

encouragements to understand the psychic bridges connecting seventeenth-century public lives and inner lives with a mysterious cosmos full of divine and magical forces.

It is important to treat past beliefs as past reality, and this Timbers does in a bold and accomplished way. By the end of this book, however, the “liminal world between fantasy and reality” (1) starts to feel more like the blurred line between history and fiction. Timbers has written a very interesting book that tests the limits of history, which is to be applauded, but her effort may exceed those limits. On the other hand, doing so may well be her greatest contribution: to make us think harder about the fictive qualities of history and the historicization of literature, and how best scholars and students should position themselves between the two.

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PAUL WEBSTER. *King John and Religion*. Studies in the History of Medieval Religion. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015. Pp. 250. \$99.00 (cloth).
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In traditional historiography one would not expect to see the words “King John” and “Religion” in the same sentence—at least not in a positive sense. Following medieval chroniclers, historians have seen John as irreligious, lacking in any pious instinct, if not downright evil. In his introduction to *King John and Religion*, Paul Webster sets his study in the context of scholarship on the religiosity of other medieval kings besides John, noting the tendency of historians to describe kings as “conventionally pious.” In so doing, he raises some provocative questions: What was “conventional” about medieval royal piety or religious practices? What expectations were laid upon kings? Did these expectations change over time? His treatment of John and religion, based on meticulous investigation of the documentary sources, reveals a different side to the much-maligned monarch.

Webster starts by looking at the evidence for John’s attitude to the mass, both in the sense of whether, and how often, he himself took confession and attended the performance of the sacrament of the Eucharist, and in the sense of masses for the departed, endowments made for the spiritual welfare of the soul after death. His discussion of the saints (chapter 2) reveals the breadth of John’s interest in those who had been canonized as it was manifest in visits to their tombs and shrines, and in his private relic collection. For many monarchs of the twelfth century the foundation of a monastic house was an expected “conventional” act (chapter 3). John’s most famous contribution in this respect was the establishment of Beaulieu Abbey in the royal New Forest. This is usually seen as a rather grudging act of penance on John’s part, made to mark a (temporary) reconciliation with the Cistercians, yet a detailed analysis shows the care that John put into the finer points of making the foundation; moreover, his interest in Beaulieu was sustained, no passing whim, and he appears to have been eager to associate members of his family as spiritual beneficiaries of his relationship with this abbey of White Monks. Beaulieu was, however, not the only monastery to benefit from John’s patronage: a number of smaller and less prestigious houses could claim him as founder, cofounder, or patron.

The issue of family, which Webster picks up in chapter 4, is another concept that tends to have negative connotations in relation to the Angevins. Much as their relationship in life lacked harmony, however, John did not forget his kin after their death, but confirmed their grants to religious houses and financed masses for their souls. In chapter 5 Webster turns to the issue of charity and almsgiving. It is the *misae* rolls that, Webster argues, bring us “closer to the king’s personal religion than other surviving evidence” (113), and he notes

that John's charity and almsgiving went beyond what might "conventionally" be expected of a king. Particularly striking are the alms given to small nunneries and solitary religious.

John's reputation as a king who lacked respect for religion rests in part on the long period during which England was under interdict (1208–1214) and John himself was excommunicated (1209–1213). Without special pleading, Webster unpicks the documentary sources to highlight not only how John's reputation has been shaped by the negative stories told by chroniclers but also his dilemma during the events surrounding the election of an archbishop of Canterbury to succeed Hubert Walter—on whom he had relied so greatly—that led to the breakdown in relations with Rome. In seeking to have an archbishop of Canterbury acceptable to the king, he was following in the footsteps of his predecessors. Henry I had exiled Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury; John's own father was held by many to have ordered the murder of Thomas Becket. Yet—and Webster argues that this is a crucial difference—they lived long enough after these events for their reputations to recover: "King John died during the crises generated by his rule" (172), and he did not live long enough to repair the damage done to relations with the church. It was these circumstances that forged his obituary and his reputation, all the other expressions of his religiosity forgotten.

Some of the topics treated in *King John and Religion* have, naturally, already received much scholarly attention. However, others—notably those manifestations of personal religiosity or expressions of religious sentiment that are so difficult to uncover—receive sustained treatment for the first time here. Webster has offered us new insights into John's rule, as well as a fresh perspective on such matters as John's "exploitation" of the church through taxation and the complexities of his relations with Rome. He has produced a wide-ranging and detailed study on which he is to be congratulated.

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C. M. WOOLGAR. *The Culture of Food in England, 1200–1500*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016. Pp. xiii, 341. \$45.00 (cloth).
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C. M. Woolgar's broad survey, *The Culture of Food in England, 1200–1500*, covers both a basic aspect of survival and the elaborate world of ceremony and ostentation constructed in and around the kitchens and tables of those who have left most of the extant records. He focuses on late medieval England, where the specter of scarcity (and famine) was real and where the basic ritual of religious observance was the ingestion of the host at the mass.

Woolgar follows two lines of discussion. One the "what" of foods—what was available in the realms of meat, fish, products of field and orchard, and, more exotically, spices, high-quality wines, and such luxury foods as oranges and lemons. The other is how these foods were prepared and served: recipes and household manuals, menus of great feasts and banquets, regular meals and mealtimes as delineated in regulations covering aristocratic and episcopal households, and records of and receipts from guild dinners. One theme that Woolgar drives home is the power of aspiration, or what we might call a trickle-down effect of cuisine and the drive toward emulation: the peasantry and urban poor were eager to follow their social superiors in patterns of choice and consumption.

Given Woolgar's long-established expertise on great households and their foods, we have come to expect that he will have tapped vast range of sources. Not only does he range through more than three hundred years and cover the kingdom from one corner to another, but his dip into many different sources allows him to offer a comparative assessment of variety, custom, and change, as well as the pleasures and the risks of the food world. His