

*The Miraculous and the Writing of Crusade Narrative.* By Beth C. Spacey. Crusading in Context. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2020. xvi + 198 pp. \$99.00 cloth.

There has been a turn in how the medieval Christian holy war (what we so often call the “Crusades”) has been studied over the past few decades, a reevaluation of the way these events were told, were presented, and were integrated into the arc of sacred history for contemporaries. This is not, of course, to deny the events themselves but rather to fully appreciate the complexity of our sources and the relationship between what actually happened and what stories the author(s) wanted to tell. As such, the book *The Miraculous and the Writing of Crusade Narrative*, which grows from Spacey’s doctoral thesis, follows on this newer tradition, one begun in large part by the late Jonathan Riley-Smith.

Spacey sets out, as the title states, to consider the use of the miraculous in texts related to Christian holy war waged from 1096–1204, a period encompassing the “First” through “Fourth” Crusades. The author argues that the miraculous was a narrative tool, flexible and theoretically sophisticated, that allowed medieval (primarily monastic) authors to convey specific types of meaning about the events they described—this could be to show divine sanction for success or impart moral lessons in connection with failure.

The book itself is in three parts, divided equally into two chapters each. After a largely historiographical introduction, the first part, “Miracles and Marvels,” deals directly with success and failure. Chapter 1 situates crusade narratives within larger trends in medieval history-writing, with a particular focus on intellectual developments during the twelfth century and how authors tried to communicate divine approval. Chapter 2 reinforces these points, using narratives of unsuccessful (or “controversial”) expeditions to show how these authors still drew from a reservoir of miracles to rhetorically convince their readers of important points.

The second part of the book, “Visions and Dreams,” begins with a chapter on the distinction between those two terms in the twelfth-century mind. Spacey does well here to demonstrate how interconnected monastic authors were with ancient, late antique, and early medieval theorists. The legacies of Augustine and Macrobius loom large here and make their way into how later narrators couched their discussions of revelation. Then, chapter 4 demonstrates how visions worked to legitimize certain endeavors within the holy war, such as relic translations or martyrdom. There is a wealth of specific examples here.

The final part of the book is entitled “Signs and Augury” and is about a different way people thought God’s will could be made known. Chapter 5 frames the general way that clerics in Europe’s central Middle Ages understood these divine messages and the difficulties they felt in distinguishing valid readings from invalid ones. Narrators of the holy war ran up against a growing contemporary movement to naturalize celestial and meteorological events, and so walk a fine line. What mattered here was the *auctoritas* (“authority,” but specifically tied to a person with appropriate training to interpret) of their reading. The final chapter is composed of case studies across the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, highlighting points at which these signs shepherded the author’s “intended audience’s perception of the divine significance of the expedition” (136).

The book ends with a very brief conclusion and then an appendix that gives details (the author, when known, and the date of composition mostly) about the major

narrative sources that Spacey's book relies upon. The appendix is a bit of an odd duck, it must be said. On the one hand, as I noted, Spacey's focus is on the narratives of the medieval Christian holy war, and so attentiveness to the contexts of those narratives makes abundant sense. On the other hand, the book primarily engages, sometimes quite deeply, with specialists who work on medieval Christian holy war, people who will almost certainly be familiar with these sources.

This tension is, I think, one thing with which the book does struggle, unsure of who it is for and landing at times "in between" audiences. At times, *The Miraculous and the Writing of Crusade Narrative* feels trapped by the historiography of what is known as "Crusade Studies," for example, when it has to fight off the specter of a tradition in the subfield that historically belittled its subjects' religiosity (e.g., invocations of an "Age of Faith" [9–10, 156]), and when it seems to take "crusading" as a well-defined activity that necessarily links the sources under discussion. Yet, this is a book that should be read by all medievalists interested in the Christian twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It engages well with the intellectual legacy of the early Middle Ages and how ideas not only moved but were *used* by later generations. Indeed, Spacey's discussions of those elements feel like some of the most exciting and expansive chapters in the book and I would have loved to see more of that. Christian holy war was a part of the very fabric of medieval Europe's world, not a carved out side project, and using the lens of how they thought God intervened in the world hints at why that was.

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***The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West.***  
Edited by Alison I. Beach and Isabelle Cochelin. Cambridge:  
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hardcover.

As Albrecht Diem and Claudia Rapp write in their historiographical essay, "New syntheses may come at some point . . . but we are not there yet" (1:22). For the moment, we are at the point of sixty-four essays, along with their ample bibliographies, produced by an international team of scholars highly attuned to the diverse expressions of medieval regular religious life, generously defined.

The essays contributed by editors Alison I. Beach and Isabelle Cochelin illustrate several strengths of this *Cambridge History* as a whole. Cochelin's essay on monastic daily life asks scholars to "be more critical about what have long been considered fundamental tenets of medieval monastic life" and to replace "strict separation" with "complexity of . . . interaction" as characteristic of monastic relations with the world beyond the cloister (1:542). This call to greater critical awareness is echoed throughout, with many contributors challenging a new generation of scholars to read between the lines of their sources. Lauren Mancia describes how sources on nuns must "be combed with an exacting and critical eye, careful not to dismiss the agency that these women yielded" (2:681), while Bert Roest notes that laments about monastic indiscipline are not necessarily mirrors of reality but "part of a performative reform discourse" (2:1185). The discovery of a