

Reviews

Article

Published Version

(2000) Reviews. Reading Medieval Studies, XXVI. pp. 155-171. ISSN 0950-3129 Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/84006/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

Publisher: University of Reading

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

REVIEWS

ERRATUM

The Editor wishes to apologise for the following error in the Reviews section of the 1999 issue of *Reading Medieval Studies*: p. 122, the book reviewed was not Angus MacKay and David Ditchburn, eds., *Atlas of Medieval Europe*, but Michael Richter, *Ireland and her Neighbours in the Seventh Century*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 1999. 256pp. ISBN 1-85182-369-7.

Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End*, (Records of Civilization: Sources and Studies, XCVI), 2nd edn., Columbia University Press, New York, 1998. ISBN 0-231-11257-2, pb., £14

This is a revised paperback edition of Professor McGinn's 1979 collection of medieval apocalyptic writings, presented in translation. The writings are grouped according to appropriate chapter headings (sometimes an individual, or a movement, a particular historical moment or more general conceptual category). Each of the chapters - there are 35 in all - opens with a concise introduction which interpretatively situates the concerns of the chapter and the texts that follow, as well as referring the reader to appropriate other scholarship and related texts. This makes, overall, for a quite excellent accessible reader which is supported both by extensive notes and an approachable bibliography. The revision is a modest one. No change has been made to the basic text, but a new, exemplarily clear Preface has been added, as has a second bibliography representing the important relevant scholarship of the last twenty years. A footnote to the Preface (p. xxi, beginning of note 7) describes an unfortunate lacuna in the book's overall coverage: 'A stronger representation of medieval poetic and dramatic uses of apocalypticism would certainly be needed (e.g. Dante, the *Roman of the Rose*, Langland, the Mystery Plays)'. It is regrettable that the publishers did not allow for such a correction in this edition; nevertheless they are to be congratulated for making such a range of well-presented material available in a paperback edition, the author more fully applauded for the depth of scholarship and understanding which underpins it.

Pete Mathers

University of Reading

Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (eds.), *The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe, Volume 2: Ancient Greece and Rome*, London, The Athlone Press, 1999. xvi + 395pp, 4 b/w plates. ISBN: hb: 048589002X, £45.00; pb: 0-48589-102-6, £17.99.

One might expect a six-volume history of witchcraft and magic in Europe, spanning the millennia from Biblical times to the twentieth century, to be superficial and generalising. The four contributions to this volume are of mixed value, but the whole is surprisingly erudite for what seems to be a popular series. Daniel Ogden's comprehensive essay on curse tablets and voodoo dolls provides a survey of issues which have arisen in the scholarly study of magical cursing, as well as an introduction to the material, contents, and use of the tablets themselves. For the non-specialist, this may be the best introduction into the subject: accessible, thorough and mostly very accurate. The expert in the field will also find this essay useful for the synthesis of arguments, the wealth of bibliography and ancient references, and the overview which so few academic studies provide. Georg Luck has contributed a less useful essay on witches and sorcerers in classical literature, which reproduces much commentary material (in some cases word for word) from his *Arcana Mundi* (1985). This compendium of sensational and supernatural episodes is full of generalisations and simplifications, and seems to have been written with very little attention to the huge bibliography on magic of the last two decades. The essay by Richard Gordon presents a cogent series of arguments for considering representations of and attitudes to magic, rather than merely the historical practices themselves. This piece discusses complex issues in detail and seems to be aimed at scholars in the field rather than the casual reader. Gordon considers the issue of magic as a tool to think with, as a way of categorising the 'other'; he discusses some stratagems for explaining magic; and finally considers accusations of and repression of magic. This is a broad study stretching from the early Greek period to the start of Christian Rome, and the conclusions are sometimes sweeping, but the argumentation is clear, careful, and largely convincing. Valerie Flint's piece on the Christian demonisation of magic and pagan religion traces a development of the concept of *daimones* from Graeco-Roman and Jewish worlds to a synthesis in Christian thought of the early church. The association of wicked demons with magic involves

the redefinition of pagan concepts for Christian ends: namely the appeasement of anxiety, defence, and salvation. Flint's sources are elite literary texts, but she disregards popular sources such as papyri or inscriptions; consequently, and also as a result of modern psychological views of human anxiety and need for freedom, the common person is reduced to a pawn, simultaneously reassured and restricted by the church's views of demons. This study again is guilty of sweeping conclusions, but is nevertheless a valuable treatment of the use of pagan terms in Christian definitions of magic.

John-Gabriel Bodard

*Thesaurus Linguae Graecae Project
University of California, Irvine*

James Howard-Johnston and Paul Antony Hayward (eds.), **The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown**, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, ISBN 0-19-826978-1, hb., £45

Peter Brown is one of the very few historians who has been able to inspire a whole generation of fellow-historians; it is perhaps understandable (though faintly repellent to the Anglo-Saxon mind) that in the introduction Howard-Johnston should refer to him (apparently without irony) as the Master. It is perhaps even rarer that the most influential of his writings, and the focus for the dozen essays here, is not a book but an article: 'The rise and function of the holy man in late antiquity', first published in the *Journal of Roman Studies* in 1971. The 'half-human, dispassionate, at times autocratic holy man' (p. 2) has been central to Brown's work, not just since the article, but before, with his biography of Augustine of Hippo, and with his lectures at All Souls in the late 1960s. Howard-Johnston well evokes these entrancing lectures, with 'their bewitching, image-studded language'; flickering glimpses of heaven in a very real hell - 'by the end of each term, the Hovenden Room was a ghastly black hole, packed with humanity, hot and humid, providing each of us with a genuine experience of self-mortification' (p. 3).

These twelve essays, six of them by Brown's own students, not only show the depth of Brown's influence, but the extent to which the debate, and the views of Brown himself, have moved on since 1971. Brown's own exciting but impressionistic language has inspired, but now it has been made more precise; the reality, or lack of reality,

behind the coruscating prose is beginning to be revealed. The generalisations are beginning to be modified by geographical and chronological distinctions. And, as this volume shows, the focus has moved from the holy man himself - or, rather, the holy *persons* themselves, as an enormous amount of work has been done on holy *women* since 1971. The Stenton Lecture that Brown delivered at the University of Reading in the mid-1970s, on *Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours*, looked not at the holy man but at the cult constructed after his death, a theme continued in 1981 in Brown's *The Cult of the Saints* (which, unlike the 'The rise of the holy man...', looked largely at the West). With *Authority and the Sacred* (1995), finally, he shifted the emphasis largely away from the holy man or the relics and towards the hagiographer, who constructed the image of the holy person, and to some extent laid down the modalities of life for future holy persons. It is, of course, not only in this area that the early medieval historian has come to recognise the gap between the sources and What Really Happened, but it does have the effect of undermining much of what Brown argued back in 1971. Averil Cameron, in her essay on the changing definitions of the holy man, shows that for Brown the holy man now seems less central and less powerful, but also more elusive. The methodology has changed too: it is now borrowed less from social anthropology than from the study of discourse. This insight came through osmosis for many historians, but Brown acquired it direct, in Paris, from Foucault, Veyne and others. To follow the historiography of the cult of saints over the last thirty years is to follow the path taken by many historians, ancient and medieval alike.

The essays in this book range widely, and beyond the period with which one normally associates Brown's work. After the three introductory essays, the book proceeds with two essays on the Eastern Mediterranean (though one of those about the tenth-century holy men in Constantinople), three on the West, two on medieval Russia and two on Islam. Some of the papers offer corrections to the picture presented by Brown: co-editor Haywood, for instance, retraces Brown's path through the works of Gregory of Tours, and notes that Brown was relying far too heavily on that one source, which might offer a distorted view of what was happening in the West, while Paul Fouracre, looking at the development of the cult of saints in Merovingian and early Carolingian Gaul, was more blunt: with Gregory, Brown was doing what he had done with his eastern sources,

taking his 'tendentious and highly coded sources' too literally. But all these papers show how fruitful Brown's early work has been, stimulating thought in many new directions, and in particular showing how significant the lives of saints, and the *Lives* of saints, can be in the history of the first millennium.

Edward James

University of Reading

Michael Goodich (ed.), *Other Middle Ages: Witnesses of Medieval Society*, Philadelphia, University of Philadelphia Press, 1998. viii+ 265pp. ISBN: 0-8122-1654-7

This volume is a welcome addition to the relatively few collections of easily accessible sources pertaining to 'marginal' groups in the medieval period. Divided into chapters dealing with the Jewish community, apostates and converts both to and from Judaism, the possessed, sexual nonconformists, Christian heretics and those temporarily excluded due to religious or other crises, the editor provides over 30 excerpts dating from the twelfth through the mid-fourteenth century, almost all translated into English for the first time. The emphasis as much as possible is on texts in which the marginalized speak in their own voice and we are given, for example, an autobiographical account of Herman of Scheda's conversion from Judaism to Christianity, Peter of Murrone's (later Pope Celestine V) own description of his childhood and life as a hermit, and the testimony of a young student at Pamiers on trial for sodomy and falsely posing as a priest. Any collection of this sort is bound to appear at times heterogeneous and arbitrary in its selections. Nevertheless, the book holds together well, due in large part to thoughtful introductions to the sections and to the individual texts. The texts themselves provide fascinating glimpses into the daily life and mentality of little-known individuals of the central Middle Ages. Overall, this volume is an exceptionally useful introduction for students to the 'other Middle Ages' now occupying so much ground in medieval studies.

Elspeth Whitney

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

John France, *Western Warfare in the Age of the Crusades 1000-1300, Warfare and History*, London, UC Press, 1999, I-xv, 1-327pp. ISBN 1-85728-466-6, pb., £13.95

As the title of John France's book indicates, he provides a thoughtful synthesis in sixteen chapters plus an appendix on the Battle of

Bouvines (1214) on a vast subject to which he himself has made many distinguished contributions in latter years. The historiography of warfare is notoriously prone to enthusiasms, but all France's arguments are supported by carefully controlled material from political and social as well as military history. For example, he would like to draw our attention back to the significance and consequences of pitched battles which have been somewhat overshadowed by wars of raid, attrition, and siege. There are good accounts of battles, perhaps less well known to English-speaking readers, such as Muret (1213) and Tagliacozzo (1268). From the outset France argues for what he terms 'proprietary warfare' in his chosen period, meaning that society was so dominated by the landowning élites that it was their interests which fairly thoroughly dictated the causes, conduct, and technology of war. Of course this argument can convincingly be linked to the rise of castles, the expansion of mounted knightly retinues, and the type of military command structure, and the author does so. But he is thoroughly aware of the significance of infantry, their arms and armour, and their needs of supply, and all this is fitted, chapter by chapter, into the picture. Although he rightly explains that problems of supply, pay, and equipment were usually so acute that many a campaign had to be extremely restricted in temporal and geographical scope, he gives us a fine chapter on crusading warfare in the Middle East, which normally demanded far larger resources than those used at home. One thinks of Louis IX's gigantic effort from 1248 to 1254, for example. In conjunction with France's text, the reader should consult another volume in this series from the UCL Press, John Haldon's *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565-1204* (London, 1999).

Benjamin Arnold

University of Reading

Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England*, Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 1998, ISBN 085115 5766, hb., £50

This is a strongly-argued book which makes an effective contribution to the growing demonstrations, partly led by Marilyn Oliva herself, that medieval English nuns have been considerably underestimated, and even misrepresented. A brief introductory survey establishes the problems in the older historiography of the subject, and the book then proceeds through a series of analyses of the available evidence, from

which are produced conclusions which are both well supported and frequently innovative.

As the sub-title suggests, the book's main focus is on the female religious houses of East Anglia as social institutions. The wills (of some of the nuns themselves and of their relatives) which provided much of the evidence make this approach the most fruitful. However, skilful use is also made of foundation documents and cartularies, where these survive. The loss of most of the liturgical books and the absence of any library-catalogues or booklists restrict comment on the liturgical, spiritual and literary aspects of the nuns' lives: but even here, important points are made about levels of literary and book-ownership, which were considerably higher than the traditional view of medieval English nuns might suggest.

Most striking are the analyses of the initial endowments and ongoing patronage of the nunneries on the one hand, and of the social origins and affiliations of the nuns on the other. In contrast to the traditional view of nuns as predominantly aristocratic, Oliva demonstrates that, in the Norwich diocese at least, 64% of nuns were from the 'middling ranks' of society, with another 20% from urban families and about 5% from the yeomen farmer group. Some 10% were from the upper gentry: but only 7 of 553 identifiable nuns were from the aristocracy. Further, the nunneries did not demand more than a reasonable 'trousseau' of garments and equipment, worth an estimated total of £5-£7; and at least two houses earmarked funds to help poor women to enter. A final blow to the traditional view is that prioresses and abbesses also appear mostly not to have been from the upper gentry. Equally striking is the demonstration that, while almost universally founded with only one small manor and its outlying territories, the female religious houses were generally well managed; they both made good use of the resources they had, and provided a range of services for their local societies which helped to maintain ongoing patronage. Indeed, Oliva demonstrates that, throughout the period, 'parish gentry' and yeomen farmers gave considerably more support to the female religious than to their male counterparts. Thus, only 3 of the 11 female houses studied were in debt at the Dissolution, an unusually low proportion. Finally, a strong argument is made to support the view that concepts of the religious life, whatever the order to which a particular house was affiliated, were nuanced by gender. As in the case of Thetford Priory, where the endowments deemed insufficient for the support of 2 monks were

unproblematically accepted as sufficient for at least 10 women, female religious had, and were expected to have, a distinctive asceticism. The nuns' influence was almost exclusively local, but the level of support they enjoyed in their localities was, perhaps, all the greater for that.

Anne Lawrence-Mathers

University of Reading

D. Townsend and A. Taylor (eds.), *The Tongue of the Fathers, Gender & Ideology in Twelfth-Century Latin*, (The Middle Ages Series), Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998, 211pp. ISBN 0-8122-3440-5

The thrust of this collection of essays, as laid out in a vigorous and dense introduction, is to move the study of medieval Latin literature closer to that of vernacular and historical studies, through the application of contemporary gender-based critical approaches. The result is presented as a challenge to the conventional view of medieval Latin as unremittingly monologic and patriarchal.

The claim is largely justified by what follows, although the scope of authorial subjects represented is rather narrow, and tends somewhat to the predictable. Among the most stimulating are articles by Desmond, Blamires and Townsend himself. Desmond finds a new and illuminating angle to the Abelard-Heloise correspondence, with her tracing of scripted and performative erotic violence through the layering of epistolary rhetoric with Ovidian amatory discourse. Blamires' study of Abelard's little-read letter, 'On the authority and dignity of the nun's profession', is perhaps the most satisfyingly worked-through, both recuperating the structure and coherence of what has elsewhere been dismissed as rambling and dull, and convincingly demonstrating its centrality to the correspondence as a whole. Townsend's analysis of the presentation of the Amazonian Talestris in Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis*, cast in provocatively post-Lacanian terms, argues for the undermining of the hero's potency and, by extension, of Western imperialism as a whole.

The remaining essays are rather more mixed in quality. Ferrante's discussion of Hildegard of Bingen's relationship with her secretaries resists engagement with epistolary rhetoric and seems to offer little in the way of critical insight. Taylor's thesis, relating the violence of medieval dialectic to a homosocial rite of passage necessitating suppression and denial of the self, is intriguing, but the

accompanying discussion of texts tends to the decontextualised and the superficial. Fanger's analysis of the use of female divinities within Bernardus Silvestris' *Cosmographia* marks a promising beginning, while Holsinger effectively locates Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermons on the Song of Songs* within the discourse of colonialist imperialism which accompanied the Second Crusade.

Gillian R. Knight

University of Reading

David Howlett, Caledonian Craftsmanship: The Scottish Latin Tradition, Bodmin, Cornwall, Four Courts Press, 2000, 208 pp. ISBN 1-85182-485-5.

This tightly-knit and meticulously documented volume charts the sudden and unexpected flowering of Scottish Latin literature in the 12th century. It comprises the edition, translation and annotation of a number of texts worked from manuscript sources and drawn from a range of genres. Referencing and bibliography are fully and exhaustively provided, and the volume is complemented by helpful indices and dating charts. Howlett's thesis, as it emerges from his epilogue, postulates a small number of authors, conversant with and influenced by earlier models from external literary traditions, and working within a rigidly structured and highly formalised linguistic and metrical framework. Onto this is grafted a political agenda. Howlett argues for the creation of a self-conscious and all-embracing cultural and political identity, located within a 'kingdom of the Scots', and driven by Northern English fears of Anglo-Norman political and ecclesiastical centralisation.

In his presentation and analysis of the texts, Howlett adopts his customary architectonic approach, primarily concerned with the identification of numerical groupings and chiasmic patterning, organised around the concept of infixed devices which are held to guarantee the authenticity and significance of the text. This approach, essentially reducing written texts to the status of visual and esoteric monuments, is put forward as the only means of recuperating textual integrity and authorial intention. The accompanying dismissal of modern critical theory is, perhaps, somewhat sweeping. Whilst this reductive method can be argued to produce benefits in terms of structural understanding, it may seem to work against semantic appreciation. Significantly, only in isolated cases, such as those of the anonymous *De Situ Albanie* and Jocelin of Furness' *Vita Sancti*

Kentigerni, does the narrowly-focused analysis become more wide-ranging, opening up possibilities for further discussion. This said, this is an important and valuable scholarly work, which lays the foundation for future study.

Gillian R. Knight

University of Reading

Sabrina Flanagan. Hildegard of Bingen: A Visionary Life, 2nd ed., London and New York: Routledge, 1998. xvi + 227pp. ISBN: 0-415-013420.

First published in 1989, this gracefully-written book remains the best and most comprehensive introduction to Hildegard's life and works available. An updated bibliography, including a discography, is an especially useful addition to the first edition. *A Visionary Life* is more a guide to Hildegard's biography and personality than an interpretative study of her writings and other works. The author's judicious and balanced approach presents Hildegard and her thought in the context of the particulars of Hildegard's own surroundings and circumstances, creating a portrait which is both realistic and convincing. Hildegard emerges as a determined, complex individual who struggled with self-doubt, her own awareness of her relative lack of education, and contemporary constraints on women, only to go from 'strength to strength' (p.54) when she started to write at the age of 42. Of particular interest is Flanagan's treatment of the interrelationship between Hildegard's visions and her apparent experience of migraines. While giving due weight to physical effects (which Flanagan argues explain much of the timing and character of Hildegard's visions), Flanagan also attempts to assess how Hildegard herself may have understood and made use of her illness. Ultimately arguing that an internalization of a sense of her own intellectual limitations was a major component of Hildegard's psychology, Flanagan concludes that a firm belief that her visions were from God (perhaps the result of the intense feeling of certitude often occasioned by migraine attacks) was both initially freeing, in that it enabled Hildegard to overcome a 'crippling diffidence' (p.203) and ultimately constraining, in that it prevented Hildegard from fully recognizing her achievements as her own. Placing Hildegard firmly in her own time, Flanagan achieves a sympathetic and nuanced portrayal of one of the most unusual and accomplished figures of the twelfth century.

Elspeth Whitney

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Frank Barlow, ed. and trans., *The Carmen de Hastiŋgae Proelio of Guy, bishop of Amiens*, Oxford Medieval Texts, 2nd edn., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999, xciii +55 pp. ISBN: 0-19-820758-1, hb., £45

In a recent issue of the distinguished German periodical *Historisches Jahrbuch*, a review article on current historiography in medieval studies singled out the series Oxford Medieval Texts for especial praise. The scholarly editing of the texts, the excellence of the translations, and the incisive relevance of the learned introductions were duly noted. As we would expect, the second edition of Frank Barlow's chosen text fulfils all the criteria. The newly-written introduction, about eighty pages long, is one of the most helpful pieces I have ever read on the background, conduct and outcome of the Hastings campaign. Barlow also discusses at length the controversy over the poem's authorship. Is this really the work which Orderic Vitalis says that Bishop Guy of Amiens (1038-1074/5) wrote in praise of William of Normandy? Barlow does accept the attribution. He is perhaps a bit dismissive of the literary impact of the poem and its style. Peppared with classical and biblical allusions, it does from beginning to end excite the reader's focus upon one of the most significant campaigns of medieval times. And perhaps Bishop Guy got the essential point about the Hastings disaster after all: 'For that people [the English], unskilled in the art of war, spurn the assistance of horses: trusting in their strength they stand fast on foot'. But it did not work in 1066 at Hastings.

Benjamin Arnold

University of Reading

Peggy McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery. Queenship and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998, [The Middle Ages Series] pp. xiii, 224, ISBN 0-8122-3432-4 hb., £37.95

Offering, as it does, an innovative re-exploration of the French romance tradition within a more expansive debate about the institution and practice of queenship in the High Middle Ages, this original and thought-provoking book will prove of equal interest to scholars of medieval literature and history. Through her discussion of a wide variety of texts, from the famous and widely-disseminated tales of Tristan and Iseult, to Chrétien de Troyes' *Cligés*, and less well-known romances such as the *Roman de Silence* and *Du mantel*

mautaillié, McCracken's contrast of the portrayal of adulterous queens in fiction with the realities of life for most royal women being entertained by these tales is a constant thread. For the real queens-consort of medieval Europe, the production of legitimate heirs was their most important professional function; in the fictitious romance court, the queen is habitually cast in the role of adulteress and, most crucially, barren. The triangular relationship between the king, the queen and her lover is the dramatic pivot in many of these tales, and used to discuss deeper, troubling questions of sovereignty, political influence and female sexuality. However, as is emphasised in the first chapter, the sterility of these queenly liaisons is an unacknowledged but essential aspect of the drama because 'bastardy was too serious a matter to be treated lightly, even in literature', particularly when divinely-sanctioned sovereignty was at stake. Themes of royal succession and political stability run alongside an exploration of women and power in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; the disturbingly common depiction of seductress queens whose lust for power is specifically connected with sexual voracity poses many questions on the literary and literal perception of women in this period, which McCracken tackles forcefully and persuasively. Her explicit connection of the dwindling of this particular model of courtly romance with the Capetian adultery scandal of 1314 is perhaps not completely tenable, but certainly provides a useful point of reflection on the contrasting worlds of medieval fact and fiction. As she concludes: 'If romance queens can combine transgressive sexual pleasure and the privileges of queenship it is, of course, because they are fictional queens. [...] Nonfictional queens were in general models of chastity, and if romance adulterous queens were part of a cultural debate on the nature of queenship, their place in this process depended on their fictional status. Once the uniquely fictional status of the adulterous queen is challenged [...], the representation of challenges to royal sovereignty in the form of fictions about the queen's sexual transgression is no longer possible.' The allegation of adultery against the daughters-in-law of Philip IV was certainly a unique aberration in real life, as opposed to the fantasy life of courtly romance, but the two worlds have many points of intersection, which are clearly and absorbingly explored in this very welcome addition to the growing field of queenship studies.

Ann Trindade, *Berengaria: In Search of Richard the Lionheart's Queen*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 1999, 224 pp., ISBN 1-85182-434-0, hb., £24.95

This book amply justifies its apparently unpromising choice of subject, whilst demonstrating the error of the traditional view that Berengaria is only of interest for her brief marriage to Richard I. Effective use is made of a number of issues derived from the growing literature on medieval women and the book makes an extremely interesting contribution to the increasing study of widowhood in the medieval period. The background sketch of the twelfth-century history of Navarre, and of Berengaria's own family, the Jimenez dynasty, is a helpful introduction to what is for many English-speaking readers an unfamiliar subject. However, the attempt to build up some insights into Berengaria's personality is defeated by the sparseness of the sources, and by the fact that, as is demonstrated, they discuss women only by reference to their male relatives and marital status. Indeed, the point is made that even when discussing Berengaria's wedding, almost universally treated as the most significant event in her life, the chroniclers go into detail on the appearance and various costumes of her husband, but give no description of Berengaria herself.

Ann Trindade is clearly familiar with all the sources, and succeeds in setting her discussion of Berengaria within the dual contexts of women's history and of the extensive historiography of Richard I and the Angevin Empire. Literary sources are also used, not only twelfth-century poetic works but also, and more surprisingly, modern historical works. This approach succeeds in building a multi-faceted study of Berengaria; but a price is paid in that the structure of some chapters is rather fragmented, as various themes are pursued. Political analysis perhaps suffers most, especially in the discussion of the marriage with Richard I. The terms of the agreement are clearly stated, in line with the careful citation of sources throughout; but political factors, and the inter-relations between Gascony, Toulouse and the Spanish kingdoms are effectively discussed only as of interest to Henry II. Richard's motivations are analysed primarily as the outcome of his emotional and sexual development. One other negative point is that, while the overall number of typos is small, some are of significance. For instance, on p. 110, Berengaria is stated to have 'left Palestine on 29 September 1992' and on p. 220, n.1, Berengaria's

sister, Blanca, is said to have 'retired in 1922'. Finally, on p.192 Edward III is named in error for Edward II.

However, none of this detracts from the most substantial achievement of the book, the discussion of Berengaria's 30 years as a royal widow. This demonstrates that even a queen could face powerlessness and destitution if her dower lands were withheld, as Berengaria's were by King John. The importance of good relationships with influential churchmen is shown by the support given by successive popes, who eventually persuaded John and his successor, Henry III, to pay compensation. The significance of family and marital relationships is also demonstrated through the help given by Berengaria's sister, Blanca, as countess of Champagne, and by Blanche of Castile and her son, St Louis. It was Philip Augustus of France who gave Berengaria the town of Le Mans in recompense for the part of her dower lands which he had captured; but it was the network of relatives and ecclesiastical supporters who helped her to maintain her position as 'Lady of Le Mans' and to found the Cistercian monastery of Notre Dame de la Pieté-Dieu at l'Epau, in which she was buried in 1230.

Anne Lawrence-Mathers

University of Reading

Gerard Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2nd edn. 1998, ISBN 1-85182-198-8 pb., £19.95

Susan Leigh Fry, *Burial in Medieval Ireland 900-1500*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 1999, ISBN 1-85182-309-3, hb., £35

In a short section on 'The Requiem Mass, "keening" and The Elegy', one of a sequence of brief, authoritative summaries of the available evidence and the understandings it makes possible, Susan Leigh Fry discusses how the Church in medieval Ireland worked to put an end to the pre-Christian practice of keening, to 'replace it with ecclesiastically more acceptable forms of mourning' (p.85). She goes on to refer specifically to the 'Old Irish Penitential' of c.800 in which 'specific penances are prescribed for keening which vary according to the social status of the deceased: the lower the social status of the person being keened, the more severe the penance.'

In the wholly welcome new paperback edition of Gerard Murphy's authoritative anthology of early Irish verse, first published in 1956, five poems from the Sweeney cycle - under the heading 'Nature Poems Attributed to Suibne Geilt' are presented, each, as throughout the collection, in exemplary fashion. A prose English translation

faces the Irish text, footnoted on the page with variants, and an excellent discursive discussion of each entry, concerning the manuscript source and varying scholarly opinions of it, follows as a second major section of the book. The poems he cites are from more than one manuscript source, the earliest being a ninth-century manuscript now belonging to the monastery of St Paul, Unterdranberg in southern Austria. The cycle brilliantly presents in prose and verse the travels – and travails – of Sweeney following the battle of Mag Roth (*ad* 639). Seamus Heaney, who has translated the full cycle (Derry 1983, London 1984) suggests that 'it is possible to read the work as an aspect of the quarrel between the free creative imagination and the constraints of religious, political and domestic obligation' (n.p.); as such it is a dynamic literary expression of precisely that tension which Susan Leigh Fry evidences between the vernacular and Christian cultures.

However far there was conflict – John Montague suggests, in the Introduction to his anthology of Irish Verse (London, 1974) that 'the quarrel between natural and organised religion, between instinct and restraint, is one of the major themes of Irish literature' (p.23) – the exact picture is always a more complex one. Susan Leigh Fry, in another section of her exemplarily precise study, discusses and presents the evidence, for example, that the burial of the dead was not at first controlled by the Church in the same way as the rituals preceding burial; tribal, as well as family, places of burial were maintained for some time. Equally the survival and accessibility of a secular literature (Sweeney being precisely such an example) is precisely a consequence of the literacy skills of the Christian Church in its arrival into, and particular place in, Ireland. It is the essential cause that makes it possible for Gerard Murphy to present more secular than monastic poems in his collection.

In his extended essay, *The Dual Tradition* (Manchester 1995), Thomas Kinsella notes 'There are no Irish martyrs, but many saints' (pp. 8-9). If one of the ceaselessly exciting consequences of the eirenic aspect of the cultural change to christianity is the vibrancy of the Irish poetic tradition – made excellently accessible to scholars in this paperback edition of Gerard Murphy – Susan Leigh Fry, through her combination of a singular focus on burial with an important energy for looking at all its intersections with community and culture, presents a striking overview of the material consequences of this

change. Through such publishing, Four Courts Press are providing excellent and complementary resources for medieval scholarship.

Pete Mathers

University of Reading

Winder McConnell (ed.), *A Companion to the Nibelungenlied*, New York and Woodbridge: Camden House and Boydell and Brewer 1998, xiii + 293pp.. ISBN: 1-57113-151-5 £4

The early thirteenth-century *Nibelungenlied* remains a rich resource for those interested in medieval literature and its modern adaptations (the fourth section of Wagner's Ring tetralogy takes it as its main source) and also, perhaps more surprisingly, for the educated lay reader. In his wide-ranging Introduction to the above volume Winder McConnell poses the question as to why this anonymous work is able to hold its own on the shelves of European and North American bookstores together with Homer's epics, the *Aeneid* and *El Cid*, and also why it was singled out by Harold Bloom (with Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*) in the appendix to his *The Western Canon* as having 'great aesthetic interest'. A reading of the articles by the contributors to this volume will doubtless supply a good part of the answer to that question. McConnell himself points to the innate passion which the work develops, and in his own dedicated contribution ('*The Nibelungenlied: a psychological approach*', pp.172-205), concludes that 'this poet ultimately concentrated squarely on one particular archetype: the 'shadow' side of man and his proclivity to destruction' (p. 205). As is well known, the non-judgemental narrator of the *Nibelungenlied* does not indulge in sermonising, and attempts to derive a 'message' from his work have been strikingly unsuccessful. Perhaps the reason that we nevertheless respond so directly to it is that the non-omniscient narrator gives the impression of unravelling a bare and sombre chronicle without the tone of historical revisionism which characterises the *Klage*, a moralistic continuation of the *Nibelungenlied* which does indeed attempt to apply the moral yardstick by apportioning guilt for the downfall of the Burgundians (or 'Nibelungen') amongst persons appearing in the original 'cast'. The original, nihilistic ending, in which the narrator makes little attempt to palliate or 'explain' the tragic ending, will have doubtless made its mark on the later Wagner in his *Götterdämmerung*, where the Feuerbachian notion of a redemptive hero (Siegfried) appears to take a back seat to the Schopenhauerian image of the abdicating, self-

destructive figure of Wotan and his submission to what both Schopenhauer and the scribe of the Old High German *Hildebrandslied* describe in their different terms as 'evil fate' (*wîwurt*).

Readers interested in the Wagnerian and later receptions will wish to consult James McGlathery's 'Erotic passion in the *Nibelungenlied* and Wagner's Ring' (pp. 206-228) and John Flood's 'Siegfried's dragon-fight in German literary tradition' (pp. 42-59 with interesting prints, pp. 60-66), together with Werner Hoffmann's 'The reception of the *Nibelungenlied* in the twentieth century' (pp.127-152). A majority of articles focus on various (much debated) facets of the medieval original text, such as Authorship (Werner Wunderlich) Politics (Brian Murdoch), Manuscripts (Joachim Heinzle). This is a solid and well-produced volume which will be of interest to scholars, students (undergraduate and postgraduate) which could be most sensibly used as a more advanced follow-on to McConnell's own short monograph on the *Nibelungenlied* of 1984 in the Twayne's World Authors series or the present reviewer's *Reading the 'Niebelungenlied'* of 1995 in the Durham Modern Language series.

Neil Thomas

University of Durham