

This volume contains eight papers (plus an introduction) arising from a conference in Cambridge in 2011. Most focus on English material, although Iona McCleery deals with the more unfamiliar terrain of late medieval Portugal. As is always the case with such undertakings, the contributions vary greatly in quality and approach, some being more in the nature of musings, others more empirical. Of the latter, one might mention the careful discussion of the twelfth-century collections of Marian miracles by Kati Ihnat, who notes the way in which the miracle accounts gave a special prominence to Mary's liturgy at a time when it was both taking on new forms and being contested. She argues that, in this case, 'miracles come across as *apologiae* for novel liturgical practice'. Iona McCleery illustrates her succinct and perceptive remark, 'there is something inherently countable about miracles', by analysing three Portuguese cults. She notes both the general and the particular: 'plague miracles are very unusual in miracles collections', but, in one of these cults, cases of possession 'involved ghosts of the deceased, a rare phenomenon in other parts of Europe'. Not all the assumptions underlying the individual papers are equally convincing. Irina Metzler advances quite broad explanations for a supposed decline in the proportion of healing miracles in the later Middle Ages, but this 'decline' seems to be supported only by Vauchez's conclusion that healing miracles form 90 per cent of miracles in canonisation processes of the thirteenth century and 80 per cent in those of the fourteenth; a decline, it is true, but a modest one. Rebecca Pinner becomes rather entangled in attempting to find a context for the solitary example of a childbirth miracle by Edmund King and Martyr, although inhabitants of Norfolk and Suffolk will be interested to know that 'East Anglia is like the penetrable female body'. Louise Wilson looks at the miracle collection of Edmund of Abingdon in an Auxerre manuscript, a collection that has never been published in its entirety, while Fiona Kao seeks for the influence of the 'motifs, topoi and rhetoric' of medieval hagiography in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. Although there are the customary declarations in the introduction to this volume that the essays will 'present new approaches', what is striking throughout is the continued dominance of the classic studies of thirty-five years ago (Sigal, Vauchez, Brown, Finucane, Schmitt) and the equally vintage nature of the anthropology cited (Victor Turner, Mauss on the gift). It is still apparently necessary to decry the spurious distinction between elite and popular religion – perhaps this is a battle that has to be refought each generation. There is no index or bibliography.

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Mulieres religiosae. Shaping female spiritual authority in the medieval and early modern periods. Edited by Veerle Fraeters and Imke De Gier. (Europa Sacra, 12.)

Pp. xx + 314 incl. 8 colour plates, 26 figs and 3 graphs. Turnhout: Brepols, 2014. €90. 978 2 503 54912 5

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This collection of twelve essays is impressive for the temporal and geographical range of topics covered and the diversity of disciplines represented. The central question of the volume is set out in the editors' introduction: 'This volume ... investigates how women shaped their religious lives within limits set by the

Church and what avenues they explored to construct religious authority and exercise spiritual leadership' (p. 1). As the introduction makes explicit, the collection seeks to challenge the traditional categories through which female spiritual authority has been studied, particularly the association of women with *ex gratia* authority (derived from unmediated divine sanction, for example prophecy or mystical experience) as opposed to the *ex officio* authority available to men (official ecclesiastical approval of the administration of the sacraments and preaching). What is sought instead is 'a rather more nuanced picture of spiritual authority in line with more recent scholarship on cross-gender friendships and authorship and with gender-neutral approaches to affective spirituality' (p. 4). While not all of the essays challenge the traditional categories of authority explicitly, the collection as a whole does bring nuance and a variety of perspectives as each essay presents a case study focused on either an individual woman or communities of women religious.

The case studies examining individual religious women, ranging from prophets to mystics to a French princess, treat not only well-known figures (Marguerite Porete, Julian of Norwich), but also lesser-known religious women (St Margareta of Hungary). In the first essay of the collection, María Eugenia Góngora examines the relationship between female prophet and ecclesiastical authorities through the career of Elisabeth von Schönau. She argues for a reading of Elisabeth's *Book of revelations* as a 'judiciary inquest' (p. 32) used by the ecclesiastical authorities in the establishment of the cult of St Ursula in Cologne. Viktória Hedvig Deák shows that the spirituality associated with the *mulieres religiosae* of the Low Countries was also active in thirteenth-century Hungary, through examination of the life of the Dominican nun and mystic St Margareta of Hungary. Imke de Gier's study of Marguerite Porete's *Mirouer* challenges the hierarchical model of conferring authority; she argues that a religious woman could attain spiritual authority even when official ecclesiastical approval was absent through her decision to write and the reception of her work within a community. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker's chapter on Jeanne de Valois challenges traditional models of authority from an altogether different angle. She argues that women could and did have *ex officio* authority through a re-examination of the social structures within which religious women lived, bringing to the fore other forms of power and authority outside of the male political hierarchy (pp. 155–6). Kathleen M. Smith argues that Julian of Norwich's use of the vernacular in the *Showings* effectively accords it authority 'as a tool of divine expression' (p. 188). Complementing these studies of individual women are an equal number of essays interrogating the construction, representation and exercise of female spiritual authority by communities of women.

Andrea Worm's essay on 'images of abbesses and female religious communities' from the late tenth through early thirteenth centuries demonstrates how images of female convents shifted in response to the monastic reform movement, coming to reflect 'the consequential relationship between the female convent and their male superiors' (p. 79). Sylvie Duval's chapter focuses on the relationship between the Dominican Observant movement and the increased practice of strict enclosure in Italy from the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries. Eva Lindqvist Sandgren examines manuscripts copied by the Bridgettine nuns in Vadstena Abbey and through careful analysis of illuminations and embedded scribal initials is able to shed new

light on the scribal activities of the Vadstena nuns. Mathilde van Dijk's diachronic study examines how depictions of female leaders of the *Devotio Moderna* found in a fifteenth-century 'collection of the lives of exemplary sisters' (p. 243) from Diepenveen contrast with examples from the thirteenth-century women's movement found in biographies. She concludes that, in contrast to the focus on 'interior lives' found in the earlier material, the later material 'concentrate[s] on practices and sayings' (p. 261). In her essay on the seventeenth-century Brussels Visitandine nuns, Ping-Yuan Wang challenges the 'close correlation between gender and genre' (p. 267), arguing that the study of female spiritual authority should move outside of the *ex gratia* / *ex officio* distinction to take into account not only the exceptional, but also the mundane, here exemplified by communal circular letters. In the final essay in the collection, Caroline Giron-Panel examines a unique form of eighteenth-century female religious vocation fostered in the hospitals (*ospedali*) of the Venetian Republic, namely as musicians who played both 'to the glory of God' (p. 291) and for 'the glory of the Republic' (p. 292).

These essays are arranged chronologically, moving from the twelfth through eighteenth centuries. This arrangement is intended to demonstrate a shift over time in which female spiritual authority came to be 'defined within the context of collective communal devotion rather than as one striving primarily for an individual spiritual perfection' (p. 8). This shift was the result of 'the various restrictions [placed] upon religious women from 1300 onwards' (p. 8) that limited their ability to act as individuals. While some of the authors present strong arguments in support of this thesis (for example, Duval, Wang), many do not address the issue directly and one contributor explicitly disagrees (Mulder-Bakker: 'I do not see much change for the worse after 1300' [p. 161]). Even though I remain unconvinced that the temporal shift articulated by the editors is fully demonstrated here, the collection remains a valuable addition to the study of pre-modern female spirituality and authority.

The strength of the volume rests in the range of places, times and methods represented. Both individually and as a collective whole, the essays in this collection will be of interest to a broad spectrum of graduate students and scholars interested in the history of women and the means and methods by which they exercised spiritual authority and leadership within western Christianity.

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Wading lambs and swimming elephants. The Bible for the laity and theologians in the late medieval and early modern era. By Wim François and August Den Hollander. (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 257.) Pp. xv + 412 incl. 58 figs. Leuven-Paris-Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2012. £84 (paper). 978 90 429 2755 1

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This is the third collection of essays to emanate from the *Biblia Sacra* Research Group, following August den Hollander and Mathijs Lamberigts (eds), *Lay Bibles in Europe* (2006) and Wim François and August den Hollander (eds), *Infant milk*