

Review of W.M. Ormrod (ed), 'England in the the Thirteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1984 Harlaxton Symposium'

Article

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W.M. Ormrod (ed)

***England in the the Thirteenth Century:
Proceedings of the 1984 Harlaxton Symposium***

(Harlaxton College 1985; reissued by The Boydell Press,
Woodbridge, 1986) ix + 177pp. 49 plates. £27.50

Different readers will derive different pleasures from this collection of papers read in July, 1984, at Harlaxton Manor, Lincolnshire, the British Campus of Evansville University, Indiana. In accordance with the symposium's aim of encouraging an inter-disciplinary approach to medieval studies, there are contributions on history, art, architecture, iconography, manuscripts, drama and science. The range of topics covered is so extensive and diverse that no short review can hope to deal with every item in detail.

For the historian it is certainly refreshing, after so much recent emphasis on the very late Middle Ages, to welcome a book on thirteenth-century England. In a typically original and thoughtful paper, M.T. Clanchy applies Michel Foucault's view of the relationship between power and knowledge to England in this period. Using such concepts as 'forms of power', 'centres of power', etc., he suggests a means of analysing and understanding the structure of social and political control. While one might wish to challenge some points in his analysis - as, for example, that cathedrals were the main centres of episcopal power by this time - his ideas are important and stimulating and deserve development on a broader canvas. D.A. Carpenter edits a brief and hitherto unpublished obituary of Henry III, which was entered in the Tewkesbury Annals on a false report of the king's death in March, 1263, and soon deleted. Regrettably omitted from H.R. Luard's edition of the annals in *Annales Monastici*, it presents a complimentary view of the king's rule (describing him as *regni strenuus gubernator; pacis et quietis doctus reformator*) and adds further weight to Dr Carpenter's already impressive arguments for a re-assessment of the reign. In an essay on 'Simon de Montfort and his adherents' Daniel Williams provides a corrective to the view which sees political and military loyalties during the Barons' War solely in terms of constitutional issues. He argues in general that from 1263 there was on both sides a 'degeneration of motives and actions', in which 'personal feuds, revenge, regional pillage, endemic violence and brigandage' came to the fore, and in particular that the lesser nobility of

the midland shires, where the core of de Montfort's support lay, had little alternative but to follow him. Brian Golding discusses the burial places of monastic patrons, concentrating on the Beauchamps of Elmley, the earls of Essex, the Clares and the Berkeleys, in an attempt to discover whether burial of a patron in the family monastery signified his continued benevolence towards the house, as monasteries tended to believe, and burial elsewhere meant the reverse. He finds that in general there was no such link. The question of Edward I's piety is examined by Michael Prestwich, who concludes that the king was 'a conventionally religious and rather superstitious man', but, although he has performed a useful task in assembling the available evidence on almsgiving, oblations, touching for the king's evil (first documented from this reign), devotion to individual saints (including Becket), crusading and certain ecclesiastical building projects, it remains difficult to get behind these outward and mostly conventional signs to the personal piety of the king.

There are six papers on architecture, art or iconography. Virginia Jansen identifies and seeks to explain a distinctive style of building associated with the bishops of Henry III's minority government. E.C. Fernie investigates the new Lady Chapel built at Norwich Cathedral by Bishop Suffield (1245-57) and destroyed in the sixteenth century. M.E. Roberts reconstructs the iconography of Westminster Abbey's north transept portal, completed probably by 1253, and postulates a figure of Christ gesturing to the wound in His side, similar to that surviving in a restored state in the south porch of Lincoln Cathedral, which dates from 1260-70; the Westminster Christ was associated, he suggests, with Henry III's acquisition of a relic of the Holy Blood in 1247. With reference to the Anglo-Saxon sources for the life of St Guthlac, George Henderson re-interprets the carved scenes relating to the saint over the west door of Crowland Abbey, Lincolnshire, while from antiquarian drawings and descriptions, and from remaining fragments at Lincoln, D.A. Stocker reconstructs the tomb-chest of Bishop Grosseteste (died 1253), on which was placed one of the earliest representational brasses known to have existed in England. Flora Lewis investigates the spread of devotion to the Veronica, the cloth which bore the miraculous imprint of Christ's face, and with it the development of the cult of the Holy Face, which first appeared in England in the mid-thirteenth century.

Three manuscripts are discussed. Suzanne Lewis relates the contents and illustrations of the Abingdon Apocalypse (B.L. Add. Ms. 42555), given to Abingdon Abbey by Giles of Bridport, bishop of Salisbury

(died 1262), to his concerns as a pastor and to the iconography of his tomb at Salisbury. Michel Camille analyses the illuminated initials in B.L. Harley Ms. 3487, a mid-thirteenth-century manuscript of Aristotle's *Libri Naturales*, probably from Oxford, which, as he shows, provide valuable insights into the problem of illustrating a newly available pagan text. Adelaide Bennett considers the illuminated initials in the privately owned Mostyn Psalter-Hours, which she identifies as another of the very few illuminated manuscripts definitely attributable to the London region in the 1290s.

Finally, John Glenn contributes two short notes on a syllogism of Robert Grosseteste and on the *Mappa Mundi* at Hereford, and Martin Walsh offers a detailed reconstruction of the English poem, *Dame Sirith*, as a comic play, which he believes was the original intention of the piece.

The book is on the whole well produced, despite a surprising number of spelling and typographical errors, and is copiously illustrated by photographs grouped at the end of the volume, although the quality of reproduction is very variable. In spite of these blemishes, however, the book will be warmly welcomed by all involved in thirteenth-century studies, and one awaits with eager anticipation the appearance of the promised subsequent volumes on the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

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