

landscape. I do not think that reason requires us to dwell in it, and I, for one, would not choose to do so.

JOHN LAWS

Lord Justice of Appeal

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## Miracles of the Virgin in Medieval England: Law and Jewishness in Marian Legends

ADRIENNE WILLIAMS BOYARIN

DS Brewer, Woodbridge, 2010, xi + 217 pp (hardback £50.00)

ISBN: 978-1-84384-240-8

## The Homiletic Writings of Archbishop Wulfstan

JOYCE TALLY LIONARONS

DS Brewer, Woodbridge, 2010, viii + 194 pp (hardback £60.00)

ISBN: 978-1-84384-256-9

The two books reviewed here are far from being the run-of-the-mill works on mediaeval law (canon law or otherwise). Both present their subjects with a passing glance at the law, and there is a delight in seeing the law from a different perspective.

Adrienne Boyarin's consideration of the legendary accounts of the intercession of the Virgin Mary in mediaeval English literature is a work of dense scholarship, spanning literary criticism, art history and social and cultural studies. Its vocabulary is heavily technical, and it is not at all an easy read. Nevertheless, it is a worthwhile read, particularly in the latter chapters, in which Boyarin studies the legal aspects of the tales of the miraculous activity of the Virgin Mary in the Middle Ages. Aelfric's use of the 'Legend of Theophilus' in his first sermon on Mary's Assumption emphasised the Virgin's role as a legal advocate; later English writings expanded this to the presentation of Mary as a type of Moses – not simply a *mediatrix* but a *legislatrix*. Mary was especially significant for her relationship to contract law in the Theophilus legend, because she retrieves the 'soul-stealing charter' from the devil. The Virgin becomes the 'bearer of the text' of the law, quite literally a *corpus legis*. In a series of images similar to the lactation legends associated with Saint Bernard of Clairvaux in the previous century, Mary produces books of law at her breasts, giving birth to the Law. The sources invoked range from heavily illustrated English Carthusian manuscripts to the plan for the late fourteenth-century Lady Chapel in York Cathedral. Boyarin concludes by placing these literary and artistic productions in the context of the anonymous Walsingham Ballad and the tradition

of miracle stories around that famous shrine, arguing that they fulfil ‘very specific functions in the English imagination’ – particularly the English legal imagination.

Far less visual, but just as fascinating, is Joyce Lionarons’ work on the sermons of Archbishop Wulfstan (d. 1023, Bishop of London and then both Bishop of Worcester and Archbishop of York, not to be confused with either the earlier Archbishop of York or the later Bishop of Worcester). Wulfstan’s devotion to pastoral care and his legal contributions to secular and canon law are well known (he drafted law codes for both Aethelred the Unready and Cnut), but far less well known are his homilies. Lionarons reviews Wulfstan’s ‘Homiletic canon’ and then presents a variety of themes within those sermons. These works have not received the attention they deserve, perhaps because the collection circulated in the vernacular of late Anglo-Saxon England rather than in Latin, and Lionarons fills that gap admirably. But the most fascinating section of this book presents Wulfstan’s homilies based on legal codes and the *Institutes of Polity* (unique in Anglo-Saxon literature as the only surviving work of political theory from this period). These homilies have rarely been commented on, and were not even included in Dorothy Bethurum’s 1957 edition of Wulfstan’s works. For the most part composed toward the end of his life, they run the gamut from the education and duties of priests to the payment of tithes. Most intriguing of all, perhaps, is the fact that the bishop found the legal codes important enough to include in his preaching. Although he did not distinguish between homilies and law codes in content, he did in form, as he shaped and reshaped the law codes for oral delivery. The fact that most of these homilies are unavailable in printed editions is regrettable. While the number of lawyer bishops has certainly not been small throughout history, the number of bishops who selected the law as their preaching text must be few indeed, and, if only for the sake of novelty, these sermons hold our attention.

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## Select Ecclesiastical Cases from the King’s Courts 1272–1307

EDITED BY DAVID MILLON

Selden Society, London, 2009, cxxviii + 105 pp (hardback £60.00)

ISBN: 978-0-85423-127-7

This book, the 126th of the Selden Society’s edited volumes of the early sources of English legal history, takes a form familiar to that society’s readers. It consists of a lengthy and knowledgeable introduction to the primary sources, followed by