

confined to north of the Alps. However, many aspects that clearly emerge from his analysis can shed light also on other early medieval societies heavily influenced by Carolingian rulership and reforms. In his volume the author moves thematically through the following subjects: laypeople and their property; lay families and kinship; laypeople in conflict; the vertical relationships between who had more power and who had less (lordship and patronage), which structured lay society; ideas both legal and practical among the laity about freedom and unfreedom. The last two aspects, in particular, present notable surprises: lordships and vassalage show up, but they do not appear terribly institutionalised, since it is hard to distinguish them from simple patronage and clientage. Moreover, the boundaries between the various possibilities for resolving disputes were fluid, and dispute resolution might operate through networks of personal relationships and/or formal judicial institutions. What formula analysis clearly shows is the extreme fluidity of free and unfree status in early medieval European society that Warren Brown analytically explores and explains: formulas show that each person lived on a sort of sliding scale of conditions and people could move across status boundaries, sometimes repeatedly, selling and buying status for money or negotiating it. What makes this volume particularly valuable is not only the acumen with which the legal formulas are analysed, discussed and contextualised. The book also pays great attention to the material data, to the manuscript tradition, to the history of the manuscripts, and that of Flavigny in particular, as well as to the events linked to the editions and uses made in the past of formula collections. All these aspects make Warren Brown's work even more appreciated by and useful to the academic community.

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*Brides of Christ. Women and monasticism in medieval and early modern Ireland.* Edited by Martin Browne OSB, Tracy Collins, Bronagh Ann McShane and Colmán Ó Clabaigh, OSB. Pp. xvi + 215 incl. 25 ills and 14 colour plates. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2023. £45. 978 1 80151 022 6  
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*Brides of Christ* is the latest of a number of important books that have focused on women religious in Ireland. It is an extremely challenging subject because of the paucity of evidence available as is made clear by each of the contributors to this volume. This book opens with a chapter by Tracy Collins, one of the co-editors, that summarises part of her *Female monasticism in medieval Ireland* (2021) in order to 'provide a background context for the chapters that follow' (p. 7). Of the more than 5,000 ecclesiastical sites in Ireland there were at least fifty-one, about 1 per cent, for which there is some evidence of a female religious presence. Collins identifies seven major female religious establishments in the early medieval period. In addition there were 'perhaps ten larger ecclesiastical complexes where there is some evidence of attached communities of female religious' (p. 13), and at least thirty-three other sites with historical references to holy women and/or female religious attached to them. There may have been others but there was no distinctive morphology to the sites of female religious to distinguish them as such and no others are documented. Collins found that

early Irish religious women were rarely confined to single-sexed communities or strictly enclosed. Elva Johnston's analysis of the data on female saints in the Irish martyrologies that were compiled from the ninth to the twelfth centuries reveals that about 12 per cent of the saints recorded were female. They were generally associated with small ecclesiastical communities, except for Kildare and Clonburren. Johnston found compelling evidence of contemporary appreciation of female religious asceticism associated with the *Céli Dé*, in particular. She also found that it was 'considered normal ... for male and female religious to converse regularly with each other and with laypeople. There is no suggestion that strict segregation of the sexes was considered desirable apart from within their actual monasteries or as a personal ideal' – despite the fact that women were believed to be 'one third more prone to sexual temptation than men' (p. 33). Catherine Swift's fascinating study of two Irish holy women in their late antique context should attract wide attention. She presents a persuasive case that the forms of female religious life documented in the texts on SS Brigit and Íte find their strongest parallels 'with the more egalitarian and more socially engaged Cappadocian communities of St Macrina, with their tradition of men and women working together and their strong focus on charity, love of their neighbours, and humble service to others' (p. 55).

Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel's chapter is focused on Irish nuns associated with the *Schottenkloster* in Regensburg. Of the 1,000 individuals named in its twelfth-century necrology, mostly abbots and monks, there are three nuns who were identified as being Irish, and one other nun who was probably Irish. Ó Riain-Raedel presents a richly textured context for the nuns before concluding that 'The Irish women in Regensburg have left nothing but their names but ... some information may yet be extracted from the literary and hagiographical works of the local Irish community there' (p. 84). Yvonne Seal offers a comparative study of the women religious in the medieval convent at Ballymore-Loughsewdy in the Irish midlands and their *consoeurs* at Prémontré in northern France. However, there are no extant documents from the Irish community and that imposes very severe restrictions on what can be gainfully said about it. Seal addresses the long-standing confusion about which order the Irish nuns belonged to and suggests that it was probably a Cistercian foundation, though there is no contemporary evidence that it ever had a formally Cistercian community. She proposes that the confusion may have arisen either because of scribal errors, or a historiographical tendency to distinguish between 'official' Cistercian communities as against those 'imitating' or 'emulating' them, or possibly 'a more complex situation than we can now recover, of a community whose identity was fluid or situational' (p. 92). Without 'some well-hidden cache of documents' coming to light it seems that we will likely never know (p. 99).

Ann Lyons presents a very useful chapter exploring the familial connections of abbesses Mary and prioresses of convents in medieval Ireland. She sets the scene by drawing on the work of other scholars before focusing on a number of key questions. She finds that it was not unusual for the founders of convents to put one of their female family members in charge. Indeed, family connections were invariably significant for the 'progression prospects' of women religious because having one of their own promoted to a senior position in a religious house usually accrued

benefits to the family. Lyons shows that convent superiors and at least some nuns routinely maintained connections with their families after profession. Occasionally the ‘permeable cloister’ facilitated sexual congress and motherhood – there is a story included here of an Irish abbess having a son with the local bishop on the very eve of the Reformation.

Colmán Ó Clabaigh, another of the editors of this book, contributes a fascinating study of the various expressions of quasi-religious life undertaken by medieval Irish women from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. They included individuals who lived as vowesses, anchoresses or female recluses, Franciscan and Dominican tertiaries as well as religious sisters who staffed medieval Irish hospitals. While they were never as numerous or as influential as the Beguines on mainland Europe, they were certainly far more important to medieval Irish society than anyone had previously suspected. Another editor, Bronagh Ann McShane, presents a chapter whose title, ‘Who were the nuns in early modern Ireland?’, alludes to Caroline Bowden’s pioneering ‘Who were the nuns?’ project which generated much valuable data on Irish nuns who joined English convents on mainland Europe during the years of persecution at home. This chapter can be usefully read alongside McShane’s excellent monograph on *Irish women in religious orders* (2022). Colm Lennon, the doyen of Tudor Dublin, discusses the sisters of the confraternity of Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin. Among the 1,000 individuals whose names were recorded in the cathedral’s ‘book of obits’ only a minority were women; either members of religious orders or more often laywomen, married and *femmes soles*. Almost one-sixth of the female members were freewomen of Dublin. One of them was a working merchant who inducted another woman as an apprentice in 1500. Lennon outlines how female members were inducted into the confraternity, discusses the entry fines payable and explains the benefits, both spiritual and social, which women could expect to gain through membership, until it fell victim to the Elizabethan Reformation in the 1560s.

All in all, this is a valuable collection of essays about religious women. A perusal of the footnotes in the book shows that there has been no shortage of scholars who have studied this subject over the past four decades; one thinks especially of Bernadette Cunningham and Dianne Hall. However, the paucity of evidence presents an extraordinary challenge. One can only admire the care, determination and imagination shown by each of the contributors in garnering the almost-invariably scant evidence, their rigour in assessing it and their assiduity in publishing the fruits of their labour in this book.

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*Demonic possession and lived religion in later medieval Europe*. By Sari Katajalla-Peltomaa. (Studies in Medieval European History.) Pp. x + 211. Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. £60. 978 0 19 885046 5  
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Demonic possession has been a source of ongoing fascination for historians of successive generations. The search for its causes, and indeed for explanations, has produced a varied historiography in which agreement or consensus is not always available. The great virtue of Sari Katajalla-Peltomaa’s contribution to this