

Reading Medieval Reviews

Brian Kemp (ed. and trans.). *Reading Abbey Records: A New Miscellany*. Reading: Berkshire Record Society, vol. 25. 2018. xii + 142 pp. ISBN 978-0-9573937-6-9.

This volume is to be celebrated both for the intrinsic value of the texts it contains and as the final element in Brian Kemp's distinguished series of publications on Reading Abbey. As the Abbot of Douai states in his Foreword to the volume, Brian Kemp's special contribution to our knowledge of the abbey has been to focus on, and to make available, the surviving records and documents from its medieval history. These records have helped to demonstrate the significant role played by the abbey in national and even international events, a theme to which the volume under review returns in important ways. Brian Kemp's own Introduction to the volume strikes a note in complement to this, stressing that the 'lives and preoccupations of the monks' are also important, and that they have previously received less attention than the surviving books and buildings which provided their physical surroundings. It is satisfying to note that the four texts presented in this volume add significantly to our knowledge on both topics.

The first of the four consists of a previously unpublished set of annals, compiled in the thirteenth century. Sadly, Reading Abbey's main contribution to medieval historical writing seems to have vanished completely. This was the volume containing the 'History of Reading and Deeds of Henry I' which appears in the medieval booklist of the abbey. However, the publication here of this set of 'Annals of Reading Abbey' provides evidence of an ongoing concern to record major events both locally and nationally. These annals form part of Worcester College, Oxford, MS 213, a volume which was presented to the abbey by Prior Alan (1279-c.1290). They begin with the death of Richard I in 1199 and continue (not always in chronological order) to 1281. As Brian Kemp argues, their content and layout provide strong evidence of a project to compile an updated

history from 1000 to the late thirteenth century, though sadly we have no evidence that this chronicle was actually written up.

In their surviving form, the annals are especially noteworthy, as Brian Kemp points out, for their demonstration of the esteem in which King John held the abbey and its great relic of the Hand of St James. This is clear, since John spent nearly a week in the abbey during the crucial month of May 1215, and it was then that ‘the barons of England defied King John at Reading’ as the annals state. They also provide tantalising evidence of the complex relationship between the abbey and King John’s son, Henry III. This king spent considerable amounts of time at the abbey and was an important patron and yet, as Brian Kemp notes, the only surviving text of the ‘Song of Lewes’, which celebrated the victory of the barons against the king in 1264, is contained in another Reading Abbey manuscript (London, British Library, MS Harley 978). The annals published here are circumspect, recording the rebellion of the barons in 1263 and the fact that they came in arms to Reading in June of that year, before noting both the royal victory at Northampton in April 1264 and the baronial victory at Lewes (and its aftermath). Knowledge of events in London is also shown, since the annalist records that the barons killed and plundered the Jews of London in that year, and that many citizens attempted to flee but were killed before they could get away. Amongst events of significance for the monks themselves, the year 1277 stands out. A general chapter was then held at Reading, and the abbot gained support for the construction of a building in Stockwell Street, Oxford, for scholars from the abbey and other Benedictine houses in the province. This became Gloucester College, and the site is now occupied by Worcester College.

The ‘Miracles of the Hand of St James’, have been published before only in translation, also by Brian Kemp (in *The Berkshire Archaeological Journal*, Vol. 65, 1970, pp. 1-20). Now the translation is placed alongside an edition of the Latin text found in Gloucester Cathedral Library, MS 1, ff. 171v-175v. The manuscript cannot be proved to be of Reading origin, but as Brian Kemp points out the hand of the *miracula* is very similar to the main hand of the abbey’s cartulary (now BL MS Egerton 3031). This was a hand which Brian Kemp knew well, since he previously edited that cartulary in *Reading*

Abbey Cartularies (2 vols.), Camden Fourth Series vols. 31 and 33, Royal Historical Society, 1986 and 1987. The present volume also offers a revised introduction to the miracles, together with evidence that the Hand of St James was still revered at least in 1274, when a wax candle as tall as Prince Henry, son of Edward I, was offered at the shrine during that prince's final illness.

Items 3 and 4 are like the annals both in not having been previously published and in showing the close connections between the daily lives of the monks and figures beyond the abbey. This volume leaves no doubt of the continuing high importance placed by the monks upon their connection to their royal founder. The record of the arrangements for marking the anniversary of Henry I's death is found in a small gathering added to BL MS Additional 8167. Both the anniversary itself and the eve, or vigil, preceding it were treated as important feasts. The abbey church was adorned with splendid hangings, all the bells were rung, special candles were burnt day and night, and the liturgical and choral arrangements were impressive. Moreover, seven special cooked dishes, and extra wine, were available for the monks, and leftovers were given to the poor. Every poor person who came to the abbey on these days was to be given bread, with a portion of meat or fish. Special services were also held every month for the dead king and, as this record shows, these too were of significant length and solemnity. Finally, thirteen poor people were to be fed in the monastery, in the king's name, on the second day of each month.

The final text presented in this volume is the 'Schedule of Feasts and Anniversaries', which is found in the same volume as the annals already discussed. Brian Kemp's dating of the list to 1269-90 is convincing, as are his comments about the hierarchy of feasts celebrated in the abbey at that time and the number of special commemorations of the significant dead. The care given to the latter is shown by their division into five groups, to be celebrated in carefully calibrated fashions, and at the expense of identified officials within the monastic community. The level of detail provided here may be illustrated by the fact that, as Brian Kemp points out, 'ale of Cholsey' is specified as the ale to be given on nine feasts and four special Sundays. We also learn that tonsures were to be shaved at the feast of

St Lambert before Christmas, on which day the sacrist was to provide a special meal.

Overall, this volume adds considerably to our knowledge of the life and preoccupations of the abbey during the thirteenth century, as well as providing compelling evidence of its close relationships with royal patrons and its place in the affairs of the kingdom. It also provides a fitting conclusion to Brian Kemp's body of work on Reading Abbey.

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Nicola Clark. *Gender, Family & Politics: The Howard Women, 1485-1558*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2018. xiv + 206 pp. ISBN: 9780198784814.

This slim, tightly-written volume presents a rich analysis of the roles and agency of women in one of England's most powerful families. The Howards' reputation for ambitiously grooming daughters to attract a lustful king and ruthlessly abandoning members who fell out of political favour, for dominating queens' households and for loyal Catholicism are all brought into question in this scholarly study of the family from the perspective of its women.

Many of the issues discussed have wider significance for understanding aristocratic society and court politics at this period so that the book's readership should certainly not be limited to those interested in women and gender studies. These issues include the frequency with which friends and family worked together in spite of differing religious opinions; the opportunities for understanding family loyalties and political perspectives through material culture; the impact of 'soft power' and the shaping of anti-treason laws. Nicola Clark argues that the Howard dynasty have too often been oversimplified, either as a strongly coherent dynastic force or a family torn apart, at different periods in their history. She suggests that, in some ways, the Howards were not entirely typical of contemporary aristocratic society. A recurring theme is the unusually powerful sense of Howard family

identity. This was manifested in marriage and burial choices, in the absence of litigation between kin and in how outsiders perceived them. Yet this did not mean that they were ever following a wholly united strategy or felt obliged to rescue less fortunate individuals or family groups within the dynasty. The Howards also stand out among contemporaries for the exceptional number of 'rebellious' women whose troubled marital arrangements, brushes with treason and religious radicalism left behind many of the sources for this book.

The work is structured thematically rather than chronologically, effectively shaped to make best use of the limited sources, and is largely focussed on the reign of Henry VIII. It opens by exploring kinship relationships. Clark's conclusions support other recent work on the variety of valued networks women inhabited and the particular importance of familial support in negotiating unhappy marriages. Clark suggests that the third duke of Norfolk's perceived failure to provide protections expected from a 'paterfamilias' may have invited some of the rebellion he experienced. Nonetheless, she defends his decision to distance himself from Henry VIII's disgraced queens because the duke's primary duty was to his direct family line.

A chapter on their material culture, 'drenched in dynastic "branding"', and their patronage represents them as fairly typical of aristocratic society. That said, Elizabeth Stafford/Howard's apparent use of needlework to protest against both her husband's infidelity and the treatment of Catherine of Aragon stand out as Tudor craftivism. A chapter on marital strife considers three strikingly different cases, all of which involved seeking help first from family members and then royal advisers. Through the chapter on courtiers it becomes clear that Anne Boleyn was only remotely considered a Howard. For most of the book the queens, Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard, are mere shadows in the background of the principal line. The chapter on treason and rebellion does include telling comparison of the circumstances of the downfall of each, revealing how lessons learned during the first shaped royal decisions over the second. A final chapter on religion investigates the Howard women's varied responses to the Reformation and considers problems in defining conformity.

The study draws on the lives of three generations of a large family, including both women born into the Howards and those who

married in, but a small number of remarkable noblewomen take the foreground. These are Agnes Tylney/Howard, second wife of the second duke of Norfolk, her daughters Anne Howard/de Vere, countess of Oxford, and Katherine Howard/ap Rhys/Daubeney, countess of Bridgwater, along with Elizabeth Stafford/Howard, second wife of the third duke, and her daughter Mary Howard/FitzRoy, duchess of Richmond. Some of the scandalous or dramatic details of their individual lives are familiar, but Clark reassesses traditional assumptions, frequently arguing that the extent of their agency has been overlooked. Moreover, this comparative work presents a fresh perspective on the different consequences of their experiences and indicates the wider impacts of their agency and political involvement throughout the dynasty. In so doing, Clark both enriches our understanding of the actions and experiences of more famous members of the dynasty and provides hugely useful context for examining other late medieval and early modern aristocratic families. This is a fascinating and persuasive contribution to a more balanced understanding of a turbulent age.

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Claire Trener. *Madness, Medicine and Miracle in Twelfth-Century England.* Abingdon: Routledge: 2019. 184 pp. 1 fig. 8 tables. ISBN: 978-0-8153-6745-1.

Drawn from her doctoral research, Claire Trener's new monograph provides the first, focused, book-length discussion of the accounts of madness recorded in medieval hagiographies. Focused on the long twelfth century (c.1079-1220), Trener provides case-studies for five saints' cults, analysing how accounts of madness are represented within them. Taking a chronological approach, she focuses on a particular theme for each case-study: St Edmund, Bury, and protection and punishment; William of Norwich, and violence and restraint; St Thomas Becket, Canterbury, and diagnosis and medical

awareness; St Bartholomew, London, and demonic possession; and, St Hugh, Lincoln, and balance of the body, mind and soul.

The twelfth century saw developments in canon law and a tightening of papal control over canonisation, but also saw the rise of the medieval universities and the transmission of Greek and Arabic medical texts into Western European monastic book collections. As such, this is a century ripe for investigating how developments in church law and medical knowledge impacted on representation of miraculous cure. Although, Trenerly argues, it is more important that the specific local contexts are considered, as these impacted on the representations of madness within the five collections to a greater extent than the chronological progressions seen across the century.

Highlighting, in her introduction, the need for historians to be careful in their use of modern interpretations and categorisations of mental health conditions, Trenerly emphasises the importance of interpreting these accounts of madness within their contemporary setting. In so doing, Trenerly pays attention to classical medical concepts of madness, from which medieval understandings were partially drawn, the terminology used to describe madness, and she also challenges the concept of mad individuals in the hagiographies being presented as sinners. Here, and in the historiographical discussion that follows, Trenerly presents a thoughtful discussion of complex topics, while still ensuring a high level of accessibility in her writing.

Two miracle collections were compiled for St Edmund in quick succession, one either side of 1100, and Trenerly uses both here in a comparative study: four of the mad individuals being recorded in both collections, with an additional case being recorded only in the earlier collection. Trenerly, through detailed case-studies of each account, highlights the subtle differences at play between the representations of mad individuals in both *miracula*. She reveals that both collections connect the punishment of divinely-inflicted madness with specific forms of sin; however, the later collection (written at the request of Herbert of Losinga, bishop of Norwich) provides a less Bury-centric portrayal of these punishments in favour of a broader defence against sinful behaviour.

Mad individuals appear eleven times in Thomas of Monmouth's hagiography for William of Norwich (who was allegedly murdered by the city's Jewish community). The extreme behaviour exhibited by these individuals included biting, blaspheming and attacking others. Extreme physical strength was often also an issue which led, as Trener notes, to many mad individuals being forcibly brought to William's shrine in iron chains, some having been beaten. This treatment, Trener concludes, echoed the violence of the mad. Meanwhile, depicting William as Christ-like in his curative miracles, she argues, was important as this was a new cult and did not have the history of others, unlike St Edmund, to fall back on.

Two substantial miracle collections were compiled for Becket in the late-twelfth century, containing 25 accounts of madness in total. The second of these, produced by William of Canterbury, indicates an awareness of contemporary medical vocabulary. Yet, as Trener shows, William's use of this terminology is inconsistent in accounts of epilepsy, and in cases of madness is non-existent. This, Trener argues, is reflective of Becket's rapidly-growing cult with hagiographers drawing on numerous oral and written testimonies (and the varied language presented in these testimonies) in combination with biblical and hagiographical tropes. Thus reflecting the 'multifaceted contemporary understandings of madness', while revealing a continued connection between madness and demons (p.102).

Demonic possession is the focus of Trener's following chapter. Using the five madness miracles in the collection for St Bartholomew's, London, Trener explores the violent behaviour of demoniacs at the shrine, returning to themes introduced in her analysis of William of Norwich. Saints played a vital role in the battle against demonic possession, with physicians unable to exorcise demons, divine aid was a necessity in the cure of demoniacs. Yet, Trener highlights that there were subtle differences between demonic and non-demonic madness. These were often determined post-miracle through discussion with the individual and through particular behavioural patterns, including blasphemy and extreme strength. These behavioural patterns were key in characterising madness, just as losing these traits indicated cure.

In her final case-study, Trenery turns attention to the three early thirteenth-century collections for St Hugh. Hugh provides an interesting contrast to the other four saints: he died peacefully, meaning he was not a martyr-saint, and the majority of his curative miracles occurred *in vita*. In the four madness miracles of Hugh's collections, contemporary understandings of balance between body, mind and soul, are made evident. Although none of the individuals were punished with madness for sinful behaviour, while mad they acted sinfully. Gerald of Wales' *Vita S. Hugonis*, for example, recording that a mad girl from Wigford screamed in church. Upon recovery, these individuals were not only restored to their sanity, but to suitable behaviour - physical and spiritual. The girl from Wigford even took up a position in a Lincoln hospital: charity thus ensuring the continued improvement of her soul. Trenery successfully ties Hugh's actions back to those of Edmund by reflecting how the action of the saints (punitive and curative) not only impacted on the individual but had wider, communal importance in protecting the community from 'spiritual error' (p.160).

Madness, Medicine and Miracle in Twelfth-Century England provides a substantial and nuanced study that sheds light on social-medical aspects of medieval madness while providing an in-depth study of the hagiographic representation of such afflictions. Trenery's handling of these complex matters of the mind is presented in an accessible and engaging manner and she succeeds in providing a focussed study that addresses madness miracles while leaving room for future developments (for example a study of female saints' hagiographies).

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