

Book Reviews

Nick Holder, with contributions by Ian Betts, Jens Röhrkasten, Mark Samuel and Christian Steer, *The Friaries of Medieval London. From Foundation to Dissolution*, Studies in the History of Medieval Religion, XLVI, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017, pp. 384, £50.00, ISBN: 9781783272242

Historians have measured the impact of the medieval friars by their people not their places. The contributions of their teachers, especially in the theology faculties of the expanding network of universities, and the wide spread of their preachers and their forms of pastoral care, readily weighed in *summae*, sermon repertories, and the suffrages specified in wills, have defined a profile quite distinct from the monolithic presence of the old monastic orders. For medieval England, the contrast might seem especially stark. Unlike some regions of mainland Europe, even today, there is scarcely any visible fabric of the friars that can rival the arresting frame of former abbeys, reborn as cathedrals or picturesque ruins. Yet, as the most compelling insights of this book make clear, this view is skewed and now, thanks in no small measure to the advent of new digital tools of analysis, it can be rebalanced. The physical infrastructure of the friars was as impressive, in every sense, as any built environment of the medieval English church. If it has failed to leave an impression down the generations it is because so much of it has been hidden in plain sight, not judiciously ruined or razed but re-purposed over time to the point that it was assimilated into the cityscape rising around it. Digital map regression and the grey literature, collated and on open access directly or via Historic Environment Records, brings it back into sight, systematically, and more speedily than ever before. Nick Holder and his co-authors demonstrate this using medieval England's largest and most developed landscape, the city and extra-mural environs of London, which between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries accommodated no fewer than seven orders of friars. Their combined historical, physical, and material survey of these settlements and their buildings and (at least some of) their contents suggests that infrastructure was not merely the backdrop to mendicant practice, it was its blueprint: what the friars aimed to offer their neighbourhoods, and what they did provide, can be read in their walls as expressively as in their words.

Within the walled city, it was the friars, not the monastic orders, that commanded space in all three dimensions. They occupied 5% of the

available land (20 out of 353 acres). By the end of their long building history, which, Holder argues, should be seen as passing progressively further away from their first, distinctively mendicant features, their churches had outreached any other save St Paul's. There was only one cathedral church, but there were three friars' churches – Dominican, Franciscan and, the largest by some margin, Augustinian – which were close to 300ft in length. It was not only how they filled the eye-line of Londoners that spoke of their unique place in their world but also how they left it open: the precincts of the friars were also landscaped for multiple gardens and orchards. There were as many as six gardens at Whitefriars (i.e. the Carmelite convent) alone. Given the recurrent rounds of construction inside the walls, industry, horticulture, and agriculture were set cheek-by-jowl. The permanent population was slight, no more than 160 across all seven convents, a surely conspicuous fact which must have put the elaborate development of the environment into sharper relief.

This space and its place was, Holder shows, the planned result of the friars' own enterprise, supported and often steered by some of the most significant patrons present in the city, including the crown. Clearly the collaboration was powered by the mutual benefit to be realised. It served the city's interest for the redundant Norman fortifications to be cleared and (especially) for plots to be developed Thames-side. Their patrons also enabled the friars to become important city proprietors, and the tenements they acquired not only extended the boundary of their precincts but also over time built into their most stable source of annual income. The collaborative relationship with city interests was consistent and productive to a degree that contrasts sharply with the fortunes of the friars in provincial England (a comparative perspective that Holder does not draw out). Where small-town hierarchies hedged and blocked the expansion of their mendicant colonies, here, as Holder narrates it, when the Blackfriars wanted to move, they were able, more-or-less, to choose their home.

The expansion and elaboration of their sites, Holder characterises as a progressive monasticisation of the physical environment of the friars. It was only in the first phase of their development that their physical space seemed to speak unequivocally of pure mendicant ideals, a small and simple chapel, an open space for preaching and a public cemetery. Holder's second phase aimed at the creation of a *magna ecclesia* (great church); the third, at filling the church and the surrounding buildings and spaces between them with more, and more varied, facilities for the friars and the neighbourhood they served: a cloister, and then a secondary cloister and library, to allow them to balance their active life with the *vita contemplativa*, and tenements to transpose remote tenants into resident patrons. Although he does not develop the discussion in very much depth, Holder's clear contention is that this

change was neither contingency nor practicality but the remoulding of the mendicant outlook under the wash of urban life.

If city-living made friars more like monks, it also cast their buildings in its corporate image. Ian Betts and Mark Samuel's survey of architecture and decorative fabric document how fully the friaries absorbed the style and, for the most part, the source materials prevalent in the metropolis. These detailed accounts build on but also add to what is known of London's greater churches, and complement Holder's survey. The essays paired with them, by Jens Röhrkasten and Christian Steer, are not so neatly placed in the whole. The effort to explore the religious, intellectual, and social dynamics of the friars feels to be something of an afterthought, and is not well integrated with the themes, or the tone, of Holder's portion. Of all the minor themes that may be drawn from the book by far the most valuable, and original, is surely the story of re-use, concealment and fleeting rediscovery of the city's mendicant fabric as London has again been re-made, successively, by fire, blitz, and big business, in the past 450 years. For these insights alone, and the implications they carry for our understanding of the Dissolution and its aftermath, this book is a welcome addition to the critical literature on the religious orders.

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Gavin Schwartz-Leeper, *From Princes to Pages: The Literary Lives of Cardinal Wolsey, Tudor England's 'Other King'*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 202, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016, pp. xii + 261, €129,00, ISBN: 9004317503

The early modern literary representation of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey (1470/71–1530) is ripe for scholarly analysis. This material has not received the attention it deserves: Wolsey is among the most important Tudor administrators, and during his lifetime and beyond he became subject to substantial satire and invective. Scholars have long been aware of major literary treatments of Wolsey, including the poems of John Skelton, passages concerning Wolsey in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* and Holinshed's *Chronicles*, and Shakespeare's and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*. By offering a reading of the representation of Wolsey in these texts, Gavin Schwartz-Leeper's *From Princes to Pages* offers an important step toward remedying the gap in knowledge of this important subject. Schwartz-Leeper includes analysis of the characterization of Wolsey in the work of the cardinal's former gentleman-usher, George Cavendish, and he is correct to observe that these writings, which include a *Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey* and