

JENNIFER N. BROWN and DONNA ALFANO BUSSELL, eds. *Barking Abbey and Medieval Literary Culture: Authorship and Authority in a Female Community*. Woodbridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2012. Pp. 350. \$99.00 (cloth).  
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This eagerly anticipated volume focuses on the literary production of Barking Abbey, one of only a few English convents to boast a relatively uninterrupted tenure from its foundation in the seventh century to its dissolution in 1539. As a prominent house that was well supported by ecclesiastical and royal authorities, Barking was the third-richest house at the Domesday inquest, a position it maintained at its surrender. Extant documents indicate that Barking nuns were actively engaged in the patronage, production, reading, and exchange of books. Barking's elite status is one reason that it is the best-attested convent library in England, with a modest fifteen books (though another twenty-one are associated with Barking). Though a small number when compared to the holdings of Continental convent libraries, it speaks to a strong engagement in textual culture. Barking undoubtedly had a richer collection, as the essays in this volume demonstrate: they provide evidence of textual culture in Latin and Old English from the early period, as well as Latin, French, and Middle English from the later.

The collection features three sections of essays arranged chronologically and an introduction detailing Barking's history: its foundation as a double house by Erkenwald for his sister Ethelburga, its arrested state following a Viking attack, its refoundation as a community of women, and its presence in ecclesiastical and political crises. The introduction usefully surveys the major actors in Barking's success, its extant books, and a number of intriguing details, including that Barking had a librarian and that nuns were required to read a book each year. Particularly important when discussing the literacies of medieval women, the introduction defines literary culture "as a space of compositional activity that connects spheres of women's experiences and perspectives" (25). The essays that follow illustrate how at various moments Barking nuns were at work composing, reading, and circulating texts that illustrated their world view.

The first section, "Barking and Its Anglo-Saxon Context," opens with Stephanie Hollis's excellent discussion of the convent's educational program: "Barking's Monastic School, Late Seventh to Twelfth Century: History, Saint Making and Literary Culture." Her discussion is complemented by Lisa M. C. Weston's strong essay, "The Saint-Maker and the Saint: Hildelith Creates Ethelburg," which illustrates the second abbess's agency in establishing her predecessor's cult. These are the only essays focused on Barking's origins, but they provide compelling insight into the Anglo-Saxon religious women. Included in this section are two essays focused on postconquest literary production: Kay Slocum's "Goscelin of Saint-Bertin and the Translation Ceremony for Saints Ethelburg, Hildelith and Wulfhild," which describes the liturgy written to honor the first three of Barking's abbesses but without engaging (either to accept or reject) Anne Bagnall Yardley's suggestion that these are compositions written by the Barking nuns; and Thomas O'Donnell's engaging presentation of the literary networks Barking cultivated through their patronage of authors such as Goscelin of Saint-Bertin and Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence, "The Ladies Have Made Me Quite Fat: Authors and Patrons at Barking Abbey."

The section "Barking and Its Anglo-Norman Context" centers on the twelfth-century hagiographical output, but it is a bit unwieldy because six essays engage the same texts. First in this section is "'Sun num n'i vult dire a ore': Identity Matters at Barking Abbey," in which Delbert Russell contends Clemence of Barking is the writer of both of Barking's twelfth-century French vitae: *La Vie d'Edouard Le Confesseur* and *Vie de St Catherine*. In "'Ce qu'ens li trovat, eut en sei': On the Equal Chastity of Queen Edith and King Edward in the Nun of Barking's *La Vie d'Edouard Le Confesseur*," Thelma Fenster (without reference to Russell's position on the authorship of the life of Edward) discusses the poet's sympathetic attention to Edith's chaste marriage. While she references Dyan Elliott's landmark work, *Spiritual Marriage* (1993), Fenster does not engage more recent scholarship, including essays by Nicole Rice

and myself, which appeared in a 2010 special issue of the *Journal of the History of Sexuality*. Jennifer N. Brown's "Body, Gender, and Nation in the Lives of Edward the Confessor" illustrates the deliberate focus on women's perspectives in the French version, which differ considerably from Aelred's Latin source (also without reference to Russell's claim about Clemence's authorship). Where the first three essays focus primarily on the life of Edward, the next two consider *Vie de St Catherine*. Diane Auslander's essay, "Clemence and Catherine: The *Life of St Catherine* in Its Norman and Anglo-Norman Context," summarizes ground not directly related to her thesis, which makes her contention that the life offers a critique of Henry II less than persuasive. Donna Alfano Bussell's provocative essay, "Cicero, Aelred and Guernes: The Politics of Love in Clemence of Barking's *Catherine*," demonstrates Clemence's ingenuity in using the conventions of hagiography and of romance to justify Barking's needs. In "The Authority of Diversity: Communal Patronage in *Le Gracial*," Emma Bérat argues that Abbess Matilda commissioned the translation of the miracles of the Virgin as part of her pastoral duty, a position that needs careful qualification, given that *Le Gracial's* author claims his translation is for both men and women who do not read Latin.

The third section, "Barking Abbey and the Later Middle Ages," is the least cohesive, opening with Alexandra Barratt's "Keeping Body and Soul Together: *The Charge to the Barking Cellaress*," which argues compellingly that the cellaress's record book "should be added to our meager store of writings by later medieval English women, particularly by nuns" (235). Jill Stevenson's "Rhythmic Liturgy, Embodiment and Female Authority in Barking's Easter Plays" uses cognitive theory to posit that the Barking nuns wrote vitae and drama designed to excite devotion in a mixed audience of religious and laity. Anne Bagnall Yardley's "Liturgy as the Site of Creative Engagement: Contributions of the Nuns of Barking" ends the third section by surveying the breadth of liturgical texts Barking produced to illustrate the nuns' creativity over time. The volume concludes with an afterward by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, whose name is repeatedly invoked by the contributors for her scholarship on women and literary culture. "Barking and the Historiography of Female Community" draws together many of the volume's strands of inquiry: the political and social realities of English convents; women's Latinity and vernacularity; and nuns' literary patronage, even as she encourages future research on conventual life that can help rewrite the historical and literary record.

Altogether, this is a valuable and engaging book, but the index disappoints. Despite having great sympathy for those who index collections of essays, I am troubled by: personal names spelled multiple ways (Eadburg, Eadburga, and Eadburh), misspellings of names (Wulfere and Wulfild); and the random alphabetization of persons by first name or by regional identifier ("Saint-Bertin, Goselin of" as compared to "Hugh of St Victor"). More aggravating is that medieval texts are indexed by title, but works by a number of authors (e.g., Bede, Matthew Paris, Goscelin of Saint-Bertin) are listed after their names. Works by Aldhelm appear both ways: *De virginitate* follows his name, but *Prosa de Virginitate* is ordered by title. These inconsistencies render the index less helpful to readers of a collection that will no doubt have a great impact on the field of medieval religious women's communities.

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CAROLINE DUNN. *Stolen Women in Medieval England: Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100–1500*. Cambridge Series in Medieval Life and Thought, fourth series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. 272. \$99.00 (cloth).  
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In the context of medieval common law, *raptus* existed as a broad category encompassing a multitude of criminal (or quasi-criminal) acts, including rape, ravishment, elopement, adultery,