

intellectual, it was not a complete rupture with prior thinking. Rather, it developed a trend visible earlier in the fourteenth century to think about God's *potentia absoluta* and *ordinata* almost as two discrete options, rather than as terms to describe one single system of action. The reinsertion of Thomas into his institutional context of Parisian university discourse enables Wöller and Zahnd to offer instructive reassessments of a major late medieval thinker.

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*The Birgittines of Syon Abbey. Preaching and print.* By Susan Powell. (Texts and Transitions, 11.) Pp. xii + 347 incl. 5 figs. Turnhout: Brepols, 2017. €90. 978 2 503 53235 6  
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Susan Powell's collection of essays offers a compelling vantage point from which to enter Syon Abbey studies. In a foreword, Powell indicates that she was encouraged to provide a framework and republish her many contributions to this area of study in a single volume. In so doing, she has added an entirely original overview of the Birgittines of Syon (the only foundation of this order in England, which Henry V endowed on 3 March 1415) that provides a lengthy description of this royal foundation; the foundation's arrangement (sixty sisters and twenty-five brothers of whom thirteen were priests, four were deacons and eight lay brothers); its liturgy and requirements; its books; and its patrons. In this first chapter (and throughout the revised footnotes of the previously published essays), Powell offers a rich bibliography of scholarship about the community of women and men at Syon Abbey. In framing the collection as she has, Powell offers a historiography of scholarship on this monastic community. One can see how interest has long focused on Syon's two libraries (one for the men, with manuscripts principally in Latin, and one for the women, with printed texts principally in the vernacular) and how the field has opened up to investigate authors and translators, print culture, sermons and liturgy, the nuns' learning and agency, and issues of patronage and book exchange. For those new to Syon studies, Powell's introductory essay is a crucial first step towards comprehending the beginnings of scholarship about Syon and for its subsequent flourishing; for those who are actively labourers in the vineyard, Powell's introduction is a gold mine of recent publications.

The first chapter serves as one of two bookends; the final chapter, which is also original, offers a discussion of Syon during and after the time of Henry VIII, when the community was twice exiled to the continent. As such, this pair of essays form commanding pillars to support the volume and these alone provide worthy justification for it. A generous and thoughtful scholar, Powell draws on the work of other scholars and enhances it to elucidate the intricacies of this important community. For example, Powell draws on the work of Virginia Bainbridge in the first chapter, and indicates that the men who became Syon brothers were highly educated, most coming from the universities in their later years. Several of these men, as she illustrates in the concluding chapter, were highly important during Henry VIII's break with the Roman Church. Some of the brothers actively resisted the king's title as head of the Church in England. Powell situates Syon's later years alongside a discussion of the surviving books of the men's library and the print books made

especially for the nuns, which provides another link between the beginning and the ending of the book, as well as offering a backbone for the reprinted essays.

In between these pillars stand five previously published essays, each of which features a headword and an afterword. These detailed notes indicate where the essays first appeared, as well as the important bibliographical changes that have developed since each essay was printed. Chapter ii, 'Preaching at Syon Abbey', was published in *Leeds Studies in English* xxxi (2000), 229–67; chapter iii, 'A rare survival of sermons preached at Syon Abbey?', appeared in *Mediaeval Sermon Studies* lii (2008), 47–62. Chapter iv moves from a focus on preaching to a focus on print culture and is titled 'Links to Syon Abbey in Caxton's editions of John Mirk's *Festial*'. Some of this chapter first appeared in the 'Preaching at Syon Abbey' essay and the remainder was part of an introduction to Susan Powell (ed.), *Three sermons for Nova Festa*, Heidelberg 2007. Chapter v, 'Manuscript and print at Syon Abbey,' was published in *Saint Birgitta, Syon and Vadstena* (Stockholm 2010), while chapter vi, 'Lady Margaret Beaufort: books, printers, and Syon Abbey', originally appeared in *The Library* xx (1998), 197–240. In addition, Powell offers three appendices to chapter iii, one of which is an index of dominical sermons in the Syon manuscript, Cox MS 39, and two appendices to the whole volume, a bibliography of Syon texts before and after 1519 and a list of woodcuts of St Birgitta in printed editions associated with Syon Abbey.

My description of *The Birgittines of Syon Abbey* hardly does justice to this excellent volume, and I have only hinted at the multiple scholarly audiences who might find the essays useful. My own work on native saints' *Lives* has recently turned to an extant Syon manuscript, MS Sankt Georgen 12, which is housed in Karlsruhe at the Badische Landesbibliothek. This is one of two original volumes commissioned by Margaret Holland, duchess of Clarence and grandmother of Margaret Beaufort, which integrates John of Tynemouth's *Sanctilogium Angliae, Walliae, Scotiae, et Hiberniae* into the Roman sanctorale. This elaborate manuscript, as Powell remarks, was copied by the prolific Sheen scribe, Stephen Dodesham. What remains unsaid is that Herman Scheerre, the famed limner who between 1405 and 1422 contributed to the Neville Hours and the Bedford Psalter, among others, illuminated this deluxe manuscript. What no one has observed is that this means that Margaret Holland hired the limner used by her brother-in-law and noted bibliophile, John, duke of Bedford, when commissioning this manuscript of saints' *Lives*, perhaps as a foundation gift to this royal house. The *Sanctilogium* would have been an important book for the community and, written in Latin, was likely intended for the brothers' library. Other copies (rearranged in alpha order and known as the *Nova Legenda Anglie*) were produced for the most important monasteries, including York Minster and Christ Church, Canterbury, which is some indication of the book's status. This example is but one of many ways in which *The Birgittines of Syon Abbey* is of significant scholarly interest, not just to scholars invested in Syon.

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