

eight of the fifteenth, mostly preserved in Germany and Austria. It may also be worth noting that, as I have discovered, we have a similar situation with the manuscript tradition of Humbert of Romans's treatise *De predicatione crucis*, originally destined for crusading in Palestine. Furthermore, as it is possible to see in catalogue records of the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library that the *Codex S. Petri b. IX 28* from Salzburg, which contains Robert's chronicle, includes some historical and liturgical materials concerning the Ottomans and the Hussites as well: the later use of the chronicle by Robert the Monk would probably be a good subject for further scholarship.

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*King John and religion.* By Paul Webster. (Studies in the History of Medieval Religion, 43.) Pp. xv +253 incl. 4 maps, 1 fig. and 2 tables. Woodbridge–Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2015. £60. 978 1 78327 029 3

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It is notoriously difficult to study the personal religious beliefs of medieval monarchs. Whilst writers and chroniclers of the time often commented on the spiritual conduct of specific kings and queens during this period, such sources are made up of multiple layers of interpretation. In order to analyse the specific, sometimes unpredictable, opinions and motives of individual monarchs, modern scholars must carry out close and objective readings of contemporary accounts in order to see clearly through the complex views of the medieval writers. Indeed, the Angevin kings of England are no exception to this rule. For Paul Webster, the study of the personal religion of one of England's most notorious kings – King John – indicates the wealth of potential that investigations of this type provide for discussions of religion and the post-Conquest kings of England. The distinction between the phrase 'personal religion' and 'piety' is crucial to this discussion, and is noted by Webster at the very beginning of his analysis. For Webster, there is a useful but under-examined distinction between the study of the monarch's personal devotion and his public piety, i.e. being seen to visit the shrines of saints, undertake pilgrimage and practise almsgiving to enhance his public image as a Christian monarch. Whilst much of his work by necessity discusses the public manifestations of John's religious devotion, Webster is ultimately more interested in investigating John's 'inner soul' (p. 2). In this respect, this study helpfully builds on an already flourishing scholarly tradition that addresses the theme of the religious expression of medieval monarchs, but which, as Webster notes, often does not try to determine whether or not these were pious individuals themselves. This study rethinks scholarly trends to conclude that, whilst John 'saw his dispute with the church in political terms, he viewed his personal religion as a separate matter' (p. 198).

Perhaps the strongest element of this book is its drive to shift the negative focus of scholarship on King John, which has so far encumbered research in this field, by demonstrating that, despite the opinions of his political commentators, John did indeed engage with the most important religious observances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Examples of this are most explicitly indicated in the first five chapters, which deal with John's engagement with various pillars of religious practice during this period, including the offering of masses such as the *Laudes*

*Regiae*, which connected earthly and heavenly hierarchies; his pragmatic devotional activity at the shrines of saints such as St Edmund and St Edward the Confessor; his support for religious houses and the foundation of the Cistercian abbey at Beaulieu; the influence of his ancestry and family on his religious activity; and his charitable and almsgiving activities. What these chapters on John's personal religious preferences reveal is the complexity of his engagement with religion, as well as the ways in which religion, politics and finances influenced him before and during his reign. For example, John's preferences for saints such as St Wulfstan of Worcester, next to whom he expressed a desire to be buried, demonstrate a commitment to continue the conventional devotional practices of his ancestors, as well as an attempt to heighten his own status by proximity to relics and legends surrounding the saint. As Webster notes, John 'can hardly have been unaware of the developing cult, particularly as moves to secure Wulfstan's canonisation gathered pace' (p. 46).

The subsequent two chapters are chronologically structured, and take a closer look at John's religious activity during the period of his reign for which he is certainly most remembered – the interdict of England from 1208 to 1214, and the excommunication of the monarch during four of these six years. Not only does Webster analyse the reasons for, and consequences of, these turbulent years in English history, he offers a discursive analysis of how John sought to gain financially and politically from his dispute with Pope Innocent III (in particular through ecclesiastical taxation from 1210 and the seizure of church property), and of how the events of this period sowed the seeds for John's later notorious reputation, recorded by chroniclers such as Matthew Paris. Throughout the book, Webster also alludes to criticism of John in literary sources, in particular Adam of Eynsham's *Life of St Hugh of Lincoln*, and the perspectives that these sources offer are often very illuminating. What Webster is keen to emphasise throughout these chapters is that John continued to encourage, and to be involved in, the observance of the religious calendar despite the limitations of the interdict and during his excommunication. In this way, these chapters, succeeded by the final chapter on John's death and burial, reveal a monarch who 'knew the ropes', so to speak, but who struggled to control his devotional image in the eyes of his contemporaries, particularly when he was seen to have lacked devotional willpower and the ability to deliver on his personal religious activities, such as fasting or preparing to go on Crusade.

A rigorous attention to detail, both thematically and chronologically, give this book a strong standing in the intellectual fields in which it is situated, and will surely make it a key text for the study of King John and his religious interest and activities. The scope of this study goes further, however, by highlighting the ways in which research in this field can cast new light onto areas of study about which, historically, people have been misinformed by popular and scholarly opinion. Clearly and cohesively written, this book provides a stimulating account of King John's personal religion. It suggests many intriguing avenues for further research and will be of interest to scholars of social and political, as well as ecclesiastical, history.

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