ lives, letters, chronicles, and histories all examined.

Each essay stands as a call for further thought and investigation: the questions asked are crucial to our understanding of ourselves as historians, and it is well worth such a refreshing journey through them again.

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Phillips, Joshua, *English Fictions of Communal Identity, 1485–1603*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2010; hardback; pp. viii, 268; R.R.P £55.00; ISBN 9780754665984.

Joshua Phillips begins his analysis of sixteenth-century English expressions of collective identity with a quotation from a Marian livery company charter which declares that the men of the company ‘may be in fact, deed and name one body by themselves for ever’. This is Phillips’s starting point for exploring how literature and rhetoric during the reigns of the Tudor monarchs preserved and endorsed ideas of collective identity and enterprise.

Phillips’s source range is eclectic. Although he has excluded lyric poetry, government documents (despite quoting the Marian charter), wills, and theological writings, he has used a wide range of texts in his study, including romances (especially Malory), fantasy writings (notably More’s *Utopia*), Edwardian Protestant writings, translations of the classics, and contemporary fictional works by Greene, Lodge, Sidney, and Nash. The common denominator among these texts, even the Edward Protestant writings, is that they are works of fiction.

Out of this body of writings, among them comedies, tragedies, mythological writings, and Protestant flights of fancy, Phillips seeks to adduce

evidence for the enduring salience of ideas of the commons and of collective identities in post-medieval England. He reads these sources with a mind to the economic infrastructure of sixteenth-century England, whereby these fictions of collective identities ‘help to explain a property-based economy to itself while reminding it of the central importance of the commons’ (p. 5).

Drawing on this prose evidence, Phillips succeeds in advancing a fresh and stimulating appraisal of the fictional works and their interaction with a sixteenth-century readership. Asserting the capacity for society to have produced texts and meanings which conveyed a sense of collective identity, Phillips uses his evidence to reveal (borrowing Benedict Anderson’s concept) ‘imagined communities’ whose members were alert to collective bonds.

While his source base is sixteenth-century, Phillips’s conclusions also testify to recent patterns of thought indebted to sociology, behavioural economics, feminist theory, and legal studies, which have promoted the idea that the individual may not necessarily be a basic unit of knowing and acting. Phillips uses these insights to subvert traditional distinctions between the medieval person – thinking of himself as a member of a race or people – and the individualist outlook of the Renaissance. Instead he asserts that ‘we miss the extent to which group identification continued to be central to the experience of reality in the sixteenth century and beyond’ (p. 9).

Phillips skilfully interweaves these theoretical insights with the practical realities of sixteenth-century communal life, including linkages based on clientage, patronage, kinship and marriage, legal institutions, as well as more nebulous links derived from local custom, neighbourly proximity, and friendship.

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Powell, Susan, ed., *John Mirk’s Festial edited from British Library MS Cotton Claudius A.II*, Volume 1 (Early English Text Society O. S. 334), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009; hardback; pp. cxlv, 188; 6 b/w plates; R.R.P. £70.00; ISBN 9780199578498.

Written in the 1380s, John Mirk’s sermon-cycle had most of its impact much later: it underwent considerable excerpting and two re-workings, and was printed twenty-three times, making it for a while the most widely circulated Middle English text. It then suffered a near-total eclipse from the Reformation until Erbe’s edition of 1905, of which only Volume 1 (text and glossarial index) appeared, owing to his death in World War I.

Susan Powell has made Claudius A.II her base manuscript, for reasons she sets out in her detailed analysis of it. The choice is almost inevitable, as this is by far the earliest copy, and uniquely preserves much in the way of original-looking forms and lexis; but it is also a difficult choice, as Claudius gives the text in five heterogeneous sections (four hands, one including an unmistakable change of exemplar), some nearer the original than others, and all but two of them having significant affinities with the post-Mirk 'Group B' recension. Erbe's edition, based on what Powell's investigations have shown to be the second-best surviving copy, provides a more homogeneous text, and offers readings likely to be closer to what Mirk wrote, although in the sections in Powell's hand D (about three-fifths of the whole) the two editions seldom diverge markedly.

This is a critical best-text edition, sparingly emended through comparison with the other manuscripts, and preserving a wide assortment of scribal oddities, though with modern punctuation and capitalization and silently expanded abbreviations. While Section 3 of the Introduction gives a lucid overview of the *Festial's* complex transmission, there are no descriptions or datings of any of the manuscripts, other than Claudius. It might have been made clear that the 'Instructions for Parish Priests' (ed. Young) listed in the Bibliography is not the separate work by Mirk discussed under that title in the Introduction, but a component (28. in this volume) of the *Festial* itself. When Volume II appears, containing the remainder of the text, notes, glossary, and the sample collations on which Powell's views on manuscript relationships are based, a lively medieval work whose influence continued into early modern times will be available in a scholarly form.

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Prest, Wilfrid, *William Blackstone: Law and Letters in the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008; hardback; pp. xvii, 355; 4 b/w illustrations, 18 colour plates; R.R.P. AU\$61.95, £29.99; ISBN 9780199550296.

The *Commentaries on the Laws of England* that first appeared in four volumes between 1765 and 1768 (and never out of print since) arguably represents one of the greatest textbooks on the English common law. Despite this, their author Sir William Blackstone, has been relatively neglected by historians and biographers: the man himself remains largely a mystery. Professor Wilfrid Prest's scholarship has rectified this in a series of articles, a 2006 edition

of Blackstone's letters, and now this definitive biography. Prest's principal achievements have been both to contextualize Blackstone's life and works in the social, intellectual, and political milieu of eighteenth-century England and to bring to bear from the disparate archives almost every relevant primary source material. In a work of exacting scholarship and refined prose, Prest provides a chronological survey and assessment of the life and activities of Blackstone. In doing so, he has laid the foundations for all further study of matters Blackstonian.

'A Young Man of Brilliant Parts' (Chapter 2), Blackstone excelled in the literary arts, as well as Greek and Latin, at London's Charterhouse School. And 'notwithstanding the diminished educational and moral reputation of Oxford' (p. 26) at the time, in 1738 at fifteen he entered Pembroke College to prepare for the degree of Bachelor of Arts. But once '[r]emoved to the University' (Chapter 3) he abandoned this for the study of civil (or Roman) law eighteen months later. A further eighteen months later in late 1741, he was admitted as a student of the Middle Temple, then a means of progression to legal practice on the completion of five years' standing there. In 1743, he was elected as a fellow of All Souls, Oxford, graduating with the BCL in 1745.

On Prest's account, it is from this time that Blackstone divided his residency '[b]etween the University and the Temple' (Chapter 4). Although he initially took up chambers at the Inns of Court in London until he was admitted to practise as a barrister in late 1746, he thereafter resided principally at All Souls. This no doubt explains why, in the period 1744 to 1753, Blackstone saw few legal briefs come his way in the London courts. Further, Prest notes that this period coincided with him '[a]dvancing the Interests of the College' (Chapter 5) in a zealous pursuit of administrative matters. His reformist tendencies, rewarding merit at the expense of privilege, is a chapter hitherto little known in Blackstone's life and remarkable in the eighteenth-century context. On taking his Doctorate in Laws in 1750, Blackstone's activities now involved the 'General Benefit of the University at Large' (Chapter 6). This took the form of his continuing engagement in university administrative and legal matters and, for the first time, a course of lectures at Oxford on the common law. At this stage, he quit the London Bar to focus on the possibility of academic employment at Oxford.

Blackstone and his *Commentaries* have perhaps never fully recovered from Jeremy Bentham's famous attack in 1776: 'Bentham's Blackstone replaced the conscientious and upright scholar, judge, and public man with an even more two-dimensional caricature; that of failed barrister turned stodgy Tory academic and confused textbook apologist for the British constitution

and unreformed common law' (p. 9). Prest's account provides a careful and nuanced corrective to this view.

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Solomon, Michael, *Fictions of Well-Being: Sickly Readers and Vernacular Medical Writing in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010; cloth; pp. 200; 7 illustrations; R.R.P. US\$55.00; ISBN 9780812242553.

In this discussion of late medieval and early modern Spanish vernacular medical treatises, Michael Solomon examines how writers carefully established claims to medical expertise even while they stressed the accessibility of their texts. Thus, Martínez de Castrillo's work on dentistry (1557, rev. 1570) was subtitled a 'brief and compendious treatise' (p. 24). This is, ironically, also an adequate description of Professor Solomon's own monograph – a deceptively short, 97-page text (helpful endnotes excluded), founded on extensive, well-digested research, witnessed by a 51-page bibliography, of which two thirds is devoted to 'Vernacular Medical Works, 1305–1650'. Solomon lucidly discusses the emergence of vernacular texts on medical conditions and their prevention or cure in Spain, and the novel practice of 'sickly reading' by non-specialist readers – increasingly self-conscious 'communities of medicalized subjects' (p. 96), who both responded to, and provided the continued demand for, such texts.

Three well-organized chapters focus on the self-proclaimed 'Utility' of medical texts, the author–physician's self-construction, and the popularized discourse of pharmaceutical remedies – the latter commodifying treatment as a 'tangible' thing for increasingly consumerist 'sickly readers' (pp. 77–80). The monograph culminates with Solomon's compelling conclusions about the literature's social and cultural effects upon its non-specialist readers.

Solomon explores evolving attitudes about the dissemination of medical knowledge. Galenic belief in the benefits of positive thinking, he explains, justified strategies of mystification, self-praise, and downright deception needed to elicit the patient's trust in the physician's qualifications and expertise, and the patient's faith in the possibility of recovery. This Galenic tradition, in turn, underpinned the rationale of vernacular author–physicians to promote their writings while creating for their readers 'a healing strategy' (p. 9), a process whereby the author–physician's claims to 'reputation' were

in the interest of the reader–patient, in conformity with traditional medical practice.

Solomon also highlights fictional characteristics of these works, namely an epic rhetoric of ‘heroic metaphors’, whereby the self-invested knightly physicians contrasted their wisdom, exemplary record, and moral excellence with the shortcomings of demonized ‘mad’ or ‘foolish’ doctors, variously denounced as ‘incompetent, immoral, deceiving’, and even ‘evil’ (p. 65).

Throughout, Solomon highlights parallels between early modern ‘sickly reading’ and modern-day medical marketing, and consumerist attitudes toward health and the body – for instance, even, at the extreme, the notion of *self-treatment* is analogous with modern-day *self-help* health literature; similarly, the vernacular medical writers’ emphasis on brevity and simplicity resembles ‘the “fast relief” promises used to advertise modern-day pain relievers’ (p. 23). In his conclusion, Solomon takes this further, convincingly proposing that, in cultivating an audience – a ‘collaborative and collective’ community of readers and listeners (p. 10) – author–physicians oversaw the emergence of ‘medicalized subjects’ (p. 96) who not only thought of diseases more scientifically, rather than as ‘undesirable symptoms’ or ‘localized pains’ (p. 95), but also became avid consumers of popular medical literature. This, arguably, not only – or not so much – provided relief through knowledge, but, conversely – like today’s internet-facilitated ‘Cyberchondria’ (pp. 92–93) – caused ‘anxiety and produc[ed] sensations of ill-being’ (pp. 93–94).

Solomon’s book illustrates well-structured, insightful, and carefully researched scholarly writing at its best.

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Tolmie, Jane and M. J. **Toswell**, eds, *Laments for the Lost in Medieval Literature* (Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe 19), Turnhout, Brepols, 2010; hardback; pp. xii, 306; R.R.P. €60.00; ISBN 9782503528588.

The essays in *Laments for the Lost* form a broad introduction to lamentation across literatures in Old and Middle English, Latin, Old Norse, Old and Middle French, as well as mystery plays, and even Old Polish drama. Somewhat unusually, the book lacks an introduction from its editors. Instead, Anne L. Klinck calls her essay, the first, a ‘contextualizing paper’ for what follows (p. 1). She discusses the concept and history of laments and signals ‘the special interest of this volume: mourning for dead children’ (p. 17).

That ‘special interest’ is first explored by Jan M. Ziolkowski in ‘Laments for Lost Children: Latin Traditions’. Rebecca Krug’s ‘Natural Feeling and Unnatural Mothers: *Herod the Great*, The Life of Saint Bridget, and Chaucer’s *Clerk’s Tale*’ is an examination of models of medieval parental and family life. Plays about Herod’s Massacre of the Innocents are addressed further by Jane Tolmie, who links the theatrical depiction of suffering mothers with ideas of ‘God’s punishment of Eve for the fall of man’ (p. 297).

M. J. Toswell investigates the use of lament psalms in medieval England and their relationship with Old English poetry in the context of ‘grief work’ because laments ‘provide a way to perform that grief, to provide words for the work of mourning’ (p. 44). Trauma theory is also used by Mary K. Ramsey in her essay on the OE elegies, in which she calls the poetry ‘a locus for remembrance of an individual or communal life’ and ‘a more general commentary on the mutability of human experience’ (p. 52). Amy N. Vines discusses the ‘emotional identification’ with the Virgin Mary and her ‘intimate parental bond’ with Christ, encouraged by medieval lullabies and how ‘constructing laments can be a means to both acknowledge and overcome grief’ (p. 202), while Elizabeth Towl also looks at the mother–son relationship between Mary and Christ, this time in the narrative of the Passion in *The Lamentacioun of Oure Lady*.

Old Norse literature is addressed in two articles on one poem, *Sonatorrek*. Anne Savage, in the requisite *Beowulf* essay, posits the poem ‘as a verbal artefact of art and grief’ (p. 70). The book ends with a ‘Postscript/Postlude/Afterword’ by Derek Pearsall, who summarizes the previous articles but draws no overall conclusions. Given the breadth of the volume, many scholars may choose to read *Laments for the Lost* for individual essays rather than for the work as a whole.

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Urban, Malte, ed., *John Gower: Manuscripts, Readers, Contexts* (Disputatio 13), Turnhout, Brepols, 2009; hardback, pp. xii, 242; 15 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. €60.00; ISBN 9782503524702.

The nine studies included in this eclectic collection are presented in three sections. Part I, ‘Manuscripts, Material, and Translation’, includes essays by Russell A. Peck on the *mise en scène* of the act of reading in *Confessio Amantis*, Andrew Galloway on the uniqueness of the Latin glosses to the same text, Martha Driver on the role of female patronage in the production of

the carefully illustrated Pierpont Morgan MS M. 126, and María Bullón-Fernández on the parallel English, Portuguese, and Castilian versions of Gower's 'Tale of Tereus'.

Part II, 'Rhetoric and Authority', comprises essays by J. Allan Mitchell on Gower's role in the authorization of a new vernacular ethics, Georgiana Donavin on Genius's definition of 'rhetorique' in Book VII of the *Confessio*, and Malte Urban on the poet's theory of history as this is borne out in his strategies of citation in *Vox Clamantis*.

Part III, 'London Life and Texts', closes the volume with essays by Craig E. Bertolet on the historical circumstances which inform Gower's anti-Lombard vitriol in the *Mirour de l'Omme* and the *Confessio* and Eve Salisbury on the dossier of texts pertaining to the identity of the poet's often overlooked wife, Agnes Groundolf.

That the collection lacks an obvious thematic or methodological unity appears to have been part of Malte Urban's plan. In his Introduction, Urban writes that these essays 'approach the works of John Gower from a variety of angles that are to a large degree informed by the multiplicity of discourses contained in Gower's texts' (p. 1). Nevertheless, it seems likely that the most enduringly useful of these studies will be those which focus most closely on the volume's titular concerns: Galloway provides an important starting point for anyone interested in composing the, as yet unwritten, history of the gloss; Driver's text will be of crucial importance to future studies of Gower's female readership and the history of women's involvement in the late medieval book trade; Bullón-Fernández undertakes important groundwork on the activities of Gower's Iberian translators; and Bertolet's contextualization of the poet's anti-Lombard sentiment contains much which will be of use to medievalists with an interest in Anglo-Italian relations.

This said, Urban is to be congratulated for bringing together nine high-quality essays. They should be essential reading for all scholars with an interest in the current state of Gower studies.

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