

male and female religious houses in the region in the early Carolingian period. Chapter iii describes in detail two clusters of books produced by women in this region, which provide the principle evidence for the study: the Gun(t)za and Abirhild manuscripts, all of which Bernhard Bischoff dated to the latter half of the eighth century. Part II, comprising five chapters, examines the contents of these manuscripts and argues that the women who produced them deliberately chose to copy texts that aligned with their gender-egalitarian views or, even more strikingly, excised misogynist statements from otherwise valuable patristic commentaries and other such texts. These texts included Augustine's commentary on the Psalms, Gregory the Great's Gospel homilies, apocryphal acts of the Apostles (many of which featured women in important supporting roles), passion narratives of female martyrs, Isidore of Seville's *Synonyms* and florilegia like the *Liber scintillarum*. In example after example, Lifshitz's main point rings clear: '[W]omen's manuscripts from the Anglo-Saxon cultural province in Francia showed how their books reflected and defended both women's integration into intellectual, cultural, political, and religious life (syneisactism) and gender egalitarianism' (p. 193). This is a long, challenging and occasionally self-indulgent book that would have benefited from a firmer editorial hand, but this does not diminish its importance as a ground-breaking and meticulously researched work of feminist scholarship that convincingly employs manuscript evidence to argue for the agency of early medieval religious women in a climate of reform that was growing increasingly hostile to their value and purpose in the Christian tradition. Historians of early medieval monasticism, manuscript studies and gender studies will all discover important insights in this book.

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO

SCOTT BRUCE

A companion to Alfred the Great. Edited by Nicole Guenther Discenza and Paul E. Szamarch. (Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, 58.) Pp. xiv + 469 incl. 1 plate and 15 figs. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2014. €168. 978 90 04 27484 6.

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The introductory chapter to this collection of essays sets out its main aims as 'to guide readers through the field and [to] add new scholarship in the study of Alfred, his times, and the artistic and literary productions associated with the king and his court' (p. 1). In broad terms Discenza and Szarmach have successfully achieved those aims by bringing together an excellent array of leading scholars in the field of the Alfredian educational and cultural renaissance. What is more, they have produced a wide-ranging collection which will be particularly useful to any student of the vernacular texts (mostly translations) arguably produced in the sphere of the West Saxon king.

The volume presents thirteen studies divided into three main parts (Context, Alfred as author and Alfrediana). This division, logical as it may be, is slightly undermined by the weight of the central section, which comprises more than half of the articles (seven). Moreover, all but the three opening pieces, which provide wider historical and artistic studies, focus on the vernacular translation of Latin texts (those most necessary for people to know) of the late ninth

century. Two further exceptions are Richards's piece on the Laws of Alfred and Ine and Irvine's broad study on the origins, creation and development of the *Anglo-Saxon chronicle*. Yet the question of Alfredian authorship is acknowledged as key to this volume (p. 232) and, in an attempt to tackle this controversial issue, the editors decided to present mostly individual essays for each text, hence the weight given to literary (and linguistic) analyses of the vernacular renderings. Apart from the enlightening, in-depth discussions, each contributor provides a wide overview of the current state of the question that they address. Thus, for instance, Bately (ch. iv) reviews the so-called 'Alfredian canon' before arguing for a probable role of the king in the translation of the four items that are now accepted as part of that canon, whereas Irvine (ch. v) reflects on the role played by Alfredian prefaces and epilogues before concluding that the issue of their originality is secondary to the 'fluid manuscript culture' that produced them, shedding light on an 'on-going process of textual presentation' (p. 170).

Finally, both an 'Annotated bibliography on the authorship issue' and thirty-six pages of general bibliography are provided, constituting highly useful resources for any scholar or scholar interested in the programme of scholarship set by King Alfred in the last decades of the ninth century.

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

FRANCISCO JOSE ALVAREZ LOPEZ

The formation of the English kingdom in the tenth century. By George Molyneaux. Pp. xv + 302 incl. 5 maps. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. £65. 978 0 19 871791 1
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This important volume traces the institutional, administrative and ideological crystallisation of the ancestor of modern England over the course of a century. Molyneaux's central argument is that the machinery of late Anglo-Saxon government, so celebrated for its achievements in the eleventh century, was largely a development of the later tenth century, particularly the reign of Edgar (959–75). In the first three chapters he sets the stage for later developments by surveying the various structures which English rulers from the late ninth to mid-tenth centuries used to accomplish a series of military conquests. The major achievement of this period was the creation of a large, geographically contiguous kingdom, albeit one still marked by important regional differences. Molyneaux is careful to define this as expansion rather than conquest. Kings extended their power in several different ways using both violent and non-violent techniques. What fuelled English (or, as Molyneaux terms the ruling dynasty, Cerdicing) success at this time was probably weight of numbers and wealth: the Viking onslaught had transformed the political map of England and left the kings of the West Saxons as the richest and politically dominant figures of lowland Britain. When they turned their resources against smaller, less co-ordinated powers the odds were stacked heavily in the Cerdicings' favour. Molyneaux proposes that the principal aim of expansion in the first half of the tenth century was the establishment of security against Vikings and other enemies, rather than unification of the English (not least because some of the English, even in the tenth century, ended up ruled by the kings of the Scots).