

Reviews

Article

Published Version

(1999) Reviews. Reading Medieval Studies, XXV. pp. 122-137.
ISSN 0950-3129 Available at <https://reading-pure-test.eprints-hosting.org/85759/>

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REVIEWS

Angus MacKay and David Ditchburn, editors, *Atlas of Medieval Europe*, London, Routledge, 1997, 271pp. ISBN 0-415-12231-7.

H.B. Clarke, M. Ní Mhaonaigh and R. Flionn, editors, *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, Dublin, Four Courts, 1998, 468pp. ISBN 1-85182-235-6.

The enterprising Irish publisher Four Courts Press has been producing some important works on Irish medieval history over the last two or three years, and the two under review are good examples of what they can offer. This is indeed Michael Richter's third book for them, although in a sense, however, this book belongs not with the other two, but with the project 'Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages', for which he and Proinseas Ní Catháin have edited three volumes of essays (for Klett-Cotta of Stuttgart). It is not a full investigation of the subject of the Irish contribution to European culture in the seventh century, but examines a number of individuals and problems, some of them fairly familiar to the early medievalist, and some not. In the first part it looks at Irishmen abroad: Columba, Adomnan, Columbanus, Fursa, Kilian and Romanus. He is particularly useful on the Irish in Northumbria, arguing convincingly that the Synod of Whitby (or Streaneshalc, as he prefers, although his map places the site at Whitby and not Strensall) by no means ended the influence of the Irish on the church in Northumbria. The second section looks at foreigners in Ireland: most of these, unsurprisingly, are Englishmen. Neither of these sections are fully comprehensive: in particular the involvement of the Irish in Scotland is largely passed over, apart from what he says about the first and eighth abbots of Iona. Nevertheless, these sections contain numerous insights and fruitful suggestions, and would be an excellent (and much needed) modern introduction to the topic for students, had Richter only translated his numerous in-text Latin quotations into English.

The third section – 'Ubera Sapientiae' (a phrase derived from a text relating to Ireland as a fount of wisdom, and itself not directly translated) – is very different in nature, and expresses in rather more explicit terms the uncertainty as to the nature of the audience: it juxtaposes very general, and even obvious, comments on Christianity

and learning in Ireland with very detailed discussion of manuscripts, and texts such as the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*. As he says, he is looking at ways in which Irish scholars were indebted to scholars elsewhere in Europe; but he does not examine all possible areas of scholarship, nor does he look in any detail at the vexed question of the influence of Irish scholarship abroad. He avoids the excesses of Thomas Cahill's popular best-seller *How the Irish Saved Civilisation* (a book understandably not to be found in his bibliography), but he does not offer a clear counter-argument to the traditional view. To complain about this is only to complain about the unfulfilled promise of the title: the insights which Richter does offer are going to be of interest to any historian of these islands in the early Middle Ages.

The question of the relationship between Ireland and the rest of Europe is also the theme of the second book under review, the proceedings of a conference held in Dublin in 1995 – the twelve-hundredth anniversary of the first Norwegian raid on Ireland – sponsored by the Norwegian government (as if by way of reparation). The essays in the volume are all (save one, perhaps) substantial contributions to the debate about the significance of the Viking impact upon Ireland and its immediate neighbours across the Irish Sea (Scotland, Man and the adjacent western coastline of Britain). The 'early' Viking age is taken, generously, as referring to the period between the earliest raids to the late eighth century and c. 1000. The first chapter, by Bjørn Myhre (on the archeology of the early Viking age in Norway), in fact discusses the debate among Norwegian archaeologists on this question of dates: if one extreme in the dating range is adopted, the earliest plundered objects from the West may be finding their way into Norwegian graves in the first half of the eighth century. There are various areas of disputed chronology, including the question of the date of the earliest settlements in Iceland and the Faeroes, and of the earliest use of reindeer antler on Orkney and Shetland. It is clear that this problem, raised by Myhre in the first few pages of the book, usefully shook some common assumptions: it is referred to in several of the later contributions.

The first half of *Ireland and Scandinavia* consists of a series of surveys of the archaeological evidence from various relevant parts of the Viking world: Myhre on Norway, C.D. Morris on Scotland, J. Graham-Campbell on the Irish Sea area, and R. Ó Floinn on Ireland itself, while Egon Wamers explores the question of the artefacts of British and Irish provenance in Scandinavia. All these chapters are

state-of-the-art discussions of the evidence, as well as guides to the available literature: they will be much used and cited by those who work in this field. Although there are very few photographs of artefacts (and none of sites), there are numerous helpful maps. (On the whole the book is extremely well produced: but it is odd that there is no consistency in the area of referencing: most chapters had welcome footnotes, but others had long strings of user-unfriendly references in brackets in the text.)

The first section of the book ends with rather more specialised chapters on Irish archaeology: discussions of silver hoards, of Viking swords, and of the celebrated Viking burials to the west of Dublin, in Kilmainham and Islandbridge.

The second section, on 'History and Literature', is also a mixture of the general and the specific. Knut Helle and Charles Doherty offer general surveys of Norwegian and Irish historical sources, while Howard Clarke (in the longest chapter in the book) tackles the question of the origin of towns in Viking Ireland, in comparison with England in the same period, in a challenging and convincing way. J. Kristjánsson looks at the Irish in Icelandic literature, while M. Ní Mhaonaigh writes on the Vikings in Irish literature. J.E. Rekdal's contribution is on the possible links between Norwegian hagiography and Irish voyage tales. The book ends with two overviews: Björn Ambrosiani on the archaeological material, and Donnchadh Ó Corráin on the historical. As it happened, Doherty's chapter 'The Vikings in Ireland: a Review' was more of a wide-ranging overview than Ó Corráin's 'official' overview: the latter spent more time picking up on Kristjánsson's rather unhistorical discussion of the Irish in the sagas, introducing some fascinating material, and discussing the possibility that behind *Njáls saga* lay *Brjáns saga* (*Life of Brian?*), an Old Norse saga produced in Dublin at the turn of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Doherty makes an explicit comparison between the conclusions of this conference and that of the last conference to address a similar theme, in Dublin in 1959 (published as B. Ó Cuív, *The Impact of the Scandinavian Invasions on the Celtic-speaking Peoples, c.800-1100 AD* (Dublin 1962). In 1959 much was made of the devastating impact of the Vikings on the 'Old Order', the traditional society of Ireland, whose archaic character made it unique within the medieval societies of Europe: D.A. Binchy's contribution, 'The Passing of the Old Order', became a classic. Now (in keeping with Ireland's enthusiasm

for the European Community?) we have quite a different picture: an Ireland which, at the time of the Viking raids, was not that unlike other parts of north-west Europe. Doherty argues, nevertheless, that the contributors to Ó Cuív's book were right – that the Vikings did indeed have a significant development on Irish history. He argues that it was partly as a result of the need to counter the Viking attacks that we have a militarisation and a 'feudalisation' of Irish society, which meant that the Anglo-Normans in 1169 encountered a system that was not that unfamiliar to them, however much Giraldus Cambrensis might bemoan Ireland's primitiveness. 'When Binchy spoke of the passing of the old order, he was right – but not in the way he intended' (p. 330). It is too early to tell whether this view will become orthodoxy; but, like many of the other chapters in this book, it will greatly inform the dialogue.

Edward James

University of Reading

James Lydon ed., Law and Disorder in Thirteenth-Century Ireland: the Dublin Parliament of 1297, Dublin and Portland, Oregon, Four Courts Press, 1997, 171pp. ISBN 1-85182-257-7.

To English medievalists 1297 is memorable for the gravest political crisis of the reign of Edward I. The military and financial pressures which triggered this were indirectly responsible for a landmark in Irish history too. Seven current and former members of the Department of Medieval History at Trinity College, Dublin, produced this volume to mark the seventh centenary of 'the first real parliament to meet in Ireland' (p.7). Summoned to make arrangements to reduce the cost of internal peace-keeping in the face of the king's swingeing demands for men, supplies and cash for his armies in Scotland and Gascony, the parliament is notable for being the first in Ireland for which the writs of summons ordering the election of local representatives are known to have contained a *plena potestas* clause. The concluding contribution, Philomena Connolly's new edition and translation of the record of the parliament's membership and provisions, leaves little doubt that the significance of the assembly lies as much in the quality of this record and in the accident of its survival, as in any certainty that the occasion broke new constitutional ground. The parliament is no less worthy of attention for that.

Two papers by the editor assess firstly the importance of Ireland's contribution to Edward's war effort and the strains this imposed on the Irish administration, and secondly the nature of parliament in late-thirteenth-century Ireland and its role in government. The remaining contributors investigate topics relating to the 1297 enactments. Gerard McGrath dissects the complexities of the development of the medieval Irish shire system. Brendan Smith discusses the attitudes underpinning the peace-keeping measures, which, from the detailed local study offered by Cormac Ó Cléirigh, appear to have been only partially effective in Kildare. Katharine Simms demonstrates the intricacies of political relationships across and beyond the peripheries of English settlement and the importance of local truce-making. Seán Duffy analyses the causes and effects of Gaelicization amongst the colonists. There is some overlap of material, but also considerable and thought-provoking divergence of views. Did the declared purpose of the parliament, to establish peace more firmly, succeed or fail? How far did the enactments reflect the views of those present, or represented, at the assembly? Did the colonists regard the Gaelic Irish with 'deep racial animosity' and 'contempt' (pp.55, 58) or were they taking 'Gaelic culture to their hearts' and being 'speedily absorbed into the native scene' (pp.96, 101)?

The absence of maps and the necessity of consulting another work to expand the footnote abbreviations may discourage non-Irish-specialists, who will find one or two conspicuous omissions amongst the authorities cited. Those interested in Edward I, the development of parliament, or conflict and convergence across cultural boundaries, should persist.

Elizabeth Matthew

University of Reading

Ian Bradley, *Celtic Christianity: Making Myths and Chasing Dreams*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1999, pb, 246 pp. ISBN 0 7486 1047 2.

As recently as 1997, during the celebrations to mark the Pilgrim Saints, the Orange Order, in Ireland, went so far as to publish a pamphlet in which they sought to claim Patrick as the apostle of Northern Ireland (on the basis that he seldom, if ever, left Ulster) against what they characterised as an illegitimate Catholic/nationalist claim to his spiritual inheritance. In 1994, the provenance of the Lichfield Gospels became an issue of hot dispute between the

Reverend Patrick Thomas, author on Celtic spirituality, and the Chancellor of Lichfield Cathedral. The Nobel Laureate, Seamus Heaney, makes recurrent reference through his poetry to aspects of the Irish Celtic tradition, nowhere more clearly, and more dialectically, than in the extended sequence 'Station Island' with its complex enactment of, and challenging reflections on, the Lough Derg pilgrimage. 'Celtic Christianity', its ascriptions and its meanings, evidently continues to be a focus for political, religious and academic contestation, just as culturally it continues to offer a 'referential field' which can inform and legitimate a particular kind of poetic. Old dualisms are articulated through this: country or city; centre or periphery; the academic or the poetic; rational or imaginative thought. Ian Bradley has self-confessedly been on both sides of such divides. In 1993, Darton Longman and Todd published his study *The Celtic Way*, retelling the story of Celtic Christianity and examining its main themes from the perspective of an enthusiastic participant.

Now this present study, which includes both the Lichfield and Orange Order examples, far more critically reviews the history of the writing and re-writing of early Christian practice in Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Recurrently the author asks who reformed and transformed the lives and works of the pre-Augustinian church in these countries, and for what purpose? His approach is synchronic, starting with the early medieval period, working all the way through to the current, prolific, revival of interest in Celtic Christianity. It provides an immensely readable, well-referenced and resonant account.

Part of the fascination of *Celtic Christianity* is the way that it establishes and articulates Ian Bradley's own shift away from this eponymous ascription: 'I myself have now stopped using the term 'Celtic Church' and prefer to think in terms of smaller, more localised entities such as "the Columban Church"' (p.226). Methodologically the book presents a shifting balance between narrative, survey and a more theoretical perspective. Given its scope and range this feels appropriate as it offers and creates possibilities for further studies with more limited foci.

Central to the interpretative framework that the author presents is that expressed through an analysis of the multifarious ways that institutionalised power can and does recreate 'otherness'. Thus, celebrating 'Celtic difference' has, for example, been as much a way of reinforcing the new, Anglo-Norman hegemony, or a reference point for the Reformed Church against 'Popish delusions', as it has been the

consequence of a genuine openness to the challenges and opportunities of heterogeneity. Perhaps the other most important methodological feature in Bradley's analytic narrative is his recurrent interrogative relationship to the claims made for the uniqueness of the 'Celtic' approach - one striking example of this is when it is asked how far Celtic Christianity both springs out of, and articulates, a particular, close relationship to the natural world; whether, for example, the hermit poems are in fact the product of 'wishful thinking by urban monks' (pp. 33-4 and 228).

Again Ian Bradley is strikingly honest, as he writes of having been 'forced to revise my own views about the attitude to nature among early Celtic Christians' (p.228). This sense of the book being written by a very committed participant in the issues underlines not only one of its central strengths, but is also an essential element in its attractiveness.

Pete Mathers

University of Reading

Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999, xii + 300 pp. ISBN 0 8122 1665 2.

The professed concerns of this book are twofold: to examine clerical attitudes to sexuality in the higher and later Middle Ages, and to show how the notions of the past, that is of antiquity and the earlier Middle Ages, refused to disappear but instead continued through to the later Middle Ages. The pollution, sexuality and demonology of the subtitle are themes that the author regards as producing such anxiety for clerics, that even the rationalizing of the intellectuals of the high Middle Ages could not overcome it. In six chapters, most of which originally started life as separate papers and articles, Dyan Elliott proceeds to dip into such fascinating topics as the fear of pollution caused by nocturnal emission, the problem of married clergy, or succubi, incubi and the sexuality of demons.

By far the most interesting problem for medieval theologians and/or philosophers is how the very describing, naming or listing of polluting activities, sexual deviancy, or demonic conduct, through the act of intellectual enquiry takes on a life of its own. A case of the more you seek, the more you shall find, especially when one

considers the dilemma of the confessor who has to extract potentially sexually-arousing stories from his penitents.

Irina Metzler

University of Reading

Hugh Magennis, *Anglo-Saxon Appetites: Food and Drink and their Consumption in Old English and related Literature*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 1998, hb, 200 pp. £40. ISBN 1-85182-382-4.

This book raises a number of very interesting problems about the presence and absence of food and drink in various genres of Old English literature, and demonstrates the co-existence of varying, and contradictory, attitudes in different categories of text.

The first two chapters deal with secular literature, placing particular emphasis on the epic poem, *Beowulf*, as the text with the most developed imagery of feasting. What emerges is both interesting and contradictory since great emphasis is placed in *Beowulf* on feasts but the actual activity of eating is almost entirely absent. Central to the ceremony of feasting is the distribution and consumption of (alcoholic) drinks; but only the monster, Grendel, is described as actually eating. Further, even the usually present drinking is of a strikingly abstract sort. The drink can mysteriously change and, while large quantities are sometimes said to be consumed, the question of drunkenness receives little attention (p.23). All this is fascinating, but what is less satisfying is the author's discussion of its significance. The main suggestion is that food (like water) was seen as a staple and thus was devoid of symbolic significance; there is also a secondary suggestion that the Anglo-Saxons were not interested in 'cuisine' (p.43). However, these suggestions raise a number of potential problems, such as: why the attitudes to food and to drink were apparently so different; what evidence we have as to Anglo-Saxon lack of interest in the cooking and serving of food; and how far literary images can be seen as simply reflective of contemporary social attitudes and behaviours. The last problem receives relatively little attention here, and is further complicated by references to visual images of feasts and meals. Detailed articles on the iconography of the Last Supper are cited, but Magennis' own text tends to treat visual images as more reflective of social reality than literary ones, without actually demonstrating that this was so (eg. p.32).

The second half of the book looks at explicitly Christian literature, both poetry and prose. Here, a more 'practical' approach is demonstrated, with authors concerned to outline desirable behaviour, and to give examples of both good and bad practice. In this context, both eating and drinking were described with realistic detail. Particularly interesting here is the analysis of definitions of, and attitudes to, excess, where the terms used by Old English writers are valuably set into the context of Anglo-Latin and patristic literature. Less satisfying, however, is the discussion of references to cannibalism. This raises very interesting issues, but is left rather scattered through the book, and has too few texts to draw on to come to very strong conclusions. Indeed, this is something of a problem for the book overall. The final chapter, on 'Metaphorical and spiritual applications' gives a detailed analysis of eating and drinking, and especially of the theme of cannibalism, in the poem *Andreas*. Here, some very interesting cross-references to the imagery of the secular poetry are demonstrated, and a clear discussion given of the themes of 'good food and evil food' (p.152) in the text. The theme of 'good food' is then pursued in the last section, on 'Spiritual Food'. Here, however, the book rather abruptly ends. It is true that the individual chapters are generally provided with conclusions, but nevertheless some overall conclusion would be especially helpful in a book which has dealt with so many contrasting textual genres and authorial attitudes, and raised so many thoughtful questions.

Anne Lawrence

University of Reading

J.A. Raftis, Peasant Economic Development within the English Manorial System, Stroud, Sutton Publishing; Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996, 243pp. ISBN 0-7509-1348-7.

It was once a central tenet of historians of medieval England that the economic trends of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries which were brought about by an increase in population benefited landlords but disadvantaged peasants. A weakness in this interpretation is that these centuries also see the rise of markets and new towns. If the peasantry were so economically depressed how could such a level of commercialisation have occurred? Surely many must have produced for the market and reaped profits from it. Raftis has already suggested that we need to distinguish between the various tiers of peasant

society, identifying three main groups based upon the extent of landholding, the positions of responsibility held, and the status within the community. It is 'A' group – the peasant aristocracy with the most land and the most local significance – who form the subject of his latest book. Others have noted their 'initiative and productive capacity', but Raftis is the first to give them a role in the economic development of high farming instituted by landlords in the period. As in his other works, he uses evidence from the estates of Ramsey Abbey. He suggests that the wealthier peasants deliberately took up vacant holdings even where these were encumbered by labour services for it was by increasing the land they farmed that they could develop their own capital. They had no difficulty in paying entry fines, commutation charges, or fines for non-payment of services, and were keen to take up official positions so that they could influence policy decisions in the manor. The lord was keen to encourage them because their commercial success contributed to the success of the manor as a whole, and was prepared to delegate to them a considerable degree of control over the frankpledge system. Usefully Raftis combines manorial evidence with tax records in his attempt to identify and discuss the wealthy peasants. He is also able to examine their family strategy, showing how they negotiated marriages with others of their status, and how they acquired land for younger sons by dominating the land market. The discussion focuses mainly on the twelfth and thirteenth centuries but there is also a useful discussion of the post Black Death period where they increased their dominance particularly by virtue of taking up vacant land and leasing the demesne.

The book is slightly heavy going because of the inclusion of so much detail in the text and copious appendices, but the reader is left in no doubt that the general arguments are fully justified by the material. Nor can it be denied that this is a highly important study. As Raftis himself concludes, 'the result has been a striking reversal of traditional historiography, in that customary tenure becomes no longer a block to economic development but an instrument for such development', even if 'much still remains to be done in order to obtain a proper grasp of the actual available capital resources of the English countryside by the thirteenth century'.

Alan Coates, *English Medieval Books: the Reading Abbey Collections from Foundation to Dispersal*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999, 211 pp. £40 hb. ISBN 019 8207565.

This book displays, condensed into a modest length, an impressive level and range of scholarship. The surviving books from both Reading and its cell of Leominster are fully and clearly catalogued, as well as being set into a range of illuminating contexts. These include not only the foundation of Reading Abbey, and a brief outline of the categories of books such a house would have needed, but also a full and fascinating discussion of the piecemeal and complex processes of dispersal and transmission of parts of the book collection after the Dissolution.

Indeed, while all the chapters are both thorough, and interesting in themselves, it is perhaps those dealing with the later medieval period which make this book most distinctive. The largest chronologically-defined group of surviving manuscripts, those from the twelfth century, are given a concise and confident palaeographic analysis, which clarifies their inter-relationships and, by including the evidence of the decorated initials, demonstrates the almost certain existence of a productive scriptorium at Reading. However, the comparison of the early collection at Reading with other major twelfth-century monastic collections is rather brief, and it is with the impressively-detailed study of the sending of Reading monks to university, their subjects of study and their impact on the book collection, that this book becomes innovative.

This highlights one of the most distinctive features of this book, and one which perhaps justifies the wide-ranging approach suggested in its title. It does not attempt to give a simple, chronological account of Reading Abbey's library. Instead, careful and precisely detailed analyses of groups of surviving books, categorised both by their period and by their contents or origins, are set against contextual discussions of a range of topics. These, like the study of the dispersal of the books, or the impact of university study, already mentioned, are both interesting in themselves and, through the wide range of primary and secondary evidence to which they make reference, valuably open up new insights into the history of monastic libraries.

Anne Lawrence

University of Reading

Marion Gibbs and Sidney Johnson, Medieval German Literature. A Companion, New York and London, Garland Publishing, 1997, XIV + 457 pp. £63. ISBN 0-8153-1450-7.

Helmut de Boor once wrote that it was only at the stage of 'hoher Emeritierung' that he could achieve the repose requisite to the encyclopaedic task of writing up his well-known volumes on Old and Middle High German literature. The contributors to this volume are to be congratulated for having taken on such a gargantuan task as the present volume when the bureaucratic burdens on colleagues must be somewhat greater than was the case even in de Boor's time. The volume is in fact an important milestone for English readers in that it attempts to map out the whole of the German medieval literary tradition in a way rarely attempted by English scholars since the nineteen sixties (I am referring here to the literary histories of Maurice Walshe (1962) and Paul Salmon (1967)). Taking a large chronological sweep from Old High German beginnings (750 A.D.) up to *Der Ackermann aus Böhmen* (c.1400) the authors give valuable pen portraits of several hundred writers with invaluable bibliographical updates. The book may be found particularly useful by research students (of whatever age) who can look up an author or topic and pursue their theme via the *weiterführende Bibliographien*. Indeed, if the book has any fault it is that in covering so much ground the contributors leave themselves inadequate space to develop many topics on which they whet our appetites so mightily that one might be tempted to arraign them for a (rather too sanitised) intellectual striptease.

With such a massive volume it might be asking too much even of this noted duo that they might engage in a passionate *Auseinandersetzung* with all the critical issues at stage in the plethora of works which they survey. In taking the *Ackermann aus Böhmen* to close their volume they, like many others, have seen that work to be 'pointing the way forward into areas as yet untouched', meaning the time of Renaissance Humanism: 'Thematically, it treads new ground in its presentation of a world in which God ultimately retains his central position but where Man can assert his right to challenge and to question' (p.452). This contention perhaps leaves somewhat out of account the occurrence of similar sentiments two centuries before at the time of the (German) High Middle Ages such as the thinly veiled theomachy involved in that work with which the *Ackermann* is often

explicitly contrasted in this respect: *Der Arme Heinrich*. Here the peasants 'explain' to their daughter that it is God who has stricken their liege lord with leprosy but then subjoin the works: 'Had anybody else done so he would be the recipient of our curses' (ll. 507-8). In *Diu Crône* (1230 ed. Scholl, ll. 16933-16995) a similar formal accusation against God as brought by the ploughman is introduced by Sir Kay when he (wrongly) fears that Gawain has been taken from the fellowship. (All of which shows up the difficulty of periodisation for an age to which Joachim Heinze recently applied the label 'modernes Mittelalter'.) None of which is meant to detract from the value of a book from which I have derived immense pleasure and which, despite its outrageous price, will I hope gain it the very wide readership of both Germanists and comparativists which it undoubtedly deserves.

Neil Thomas

University of Durham

Lynda Garland, Byzantine empresses: women and power in Byzantium AD 527-1204, London, Routledge, 1999, xx+343 pp. ISBN 0 415 14688 7.

After a gap of ninety years since Charles Diehl's *Figures byzantines*, filled only by occasional studies like the fundamental article by Averil Cameron on the empress Sophia, and Kenneth Holum's *Theodosian empresses*, Byzantine empresses have come into their own again. This book is the first of four currently advertised which will cover the periods 300-800 (James), 700-900 (Herrin), 1025-1204 (Hill). Only the late period awaits a volume. Why this sudden revival of interest? The answer must be the development of gender studies in classics and Byzantine Studies - and the interest in queenship in the medieval west over the last ten years - with a burgeoning of feminist women's history, studies of masculinity, and a concern for eunuch history. Yet this book seems oddly untouched by these currents and marks itself out from the other works also by eschewing a problem-based or thematic treatment. It is determinedly chronological, biographical and evaluative. It promises to rewrite Diehl for the twenty-first century in the light of twentieth-century historical research, this time revealing the documentation, and it largely succeeds in this limited aim. It begins with a brief introduction which provides necessary background for an uninitiated reader, rather than raising questions or presenting theoretical frameworks. It does not explain why the book begins only

with Theodora, though the epilogue explains why the empresses of the Palaiologan era 'were not given the chance' (p.228) 'to play a public and influential part in the running of the empire': such women 'belonged to an earlier age'. There follows a series of thirteen portraits of individual empresses (though wives of Leo VI and empresses of Alexios I are grouped together) which begin with a comparative link and end with a pithy summing-up.

There are problems with this biographical approach which Garland does not acknowledge. She could have benefited from the current western medievalist discourse on the possibility of writing medieval biography, but instead withdraws to the safe Byzantinist ground of Obolensky and Nicol, of 'portraits'. For some of her women there simply is not enough information, for others the story is so tangled that repetition is necessary if the biographical formula is to be preserved; there is a gap of 150 years between Martina and Eirene, and the periodisation 'From stage to statecraft', 'Regents and regicides', 'Empresses as autocrats' simply does not work. The approach encourages value judgements 'she does her sex little credit' (p.228), 'his habits of immorality' (p.184); and speculation 'perhaps this rankled' (p.197), 'it is inconceivable to imagine that she did not play' (p.213). It does not allow Garland to interrogate the sources, either written or visual, or to allow rigorous comparison or the kind of analysis which would allow us to make sense of what is a very difficult subject. Questions not asked in the introduction are in the mind of the reader by the end: why is the system of titulature so apparently fluid? Were females really more dependent on eunuch ministers than male emperors? Are there any implications for non-imperial women? And is 'imperial women' what we should be discussing rather than 'empresses'? Are there any real shifts in the power of empresses or is it *all* a matter of personality plus opportunity? if not, then what were the expected parameters of empress-regent, consort, temporary caretaker, *autokrator* and when did women transgress them? What was expected of a *basilissa*, *despoina*, *augusta* and when, and did it matter? (Garland herself notes the paradox that the least competent empress was the most popular, but does not pursue the issue.) When did an empress become a saint and when not? What development can be discerned and why?

But Garland's 'portrait' approach does allow themes to emerge even if a lack of context blinds her to their significance (a look at Laiou's kinship diagrams or Stiernon's classic articles would allow her to see

that Komnenian family government left no space for powerful empress rule). And it produces a clear and rather brisk account ('Sophia was no shrinking violet' (p.47), Eudokia Makrembolitissa 'did not hide her light under a bushel' (p.179)) with admirably disciplined endnotes. The concomitant loss is the sweeping away of current debate lest it impede the flow (the historicity of bridesshows has been 'unnecessarily' doubted, p.257, ch.4, n.4) of an efficient and readable narrative of Byzantine politics at the top. The book, helpfully illustrated by the rich resources of Dumbarton Oaks and beautifully produced by Routledge, could most helpfully be read by those coming fresh to the subject to gain an overview before proceeding to more analytical studies. In this light it is perhaps a pity that the fourth- and fifth-century empresses Helena and Pulcheria, Verina and Ariadne are not part of the story (the period 527-1204 has no intrinsic or argued coherence). Most interestingly, the book could then be read as an introduction to the political history of Byzantium seen from a female viewpoint. It is remarkable how little of the stuff of male-oriented histories is lost: the reconquest of the west, the Justinianic plague, Basil II's conquest of Bulgaria but not the Nika riots, iconoclasm, the tetragamy crisis, the crusades or the civil wars of the fourteenth century. In this sense Byzantine imperial women are the history of Byzantium. But we still need the history of Byzantine imperial women.

Margaret Mullett

The Queen's University of Belfast

James William Brodman, Charity and Welfare: Hospitals and the Poor in Medieval Catalonia, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998, 222pp. ISBN 0 8122 3436 7.

Titles can be deceptive. The simple pairing of 'charity' and 'welfare' by Professor Brodman in his main title might suggest a relatively indiscriminate reflection on forms and modes of beneficence in (the subtitle) the hospitals of medieval Catalonia. This would be to miss the major and distinctive strengths of this very clear and lucid study.

From the first general chapter on, the author establishes and explores important distinctions between charity - 'the giving of alms gratuitously' - and welfare - giving 'predicated on a social policy' (p.6). These emerge from, and are tied to, the distinction made by

Gratian (the twelfth-century canonist) between '*hospitalitas* and *liberalitas*' (ibid., author's emphases).

Beyond the considerable interest of following this theme as it is explored and evidenced through the focus of a particular region, the study is enormously enhanced through Professor Brodman's considerable ability to place his own findings within several contexts: that of a range of studies of the region carried out over the last quarter-century; that of other societies within the Europe of the period; the growing body of scholarship on 'the methods, motives and means of medieval caritative assistance' (p.x).

The author suggests that his study may enable further studies of Catalan themes. To me it offered as well a different possibility, for although a range of reference is made to the separate Jewish and Muslim institutions of care, the central concern stays within the framework of Christian thinking. Yet the references suggest the attractiveness of studies examining more fully the contrasting differences in the paradigms through which 'help' was sought, exhorted and justified in the different systems of faith, as well as the practices that sprang from them and the problems that they encountered.

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