the promise of showing the greyscales, continuities and complexities of parallel cultures, traditionally presented as oppositional, be they masculine and feminine, lay and clerical, heterodox and orthodox, or Latin and vernacular. Grounded in concrete examples, it reminds us of the fascinating complexities of late medieval English devotional culture.

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English Gothic misericord carvings. History from the bottom up. By Betsy Chunko-Dominguez. (Art and Material Culture in Medieval and Renaissance Europe, 9.) Pp. xii + 187 incl. frontispiece, 85 colour and black-and-white ills and 1 table. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2017. €112. 978 90 04 34118 0; 2212 4187

JEH (70) 2019; doi:10.1017/S0022046918001458

The fabulous panoply of scenes carved into the misericords that once supported the bottoms of medieval monks and canons across England is ripe for an important new treatment, and in Betsy Chunko-Dominguez it has found a suitably erudite and appreciative investigator. She opens her book by arguing, rightly, that it is a fool's errand to seek a single 'correct' meaning for every carving but also disputes with scholars who have emphasised incoherence or contradiction between margin and centre, or between the pious and the lewd. Seemingly incongruous iconographies, she argues, in fact operated at different levels within the one Christian interpretative hierarchy, a riddling challenge as much for cotemporaries as for modern historians. Sexual imagery, say, was neither simply subversive nor funny but just as richly allusive and complex as an episode from a saint's life. Her book largely positions religion – or, rather, the religious – as the dominant force within the interpretive field. Thus, 'husband beating' is an injunction to celibacy; deformed human bodies, a warning of spiritual corruption; hell, a didactic tool. Some of these interpretations will be familiar to readers but they provide the grit that proves the rich multi-valency of misericord carvings, and Chunko-Dominguez's short text is exceptionally wide-ranging and comprehensively cited. In fact, her weaker arguments come when she departs from her focus on contemporary hermeneutics and tries to uncover authorial intention. The first is when she contends that carvings of busy-bee agricultural workers were the 'conscious choice' of the carver in the face of accusations of rural laziness (p. 94). She makes a similar argument about carvings of carvers being examples of 'artisanal self-awareness' (p. 147). Actually, I would argue, the inverse is more plausible – this was the divinely-ordered society of estates satire, dictated by the seignorial interests of the patron, in which the peasant laboured as he ought, eschewing the alarming social flux of the long fifteenth century. As such, it would fit more neatly into her reader- or meaning-focussed approach. The second is when she describes Reynard the Fox carvings as the work of anticlerical carvers slipped under the nose of presumably rather dim-witted canons, and thus 'socially recuperative' (p. 142). This veers towards the centre/margin distinction critiqued in chapter i (p. 30). The book begins with its focus squarely on 'interpretive

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046918001458 Published online by Cambridge University Press

responses' (p. 4) and the outlining of a coherent multi-valency but concludes that 'misericords … negotiate spaces in between … artist and object, viewer and viewed' (p. 147). The author-carver rejoins the reader-cleric as a source of meaning; the cultural turn turns back. None of this should detract from what is a succinct, pithy and broad survey of the medieval interpretive field and a brilliant application of visual analysis, an important historicisation of and corrective to a somewhat neglected subject. Rather, as Chunko-Dominguez passes through the vast iconographical range of medieval misericords, the challenges and tensions in her subject return. Is there still room for paradox and inconsistency, even irresolvable mystery, both for us and for a medieval audience, in these odd programmes of shitting hunters, hanged foxes and worthy peasants?

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Gabriel Byng

Saints and cults in medieval England. Proceedings of the 2015 Harlaxton symposium. By Susan Powell. (Harlaxton Medieval Studies, 27.) Pp. xviii + 493 incl. 3 figs, 2 tables, 1 map and 97 colour plates. Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2017. £49.50. 978 1 907730 59 7

JEH (70) 2019; doi:10.1017/S0022046918001720

As one might expect from the contributions to the annual Harlaxton Medieval Studies Symposium, many glow and not a few sparkle. Those for 2015 (on the theme of 'Saints and cults in medieval England') are no exception. Pamela Tudor-Craig sadly died in December 2017, but her elegant foreword here remains to speak of the delights to come. And delights they certainly are, covering many fields – from an examination by Claire Gobbi Daunton of wondrously carved saints, demons and sinners in West Norfolk churches (especially Outwell), to a critique by Elisabeth Dutton and Tamara Haddad of the peculiar and tempestuous *Historie van Jan van Beverley*; from Nigel Morgan's meticulous article on the Sarum Calendar in England in the fourteenth century, to John Crook's observation that, contrary to popular belief, some saints and their shrines were still very much going strong in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, in fact right up to 1536–7. Vincent Gillespie's study of the locally venerated Richard Rolle of Hampole (d. 1349) shows that even Chaucer, in his *House of fame* (recently and persuasively re-dated by Helen Cooper to the 1380s), seems to have appreciated Rolle's literary merits long after his death in 1349, by which time his Psalter, and other works in Middle English had already spread widely – 'not bad for an Oxford dropout' (p. 160). And Nicholas Orme's piece on the engagingly hyperactive William Worcester, who spent his retirement fearlessly travelling alone and far afield 'collecting' obscure saints, is excellent. David Starkey discusses in lively prose the huge effect on Cambridge of the saintly Henry VI and his family, and especially his possibly life-changing influence over the young Henry, earl of Richmond (later Henry VII), after only one brief meeting, while Henry VII's later devotion to, and the cult of, the plague saint Armel of Brittany, is examined by Linda Ehrsam Voigts. Reconstructions and reinterpretations abound, from Nicholas Rogers's deeply scholarly study, using manuscript evidence, of the lost

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046918001458 Published online by Cambridge University Press