

Book Reviews

THE LANCASTRIAN AFFINITY, 1361-1399. Simon Walker. 1990. Clarendon Press, Oxford, £40.

John of Gaunt was the mightiest of all late-medieval mighty subjects. Indeed he was more than a subject: he was a would-be king of Castile, whose ambitions stretched way beyond 'this precious stone set in the silver sea'. As Dr Walker reminds us in this excellent anatomy of his English-based retinue, the 'sceptered isle' was but Gaunt's own base for a life-time of campaigning overseas. His affinity, which at its peak encompassed a household of 115 men, an additional indentured retinue of 170, an even larger number of annuitants and innumerable well-wishers the length and breadth of England, was the largest ever sustained by a late-medieval magnate. It is also the best documented. It thus provided most of the evidence for early studies of bastard feudalism. Dr Walker not only offers a timely revaluation of this 'multi-national company' in the light of recent thinking on the nature of bastard feudalism, but also for the first time provides a set of thoroughly executed studies of the operation of its branches locally.

Walker's thesis is that Gaunt's affinity, in particular its extensively (and expensively) recruited body of indentured retainers existed first and foremost to fight his wars. It was primarily a military organization created to enable him, a royal prince who was for a while the unofficial regent of England, first to fight in France in his father's cause and then in Spain in his own. Men were retained by him because they were proven soldiers not because they might prove to be valuable local agents. They provided the backbone of all his armies in France and Spain. They were rewarded by offices and pensions in England in gratitude for military service done and as an inducement for military service to be done. Detailed examination of the role played by them in the local politics of the contrasting circumstances of Sussex (where Gaunt was marginal), Lancashire (where he was supreme as count palatine), Norfolk (where he was one among several influential lords) and the North Midlands (where he was the dominant lord), reveal that Gaunt's personal power in the provinces was strictly limited. Several reasons are advanced: the military and externally directed nature of the affinity; Gaunt's own exalted status as a royal prince and distance as a courtier; the very size and diffuse distribution of his patronage; and above all the resistance of independently-minded county communities. Nevertheless, much was done in his name by frequently unscrupulous officers and servants whom he was unable to control; it was their acts that generated the stream of complaints against him and his retainers by the representatives of the county communities in parliament. Disorder locally was not the consequence of bastard feudalism itself, but of the inability of Gaunt to control his men and, through them, the counties.

The importance of this thesis, with which all historians of the later middle ages will need to engage, lies first in its re-emphasis on the military nature of the indentured retinue, and secondly in its stress on the independent strength of county communities. Because of the wider implication of Walker's thesis it is unfortunate that he was not able to encompass all Gaunt's affinity by including detailed studies of Yorkshire and the East Midlands; and that he did not go one step further and consider what happened in 1399 when the next duke of Lancaster mobilized this very same affinity for war in England itself, and challenged for a crown at home rather than one abroad. Might not the events of July-October 1399 throw a rather different light on the role of the Lancastrian retainers in the counties and on the apparent independence of county communities?

Walker's emphasis on the political significance of county communities might be questioned. But the great strength of his work is the manner in which it will stimulate debate about the nature of late-medieval political society. In particular, in the light of his thesis one needs to look afresh at other, later royal princes who were mighty subjects, not least Richard of Gloucester. We need to give serious consideration to the possibility that Gloucester's affinity, like Gaunt's, was primarily organized for war. Dr Hicks has several times reminded his readers that the wardens of the marches towards Scotland retained on a greater scale than most of their contemporaries so that they had reserves readily at hand. Could it be that Gloucester, like Gaunt, always saw his retinue primarily as a following recruited for war; the war which he led after 1480 and out of which he gained a palatinate similar to Gaunt's? And to what extent did Gloucester in the years 1474-83 really control his affinity in the northern counties and through them control local politics? The second question might be more easily answered. Walker suggests that Gaunt's interests were too diffuse, his life too bound up in court and adventures overseas for him to be able to cultivate the localities. Gloucester, however, deliberately focused his attention and his resources in one region to the exclusion of others. He also balanced his life between court and country more successfully. In other words it might be precisely because Gloucester was different from Gaunt in these respects that his affinity in the localities was a much more effective political machine.

Finally, as these thoughts about Richard of Gloucester suggest, the question is raised as to whether Gaunt represents the exception or the rule. In many ways Gaunt was unique. Indeed it would stand to reason that all magnates approached retaining in different, individual ways shaped by their times and circumstances. It would be wrong, therefore, necessarily to conclude from Dr Walker's perceptive, stimulating and timely study that other, later magnates, let alone lesser lords, either recruited their retainers primarily for war abroad or found it equally difficult to use them to control local affairs.

A. J. POLLARD

POLITICAL SOCIETY IN LANCASTRIAN ENGLAND. THE GREATER GENTRY OF NOTTINGHAMSHIRE. Simon Payling. 1991. Clarendon Press, Oxford, £30.

This is an interesting addition to a distinguished series of studies of county societies in the later Middle Ages produced in recent years. It takes 'as its principal themes the role of the gentry in county government, their relations with the crown, the nobility, and each other, and their involvement in local disorder'. It chooses to do so through a detailed examination of about a dozen families who formed an elite of both wealth and political influence. For Nottinghamshire, in contrast to Devon or Warwickshire, was not dominated by one or two major magnate families, but like Derbyshire or Gloucestershire, was a county in which local knightly families (many of ancient lineage, but reinforced by newcomers rising through service, well-planned marriages and the law) generally held the upper hand. Within an already restricted circle, wealth and influence was further concentrated during the Lancastrian period as 'county administration and representation became more exclusively the preserve of the greater shire gentry'. It is a process of social stratification roughly comparable to that whereby, at national level, noble wealth was amassed by a contracting number of very great magnates during this same period.

The relationship between Nottinghamshire's rich gentry families and the small number of baronial families with local interests (at most three or four at any one moment, and usually fewer), is not the least interesting of the themes Dr Payling skilfully examines. His conclusions on the evergreen issue of 'bastard feudalism' lend weight to those who see family and locality as important, probably the predominant, factors in determining the political behaviour of most gentry families. The way in which the greatest of all medieval affinities — that of John of Gaunt and his royal successors — so strong in Nottinghamshire at the beginning of the fifteenth century, was allowed to crumble away in the contrasting reigns of Henry V and Henry VI, is a further demonstration of the position, recently convincingly argued by Dr Simon Walker, that even the most powerful magnates had to work unremittingly to maintain the allegiance of their retainers, with no guarantee of success. Henry VI's failure to reward adequately the traditional loyalty of his Nottinghamshire household servants is just another example of his usual political ineptitude.

At the same time, Dr Payling warns us not to exaggerate the coherence of a 'county community' even at the gentry level in this period. Monopolising parliamentary representation and occupying (given their restricted number) more than their fair share of county offices, the leading gentry of Nottinghamshire were often conspicuously absent from meetings of the county court or sessions of the peace where local 'sentiment' might be expected to crystallize. Local rivalries played their part in creating in the county some of that disorder for which Lancastrian England is notorious. On the other hand, an important practical step towards the creation of local sentiment had been taken since most offices within the county went in the Lancastrian period to men who were either normally resident or who held substantial property there. Based on a thorough investigation of both local and national records, in the absence of a

local Paston family and its correspondence, Dr Payling allows us to come as close as we probably can to the political interests of this particular county elite at the start of the Wars of the Roses.

MICHAEL JONES

THE PASTON FAMILY IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY: THE FIRST PHASE. Colin Richmond. 1990. Cambridge University Press, £35.

Considering the way in which the Paston letters have shaped our perceptions of the fifteenth century, the family has received surprisingly little sustained academic attention in recent years. H. S. Bennett's book, *The Pastons and their England* first appeared in 1922. Colin Richmond has now set himself to remedy the lack with a new multi-volume study of the family and their circle, of which this is the first instalment. It takes the story up to the death of the Pastons' patron Sir John Fastolf, whose last will (or, at least, John Paston's version of it) was later to embroil the family in a bitter dispute over his inheritance.

The book is therefore exploring relatively unfamiliar ground, with most of the famous Paston set-pieces still to come. It is also ground which is fairly thinly covered by the letters themselves, and Professor Richmond draws on a very much wider range of sources to demonstrate how the family dug itself into local society. The tactics adopted by Judge William Paston, the founder of the family fortunes, make compelling, if not very elevating, reading. Professor Richmond does not only chart the acquisition of land, he also brings out very clearly the importance of acquiring a manor — or what could pass for one. Lordship, rather than simply land, was what mattered, and Judge William was well placed to amass both. But these chapters are not only concerned with winners. Much of their fascination lies in the light they shed on the losers: the families whose misfortune was the Pastons' gain. The unsuccessful are usually also the invisible, and it is salutary to be reminded of their existence; especially since social (and political) mobility in the fifteenth century seems to have engendered a certain queasiness as well as enthusiasm among contemporaries.

To treat the Pastons simply as convenient pegs for an analysis of late-medieval social trends would, however, be a very considerable waste. Their letters allow us to see — or to think we see (the distinction is never forgotten) — fifteenth-century men and women as human beings, rather than manikins to be dressed in the latest historical fashions. Professor Richmond handles this side of things with a deft and sympathetic touch. His refusal to simplify the complexities of human nature means that the book does not quite have heroes, although it has something close to one in William Worcester, Sir John Fastolf's long-suffering dogsbody. It does, however, have villains. John Paston I is one. William de la Pole, Earl and later Duke of Suffolk, is clearly about to be another — although here he is the demon king waiting to come through the trap door in a later scene. Suffolk is one of the most important and under-explored figures of the period, and the brief references to him here leave the reader impatient for a full analysis of his East Anglian role in a subsequent volume.

The book is not always easy reading. The author's decision to allow the Paston letters to speak for themselves was surely the right one. The original language has an immediacy and subtlety lacking in even the best modern renderings. But the long, unmodernized quotations inevitably make the book less accessible to the non-specialist; as, perhaps, does the sheer volume of detail. Unravelling the complexities of Judge William's land transactions was never going to be easy, either for writer or reader. The same could be said of family relationships: so earnestly remembered by contemporaries, so difficult to make digestible and memorable today. Both these concerns — land and family — are central to our understanding of the fifteenth century and, in the end, one simply has to sit down and get to grips with them. If that takes more than one reading, it is no hardship given a book of this richness.

Much of that richness lies in the author's digressions and asides. This is not mere indulgence. Professor Richmond is here avowedly writing a particular sort of history: one where discursiveness and complexity offer a more accurate reflection of reality — and of the impossibility of grasping that reality in any concrete way — than the traditional modes of narrative and analysis. The tutelary spirit of this book is Laurence Sterne, and readers who (like the present reviewer) regard *Tristram Shandy* as one of the very great novels will take to this book with enthusiasm. Like Sterne, Richmond is always at the reader's elbow — and the result is an unusually honest book. Every historian is creating the past, but few admit it as frankly as here.

Claiming that a history book is 'as good as a novel' is usually a distinctly back-handed compliment as far as the historian is concerned. The present volume is not a novel, and to draw too many comparisons even with Sterne would be to belittle the way in which the author has had to tease out his story from extremely intractable sources. It is a difficult and demanding work of historical scholarship — but, as with the best novels, its characters and their dilemmas continue to haunt the imagination long after the book has been put down.

ROSEMARY HORROX

TRADES AND CRAFTS IN MEDIEVAL MANUSCRIPTS. Patricia Basing. 1990. The British Library, London, £14.95.

This is a book of the 'coffee table' variety, designed to give the general, non-specialist reader an insight into the subject by showing and discussing a number of manuscript miniatures. Patricia Basing has made good use of the material with which, as a curator in the Department of Manuscripts of the British Library, she is thoroughly familiar. All except three illustrations are taken from British Library manuscripts; there are fourteen colour plates and sixty-six black and white figures.

In order to discuss the illustrations, the author has had to provide quite a lot of general explanation about medieval life, in the shape of a kind of running commentary, very readable and leading logically from the discussion of one illustration to the next. The information supplied is very basic and there are,

inevitably, many generalisations, but the purpose of linking the explanations to the miniatures is adequately achieved, and she makes the material accessible to the modern lay public.

Basing points out realistic and authentic detail as well as depictions which are plainly unrealistic, such as an artist's table seemingly suspended in mid-air, or workmen nailing ironwork to a door with both feet off the ground. It is useful and important to have her comments on how far the illustrations are true to life, and what should be attributed to artist's licence, in some cases in order to please a patron — for example, farm workers in elegant attire quite unsuitable to their function. Another laudable aspect of the book is that the illustrations, wherever feasible, are used to make as many points as possible; in the background of a plate showing plowing are pigs rooting in woodland, to which reference is made in another section. One might sometimes wish the explanations were a little fuller, as for the brick-making process in figure 41, but generally they are sufficient for their purpose.

One thing that worried this reviewer was that there is no differentiation in the text between miniatures of widely varying dates; those used to show plowing, for instance, range in date from the second quarter of the eleventh century to the late sixteenth, and some explicit comment on the development of the equipment over the space of over five centuries might have helped to show the reader that the middle ages were an era of evolution rather than a closed and stationary period of history.

There is, rightly, no art-historical or iconographical analysis or comment, which would have been out of place in this type of book. The miniatures are used solely for the purpose of showing pictorially what the text tells the reader about activities in medieval everyday life. Sometimes the need for brevity and the attempt to cover such a large subject in such a short space conveys a feeling of unease, and one wonders occasionally whether the text was written to accommodate a number of chosen illustrations or the other way around.

The division in chapters dealing with the various aspects of medieval life as shown in the illustrations is suitable for the purpose. The end (which discusses the professional alchemist) seems rather abrupt, however — one would have liked to see a brief general conclusion.

The bibliography gives twenty-nine titles; some are standard works while others will provide stimulating further reading for the layman. A small flaw is that for several works the publication date given is not that of the latest edition, some publication dates are slightly inaccurate, and in one case (Salzman, *English Industry* . . .) the cited title seems to be slightly different from that found in standard catalogues.

The physical presentation of the book is attractive, and the quality of the reproductions is good. The page lay-out is extremely generous, with wide left-hand margins which, if somewhat wasteful, are fashionable and easy on the eye. Some space might have been saved by omitting mention in the text of date and place of writing of the manuscript under discussion, since title, provenance, date and reference number are fully and faithfully provided in the legends which accompany the figures and plates. However, references in the text to the illustrations would have been more helpful if they had been accompanied by a page number in addition to the illustration number.

This is not a book for the specialist and must not be judged as such. The acid test for books of this kind is whether the interested general reader has, after reading them, gained an insight into particular aspects of everyday life in the middle ages or — even better — is stimulated to further reading and exploration of the subject. This reviewer feels that Basing's book answers that purpose very well and is thus a welcome addition to our stock of general books of this kind.

DIANA TYSON

THE MEDIEVAL TRAVELLER. Norbert Ohler. Translated by Caroline Hillier. 1989. The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, £19.50.

A wealth of detail about the conditions of travel in the period *circa* 500-1500 makes this a fascinating book for the general reader. Essentially it is concerned with the practicalities of medieval travel and enables us to share the journeys of some of the best-known travellers of the time: the church-reformer Boniface to Friesland; Charlemagne on a tour of his vast empire; Ulrich, Bishop of Augsburg around his diocese; Norbert of Xanten and Bernard of Clairvaux, preachers in the footsteps of the apostles; William of Rubruck to the court of the Great Khan at Karakorum; Marco Polo to China and Ibn Battuta on pilgrimage to Mecca.

Norbert Ohler is lecturer in history at the University of Freiburg and many of his examples may be unfamiliar to the English reader since they centre primarily on the Frankish Kingdom. The book is divided into two halves dealing with the background and conditions of travel followed by descriptions of travel from contemporary accounts under headings such as Royal Progresses, Voyages of the Norsemen, Clerics on the Road, Journeys across Asia, Educational Journeys and Flagellant Movements. There is considerable overlap of material in the two parts. His sources are wide-ranging from Homer, Procopius, Bede, the Icelandic Sagas and the Lives of Bishops to the Letters of Abelard and Heloise, the reflections of Petrarch and Boccaccio's *Decameron*. One of the most interesting sources is *The Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago* written c.1140-50 and described by Ohler as 'a forerunner to Baedeker'. This is a practical guide for the intending traveller and demonstrates how popular pilgrimages to the north-west of Spain were by the mid-twelfth century. The *Guide* tells the pilgrim how much his journey will cost, outlines the route he will have to traverse, the location of hospices, the prejudices of the local people he will encounter and finally describes the cathedral and shrine of St James the Apostle.

The overriding theme of the book is the difficulty and danger of medieval travel and the hazards encountered either on the road or at sea which have given rise to much of the source material. However these dangers did not prevent millions of people each year setting off on journeys whether they be pilgrims or messengers, churchmen or students, preachers or vagabonds, merchants, kings or bishops. These were travellers of necessity not of choice. They were mainly poor and lived off the hospitality of the inhabitants through whose lands they passed. We learn about the essential equipment of a pilgrim — a cloak, broad-brimmed hat, staff, knife, leather beaker and stones to strike a spark, the

development of ship design, the horrors of sea-travel, the setting up of a courier system by the Florentine State in the mid-fourteenth century, and the standards of comfort expected at different types of English inn in *circa* 1400. If a traveller wanted an evening meal at an inn, he needed to supply his own cooking utensils and ingredients. Bed-sharing was common and respectable, proven by the delightful carved-capital at Autun Cathedral which depicts the Three Kings lying together under a heavily-draped and richly-ornamented cloak when an angel appears to them in a dream to guide them to the birth-place of Christ. A late fifteenth-century edict passed in Spain contains a quantity of domestic detail rarely found in medieval documents — the kitchen, for instance, was to be equipped with saucepans, frying-pans and spits, light, a table with cloths, wooden or stone seats, soup-bowls, plates, salt-pots, cups, jugs, tubs, kettle and wooden buckets.

There are some serious omissions to this translated edition. There is no index, although Ohler refers to an index in his foreword taken from the original German edition of 1986, nor is there a bibliography which, in the absence of footnotes makes it impossible to follow up any of the sources. The delightful illustrations taken from manuscript illuminations, maps, paintings, stained-glass and stone-carving, adding greatly to the enjoyment of the book, are erratically labelled and there are no picture credits.

DIANA DUNN

RICHARD OF ENGLAND. D. M. Kleyn. 1991. The Kensal Press, Oxford, £16.95.

Whether or not the pretender known as Perkin Warbeck was really the younger son of King Edward IV and therefore rightfully King Richard IV, as he proclaimed himself, is a nice historical mystery unlikely ever to be solved to everyone's satisfaction.

On the one hand, his own account of his childhood escape from the Tower to Tournai remains uncorroborated and unconvincing. In a surviving letter to Isabella of Castile, which seeks to establish his royal credentials and win the all-important support of Spain, he offers only a disappointingly vague and unlikely tale. After his brother had been 'miserably put to death and I myself, then nearly nine years old, was also delivered to a certain lord to be killed, it pleased the Divine Clemency that that lord, having compassion on my innocence, preserved me alive and in safety; first, however, causing me to swear on the holy sacrament that to no one should I disclose my name, origin or family until a certain number of years had passed. He sent me therefore abroad, with two persons, who should watch over and take charge of me.'

The original of this letter is in Latin. It was translated and published in 1838 by Sir Frederic Madden. The version of the above passage printed in *Richard of England* differs only in a single word: 'nearly nine' has become 'about nine'. This is a point of some significance; so it would have been useful to have the Latin text. Edward IV's younger son is thought to have been born on 17 August 1473. He

would therefore have been nearly ten, not nearly nine, at the very earliest date to which this passage could refer (July 1483), and it has been considered unlikely that the real prince would have forgotten the age at which he was nearly murdered.

On the other hand, this supposed son of a Flemish boatman seems to have spoken good English without a foreign accent, to have borne a noticeable facial resemblance to Edward IV and to have been sufficiently plausible in his princely role to gain formal recognition as 'Richard of England' from the Emperor Maximilian and the kings of France, Scotland and Denmark. Certainly his challenge had to be taken seriously by Henry VII. Although his three attempted invasions all ended in abject humiliation, the Tudor hold on the crown of England was never secure until he had been captured and put to death.

Diana Kley, a long-standing member of the Society, is convinced that 'Prince Perkin' was who he said he was, but concedes that her view can be no more than speculative. She is to be congratulated on her many years of research, which have at last achieved publication. Her book contains no new material, but it brings together in a well-constructed and readable narrative the whole of this interesting episode in early Tudor history.

Particularly valuable are the appendices, containing English versions of original documents not readily available to the general reader. As well as the letter to Queen Isabella, there are the Tournai archive entries about the Werbecque family; the pretender's proclamations made at Malines in 1495 and in Scotland the following year; a lyrical love letter from him to his wife, Lady Katherine Gordon (whose neck outshone pearls); a letter to his friend, Sir Bernard de la Forse; and the famous confession extracted while in Henry's hands, in which for some unfathomable reason he was made to swear that his name was really Osbeck.

Richard III does not play an honourable part in the Prince Perkin story: it is his assassins from whom the boy escapes. He is 'our unnatural uncle' whom 'desire of rule did blind'. Yet in his other actions he is praised for behaving like a true Plantagenet, in marked contrast to 'our mortal enemy', the meanly born Henry. For Richard, unlike Henry, 'was noble and loved the honour of the realm and the contentment and comfort of his nobles and people'.

One small error is worth mentioning and correcting because it is so commonly made. The illegitimate children of John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford, through whom Henry Tudor could claim his drop of Plantagenet blood, were not named Beaufort because they were born there. Beaufort (which lay between Troyes and Chalons and has since been renamed Montmorency) was a seigniorship inherited by the duke through his first wife, Blanche of Lancaster. It had fallen into French hands before the Beauforts were born, and Katherine did not cross the Channel and ride into enemy territory to give birth. Lord of Beaufort had become one of John of Gaunt's empty titles, like King of Castile. It was used as a surname for his bastards, not to signify place of birth, but, presumably, in order to avoid any question of prejudicing the rights of his legitimate heirs through the use of the name of an English honor.

JEREMY POTTER

THE PALACES OF MEDIEVAL ENGLAND. Thomas Beaumont James. 1990. Seaby, London, £25.

This is a general survey of buildings constructed over the 500 years from Edward the Confessor's time, by monarchs and their relations, by prelates and by the nobility, that might reasonably be called 'palaces'. There is no claim that it is anything more than such a survey, and indeed all references are to other secondary works. These references are found abbreviated, in parentheses, within the text, which is perhaps quite acceptable since the author does not directly use primary source material.

Having said this, there are a number of aspects of the book which do not satisfy. To begin with it is based simply on a chronological framework within which the author ranges between detailed architectural description and analysis to mere passing comment. While this is, alas, the pattern of many works on buildings, I much prefer a combination of analysis and gazetteer. Given the small number of palaces, compared to castles, churches, etc., this should be an easy task; it has the benefits of allowing the reader to follow the development of one building without having to dart about in the book, and liberates the author from any sense of obligation to dump passages of detailed descriptions in the overall survey.

What was a palace? James addresses this question straight away, and stipulates that properly, palaces were undefended (p.130). Naturally enough though, the book discusses places which were palatial even if they really are castles, especially the Tower, Windsor, Kenilworth and Portchester. If we recognise these as, at least pseudo-palaces, why not many others that remain unmentioned? Indeed, conspicuous by their total absence, are the 'palatial' castles of the North of the later middle ages, of which the dominant new type was the quadrangular construction best typified at Bolton, and in the south, Bodiam, which is mentioned. In this, James, who teaches at Winchester College, perhaps betrays a rather southern perspective of his subject!

To be fair, the great majority of royal palaces which rightly occupy a large part of the book, were located in the south-east particularly towards the end of the period. During this period there was also a tendency to peregrinate rather less than in earlier times, and consequently by Yorkist times, kings ruled from the Thames Valley more than before. James' view that this may have contributed to the ease with which Henry Tudor disposed of Richard III must be debatable, however, especially in the light of Richard's strategic control in the weeks before Bosworth. In accounting for the steady reduction in royal peregrinations, James refers to the intensification and deterioration of the struggle with France after 1300, yet curiously he also recognises that King John, who lost Normandy in 1204, was peripatetic in the extreme.

Other theories, more widely held, but equally contestable, are the effects on the development of English secular architecture brought about by contact with Islam via the Crusades, and the old chestnut that never seems to die that people stopped building castles because of the advent of cannon. Even worse are some simple inaccuracies of fact: Towton was not in 1469, and 1489 was not towards the end of the Yorkist period. Unhappily too there are some clumsy lapses of style and spelling errors, caused, one guesses, by inadequate proof reading (or to be

fair to James, perhaps a failure of the publishers to implement corrections). What, one wonders, does 'reverted' mean? (p.55).

It is a great pity that this survey has these imperfections, for a work on medieval palaces as distinct from castles is to be welcomed. It is plain that the author knows his stuff, but the inconsistencies in buildings described and omitted, dubious theories, carelessness in reciting commonly known facts, sloppy phraseology and spelling, all tarnish the end product and leave you with the impression that the work was somewhat rushed.

JAMES O. PETRE

A GUIDE TO WESTERN HISTORICAL SCRIPTS FROM ANTIQUITY TO 1600. Michelle P. Brown. 1990. The British Library, London, £17.95.

This comprehensive survey of historical scripts, covering the period c.500 to 1600, contains 52 examples of different styles, ranging from Roman Square Capitals to Secretary Hand, and includes, along the way, sections on Roman, National, Insular, Carolingian, Anglo Saxon, Protogothic, Gothic, Italian and Humanistic scripts, each prefaced with a brief explanatory passage. The author provides an introduction of just seven pages, discussing her approach to such questions as format, nomenclature, dating conventions, decoration, codicology and so forth, albeit in a rather condensed fashion, and concluding with a paragraph or two on abbreviations, a basic list of which is appended at the back of the book. There is a glossary of 32 terms (this could profitably have been extended to cover at least a couple more pages) and a valuable bibliography, which both students and teachers of palaeography will find extremely useful. Each of the plates (plus a very fine frontispiece from the collected works of Christine de Pisan, not considered in the text) fills a complete page, and the standard of reproduction is high. Facing each photograph is a note about the provenance of the item and its present whereabouts, a description of the script and a transcription (sometimes of only a few lines) with abbreviations fully extended and marginal notes drawing the reader's attention to any particularly significant features, such as punctuation, decoration or stylistic idiosyncrasies.

The author has assembled a veritable treasure-trove of material, largely from the British Library, but also including fascinating specimens from archives throughout Europe. It is, nonetheless, not entirely clear on whose behalf she has done so, for although this book is being advertised as an 'authoritative introduction' to the evolution of scripts, and a 'guide to reading historical documents' (at least according to the publisher's note on the cover), and is intended by Dr Brown herself for 'a wide variety of readers', it is really only suitable for a narrower academic market, or at least for advanced students, long familiar with medieval manuscripts. Certainly, the author makes few concessions to those not already conversant with a formidable battery of technical terms, and she assumes a high level of expertise on the part of her readership. It is, of course, impossible to produce a reference work of this kind without recourse to such terminology, but the use of a specialised vocabulary which is only occasionally

explained, along with a rather daunting format, may prove less than encouraging to the curious layman. The fledgling palaeographer, seeking some readily accessible background information against which to set his or her own work on original records and acquire further help at an appropriate level, would be advised to look elsewhere, since Dr Brown takes a considerable amount of knowledge for granted. At least, a sampling of my own students produced just such a muted response, partly because the examples seem rather detached from their historical context (the dating is, for instance, unnecessarily vague in certain cases where internal evidence could have been used to achieve greater precision), but also because there are few specimens of the kind of material customarily assayed by beginners. A student's first encounter with Bastard Secretary Hand rarely involves a French edition of Boethius, however aesthetically pleasing this might be.

Yet, if Dr Brown has rather overestimated the powers of some of her putative readers, her work unquestionably possesses all the scholarship and meticulous attention to detail one requires of a more specialist contribution to the subject. All students, however new they may be, should certainly be encouraged to emulate these qualities.

CAROLE RAWCLIFFE

CLAUS SLUTER. ARTIST AT THE COURT OF BURGUNDY. Kathleen Morand. Photographs by David Finn. 1991. Harvey Miller Publishers, London, £65.

If any book ever looked 'definitive' it is this impressive, attractive and spaciouly-designed study of Sluter and his art. Acknowledging her debt to the extensive literature already available the author states her purpose of drawing such literature together — especially the less accessible publications and those in languages other than English — and capturing Sluter's surviving work in the perfection of modern photography. All aspects of the artist's work are discussed and no information that one could look for has been omitted.

Sluter's life at Brussels and Dijon is conscientiously reconstructed on the very meagre evidence and set against the background of the Black Death and the spiritual climate of the late fourteenth century. Related sculptural work of the period in the Low Countries and its artists, such as the early members of the Keldermans family, are traced, and Sluter's — isolated — position in the European context considered, as far as this is possible when so few objects survived the iconoclasm of the sixteenth century and the French Revolution.

Sluter arrived in Dijon in 1385 to join other artists working on the grandiose foundation of the first Valois Duke of Burgundy: the Carthusian monastery at Champmol, which was to include the Duke's tomb and the great calvary now known by its remains as the 'Moses Fountain'. In 1389 he became the Duke's chief sculptor in Burgundy. Three projects within the monastery dominated his work and the present book discusses them in detail showing the development of his art. The first project was the portal of the church itself, with statues of the Virgin and the Duke and Duchess kneeling in prayer on either side, supported by

saints John the Baptist and Katherine. The figures, almost free-standing, are realistic and appear to be actually communicating with each other in a way unusual in architectural sculpture of the period.

Sluter's second project was a large cross or calvary erected as a focus for meditation in the centre of the cloisters, in the basin of the fountain that supplied the monks with water. The work coincided with the Nicopolis crusade and its disastrous outcome, but the resources of the Duke allowed of its completion according to plan. The superstructure, Christ on the cross, the Virgin, St John and Mary Magdalene are all lost, only the bust and legs of Christ have survived. The author evokes the many-coloured and gilded splendour of the great cross shortly after its creation when it was seen in all its glory by numberless pilgrims. Its iconography is discussed and as part of her attempt to explain the spiritual depth of the work Dr Morand relates it to contemporary dramatic art. She sensibly rejects the old theory that Sluter was an old man when he designed the Moses Fountain and enables us to see it as the work of an artist at the height of his physical and creative powers.

In the third phase of Sluter's development, the actual tomb of Duke Philip the Bold, 'we find the final expression of Sluter's genius in the portrayal of the human figure', not only in the figure of the Duke himself — destroyed during the Revolution and reconstructed from an engraving — but especially in the 'Funeral Cortège' of mourners placed in the arcaded gallery around the tomb chest. Dr Morand confidently traces the aesthetic and political genesis of the work that took three sculptors almost three decades to complete. Sluter took over from another artist, managed to blend their different styles to perfection, but did not live to finish the work, dying in 1406, two years after the Duke himself. Two years before his death Sluter had entered an Augustinian convent and we can accept the author's assertion that the artist's genius accurately relays to us his own piety and spirituality towards the end of his life. The tomb was completed by his nephew, Claux de Werve, who headed the ducal workshop until 1439; his work and style are also assessed as far as possible.

The first half of the book is rounded off by a chapter headed 'Sluter's Place in the History of Art' discussing his realism and the northern character of his art and its relation to paintings of the period. It is followed by a personal note by the photographer explaining the spell that Sluter's work and particularly the Moses Fountain cast on him years ago. His 146 black and white, full-page photographs and eight colour plates prove his involvement and fully justify the making of this new monograph.

The final part of the book consists of a catalogue of the documented extant and lost works of Sluter, with literature on each; a chronology of the artist's life and career; a postscript on the plans to restore the Moses Fountain; a bibliography and an index.

ANNE F. SUTTON AND LIVIA VISSER-FUCHS

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Daniel Williams, The hastily drawn up will of William Catesby Esquire, 25 August 1485, *Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society Transactions*, vol. 51 (1975-6), p.48.

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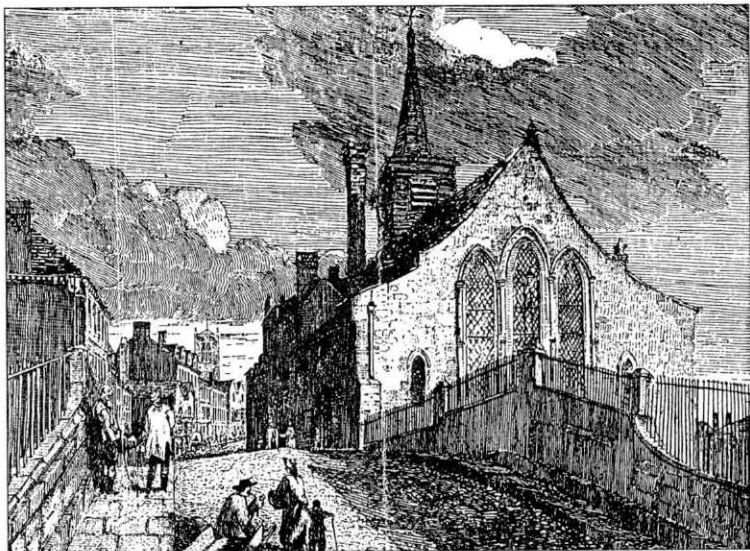
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