

Book Reviews

MEDIEVAL EUROPEAN JEWELLERY. With a Catalogue of the Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Ronald W. Lightbown. 1992. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, £80
ISBN 0-948107-87-1

As the author writes in his Foreword, this substantial volume falls into three parts. The first deals generally with the historical information concerning medieval jewellery. The second deals analytically with different categories of object – brooches, pendants etc. The third part is described as a ‘summary catalogue’ of the medieval jewellery in the collection of the V and A. The foreword also describes the boundaries within which the study is to develop. It is European in scope and extends chronologically from the time of Charlemagne to c.1520 (in practice, as becomes clear, the major evidence belongs to the thirteenth-fifteenth centuries); and, in view of the extent to be covered, finger-rings are to be omitted almost entirely. That small exclusion clause notwithstanding, the result is a very remarkable volume; for the book offers not merely a catalogue of facts and a survey of stylistic change but also an account of almost innumerable other things linked to the production of jewellery, the origins and collecting of gems, the fluctuations of fashion, the marketing of goldsmiths’ work, sumptuary laws, children’s jewellery – and much else besides. It is quite safe to say that it will remain an important work of reference for many years to come. For this reason it is also important that it is very well produced. The illustrations (all with measurements) are, almost without exception, of extremely high quality; and the general layout and design are of an extremely high order. It is a book which is not only instructive but also a pleasure to have on one’s shelves.

It is quite impossible in a short review to do justice to the many issues addressed. The subject itself – medieval jewellery – is intractable because so little survives. Hence any scholar is bound to rely very heavily on written sources and records. Here the author undersells himself since it would have been very acceptable at the start to have some account of these problems. One of the features of this book is the remarkable range of written sources upon which the author draws. Such research is time consuming and has to be painstaking. Inventories, upon which any such study will rely heavily, may have hundreds if not thousands of entries (the 1468 inventory of Charles the Bold – much used here – has nearly 2000 items). All this information has to be evaluated and relevant examples selected. By far the best published and publicised of these sources refer to England and France/Burgundy; and historians of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries will be well familiar with the work of Dehaisnes, Douët-D’Arcq, Labarte, Laborde and their contemporaries. Lightbown has however brought into play extensive sources from Spain and Portugal, the Empire, Sicily and Hungary; and at the expense of making a large book even longer, a *bilan* or *conclusion* on the subject of the sources would have been welcome.

For this is a long and physically large book; and it might not suit everyone’s requirements. There are some who might want the catalogue without the

introductory essays; others might want Lightbown on 'jewellery' without the catalogue. I assume (it is not stated) that for the author the conjunction of the two is 'of the essence'. A great national collection is to be seen and interpreted in the European context to which it belongs. Most people will gratefully accept both parts, together with the excellent index which makes it possible to look up, as required, all manner of different things – for instance, techniques (*rougecler. ronde bosse*, etc) and items and motifs (toothpicks, griffins and bears: though there are, alas, no entries for wheelbarrows, popinjays and elephants). The book, *en passant*, brings into the discussion subjects such as Pilgrims Badges and Paternoster Beads – things which are often sidelined into the pages of antiquarian journals; and the author makes extensive use of ancillary sources of visual information in sculpture and painting further to illustrate his varied themes. Some of these visual sources, such as the Naumburg *primi fundatores*, will be well known from other contexts. Others, such as the German/Austrian fifteenth-century portraits, will be much less familiar.

It may seem ungenerous, faced by the magnificence of the material and of the achievement, to observe that Homer (or at least Clio) occasionally nods. 'The tomb of Richard III (died 1484)' (p.21) is going to cause problems. Manfred cannot have been King of Sicily in 1248 (p.63). Eleanor of Castille can hardly have been distributing brooches to religious shrines in 1299-1300 (p.75). The Black Prince died in 1376 (rather than in 1378, p.199). The inscription visible in plate 33 is rather closer to the Vulgate than is suggested in the text (p.153). The *Complete Peerage* (vol. 10, p.227) says that it was Maud de Vere rather than her daughter-in-law Philippe who was accused of distributing Ricardian badges in 1404. There is also, for this reader, a minor irritation in the variable transliteration of foreign names – Charles II (of Naples) but 'King Carlo III of Durazzo' (pp.256-7); 'Marie de Hongrie' and 'Mary of Hungary' on the same page (207); likewise 'Louis of Orléans' and 'Louis d'Orléans' (p.334). These inconsistencies sit alongside regular usages such as 'Clémence de Hongrie' but 'Mary of Burgundy'. In the matter of names and in an extended work with an international dimension, it is very difficult to take decisions of principle at the start and to stick to them.

This is, nevertheless, a remarkable book, packed with both interest and wit – for the dryness of the sources only thinly conceals the humanity of the actors, as witness the sad story of the 'fair diamond' of Béthune (p.22); and many of the chapters – on, for instance, crowns or collars – are of absorbing interest. It is, moreover, a work which could only have been written from the 'inside'. The 'art' is indeed placed in a 'context'; but it could not be thus treated with anything less than a formidable knowledge of the material objects. It is fashionable today to decry expertise of this calibre; and to claim that what museums really need is 'interpreters' and 'presenters'. Books such as this will tend to undermine the shallowness of that judgement. Professional 'interpreters' are indeed necessary; that is, after all, part of the profession of teaching. But without real 'inside' knowledge and experience of the material, such 'interpreters' must seem like those people in St Paul who, though they speak with the tongues of men and of angels, have not Charity; that is, they are become like sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

ANDREW MARTINDALE

Between the great scholastic achievements of the age of Aquinas and the ferment of ideas and ideologies released at the time of the Reformation, the political thought of the late Middle Ages often receives short shrift. Events rather than ideas overshadow most historical accounts since political turmoil and revolution affected most major monarchies of the West at some point during this period, one often portrayed as constituting a 'crisis of monarchy' as dynasties rose and fell throughout the length and breadth of the continent. But as Walter Ullmann and others showed long ago, to take but one key concept – the medieval idea of sovereignty – the period from the late thirteenth century onwards saw many developments that were crucial in defining the limits of both the theoretical and practical powers of kings. A Richard II might believe that the 'law was in his own breast', but his fate was a warning that absolutist ideas seldom command universal assent in any age and require careful enunciation if they are not to provoke overwhelming opposition. There was, after all, a long medieval tradition of condemning 'tyranny' from John of Salisbury in the twelfth century onwards, a tradition that found renewed voice in the fifteenth century in men like Thomas Basin, Bishop of Lisieux, with his tirades against Louis XI.

In this brief but clear and authoritative survey, Professor Burns outlines how ideas on monarchy, most in fact tending to buttress rather than undermine its position at the pinnacle of political society, triumphed at the expense of other ideologies (e.g. republicanism) or those like Basin critical of royal high-handedness. At the same time, differences between the forms of 'absolutist' thought developed in the fifteenth century – on behalf of the Papacy, in Spain and the Empire as well as in France – and the absolutism of a later age also emerge. As late as the end of the sixteenth century, Burns argues, these late medieval ideas related to a form of absolute kingship that 'was not only compatible with but in fact inseparable from a framework of fundamental laws' (p.157). These in effect provided some protection to subjects against the arbitrariness of their rulers and constituted a precious legacy from the mixing of Christian and Classical (especially Aristotelian) ideas that had found their greatest exponent in Aquinas.

Professor Burns' account begins with a general discussion of the nature of lordship (*dominium*), particularly as witnessed through debates on the attributes of kingship in western Europe at the end of the Middle Ages. If what he has to say about England and France (naturally centring on writers like Sir John Fortescue or Jean de Terrevermeille) appears to cover ground already well-tramped, many will be extremely grateful to him for his clear exposition of the thinking of men with comparable ideas writing in other parts of Europe like Rodrigo Sanchez de Arévalo (1404-70), Antonio de'Rosselli (1380-1466) and the papal apologist Piero da Monte, who visited the English court in 1437 (at the moment Henry VI had reached his majority) to denounce the *concilium populare* at Basle 'where clamour prevails, not rational discourse' (p.113).

The next few years in England were, of course, to see mounting clamour: the relationship between a ruler and the community he governed had always depended on much more than intellectual constructs or definitions, however subtle, of their respective rights and obligations. But in the light of Christine Carpenter's recent

call to examine again the connections between 'constitutional ideas' and the actions of those who dominated political life in fifteenth-century England, Professor Burns has provided an admirably solid starting point for further reflections on this equation for which we may all be grateful, and not least for drawing our usually too-insular attention to the continental *compères* of Fortescue.

* May your reviewer wearing another (editorial) hat be allowed to point out that readers searching for the article by J.L. Gillespie on 'Sir John Fortescue's Concept of the Royal Will', cited on p.61 n. 50 (cf. p.167), should consult *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 23 (1979), 47-65, not a phantom Birmingham equivalent?

MICHAEL JONES

WOMEN AND LITERATURE IN BRITAIN 1150-1500. Edited Carol M. Meale. 1993. Cambridge University Press, £30.

ISBN 0-521-40018-X

Intense recent interest in the subject of medieval women's reading makes this volume of collected essays a welcome one, though the publishers' guidelines have unfortunately limited its length. This slender book (223 pages) contains nine essays. Oddly, no information is provided about the contributors save for their names. The most stimulating contributions are those which utilize either the new bibliography, or social history, or biography, or iconography in the service of literature. Indeed, as editor Carol Meale observes, it now seems impossible to understand women's engagement with literature without recovering the details of women's lives – and it is non-literary disciplines which seem, of late, to provide the most fruitful approaches to literature.

Meale's essay, for instance, on laywomen and their books in late medieval England, takes as its starting point the seal of Margaret, Lady Hungerford and Botreaux (+1478). The seal shows its owner sitting back on her heels, an open book spread on her thighs. Does the figure's posture, reminiscent of Continental representations of the Virgin of Humility, associate Lady Hungerford with the virgin, thus stressing her piety, or is it meant to mitigate 'the public assertiveness of Margaret's political role?' The ambiguous representation of this reading woman may stand for some larger unanswered questions with regard to women and books. In the following detailed and suggestive survey of female bookowners, Meale raises two of these issues. First, what is the relation of literacy to writing, and second, how should literacy be defined? Current thinking seems to suggest that the ability to read was more widespread among women than has previously been thought, while the ability to write might be less common than literacy itself. Here the authorship of what appear to be women's ownership signatures in surviving books sometimes constitutes a problem. Meale justly cautions against the automatic assumption that such inscriptions were written by the woman herself, and leaves open the possibility that they were sometimes written for, rather than by, the female owner. (In the case she cites, however, a copy of Lydgate's *Troy Book* which carries both a neat and fluent 'my lady elysabethe peche' and an awkward 'Elysabethe peche', it may be that the latter represents the signature of

Lady Elizabeth Peche's sister-in-law, unmarried until 1495.)

The need for a more complex understanding of what literacy meant in the middle ages is cited several times throughout the volume. Meale points out that Margery Kempe was holding an open service book when she was injured by falling masonry and says 'it is ... quite possible that women who were unable to read or write possessed books'. The strength of Bella Millett's essay on female recluses lies in just such a nuanced consideration of the many possible grades between *litteratus* and *illiteratus*. She suggests that lay anchoresses in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries occupied a mid-point between these two extremes, but that this intermediate position itself included various possible levels of activity.

Julia Boffey explores related questions in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In her essay a summary of known female authors leads into the wider question of what constitutes authorship (in the case of the illiterate Margery: recall, organisation, comment). She then offers an overview of anonymous works composed in a female voice or addressed to a female audience, and finally, a survey of scribal testimony attributing particular works to women.

This essay might be compared to Alexandra Barratt's recent compilation *Women's Writing in Middle English* (London, 1992): both are successful attempts to recover a corpus of lost work by women. The same impetus lies behind Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan's survey of medieval Welsh women's writing, whose centrepiece is the life and work of Gwerful Mechain (?1462-1500). Her thirty-eight surviving poems include both scatological and erotic work: a recurring theme is the desire for physical love. Lloyd-Morgan suggests that one reason her work has remained unedited is its presentation of 'a woman cheerfully expressing lust'. Another poem speaks of her anger at being beaten by her husband, and in still another she reproves an aged father for taking a young wife. Such expressions of female sensibility are rare indeed.

Recovery of women's writing is necessarily a limited topic since discoveries are infrequent, but the question of women's reading is a larger one. Felicity Riddy attempts to identify various literate female audiences. She begins with an examination of Chaucer's mostly male subculture and his mostly satirical depiction of a female subculture in the tales of the Prioress and Second Nun. She suggests that the authentic voice of this female subculture may be heard in the work of Julian of Norwich, concluding that 'even that greatest of ventriloquists, Chaucer, cannot speak as Julian does with [the female subculture's] ambivalent, paradoxical and compelling voices'. Between these elegantly-conceived poles lies a bibliographical survey of manuscript ownership, presented to illustrate a female textual community and to support the thesis that much women's reading was communal.

Examination of how texts present women – the 'images of women in literature' method – constitutes a traditional and much-employed approach to women and literature. Such an examination, however, often reflects only a fairly conventional spectrum of male ideas about women, and hence may be somewhat less useful than more heterodox deployments of the literary text. Male authorial subjectivity seems particularly strong in the romances which Flora Alexander discusses. Considering women as lovers, she notes that repeatedly women represent passion, men reason, and though some female sexual pleasure is depicted and some female action allowed, the examples given centre on the violence of

women against other women. The essay's conclusion, that 'love is depicted as something in which women and men participated on equal terms' does not seem entirely warranted by the evidence Alexander cites, which appears to show women acting in the interests of men, and depicted in ways which male authors would find understandable or acceptable.

Jennifer Fellows' parallel essay on mothers in the romances uses the same approach, surveying and summarising a number of narratives. This method can be a pedestrian one, redeemed when larger conclusions illuminate the thorough preceding work. Fellows' conclusion is full of stimulating ideas, but is allowed only a paragraph. The observation that 'where darker ... feelings about motherhood ... surface, it is usually in relation to female children' deserves fuller treatment, though Fellows suggests two possible explanations: mothers' ambivalence toward culturally undervalued daughters and 'male anxiety about a trans-generational conspiracy of women'.

Judith Weiss's essay on female power and weakness in Anglo-Norman romance is grounded in a comparison of pre- and post-Conquest social realities, drawing heavily on Christine Fell's *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*. Weiss notes, for instance, that several romance heroines are heiresses, and thus reflect class tensions regarding marital choice. She observes that men in romance 'generally appear less learned than the women', though the heroine's 'important educative role' is usually employed in the service of men: 'to encourage the hero to fulfill his potential'. The essay concludes by shifting back into history, basing its observations about romance texts in brief studies of three contemporary women who might have been patrons of these romances. The essay's turn of phrase is frequently positively runic: of widows Weiss observes: 'Independent action is thus vicious action', and with regard to female intelligence, 'Wisdom ... is granted to the one best fitted to use it'.

Perhaps the volume's most complex treatment of literature and history is Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's essay on Anglo-Norman hagiography. Its graceful discussion of three texts written by women – the Barking *Vie d'Edouard le confesseur*; Marie (of Chatteris's?) *Vie seinte Audrée*; and Clemence of Barking's life of St Catherine – is prefaced by a sophisticated analysis of the mixed audience for saints' lives (male religious houses, female lay-persons, secular households, as well as nunneries) which sees the differences between lay and secular culture as less important than 'the mutually intelligible interests of church and lay upper-class landholders'. The conclusion's corollary is a challenging one: that for women 'the absence of full institutional ecclesiastical and monastic life made for a further reduction in distinctions between lay and religious lives'.

This weak differentiation between female lay and religious lives is certainly a reality. Wogan-Browne cites as causes the absence for women of certain experiences normative to male monasticism: 'access to large libraries, traditions of institutional ... culture', and a history of collective legal and social dealings. This is a suggestive thesis, yet one might nevertheless notice the sense of collective identity evidenced by book ownership inscriptions from some female houses (admittedly later than Wogan-Browne's period). A fifteenth-century inscription in a Sarum *horae* from Dartford, for instance, asks prayers for the soul of Alice Braunthwyte, a nun of a previous generation, 'who gave us this book' (*qui dedit nobis istum librum*). The informal and communal 'us' chosen in preference to a

more formal third-person reference ('gave to the convent of Dartford') seems to draw on a common understanding of the house's identity.

Not the least of this essay's accomplishments is its provision of a vocabulary for considering the topics of female reading, writing, and institutional culture. The volume's editor mentions Wogan-Browne's use of the phrase 'potential of slippage' to describe the variance between hagiographic texts and what readers made of them. (The author is perhaps deliberately invoking the notion of meaningful textual instability or *mouvance*, used recently in studying Old French poems.) Similarly useful is her description of women's access to writing as heuristic, that is, opportunistic, problem-solving, and self-educating as opposed to the 'normative traditions and institutions of literary production'.

MARY ERLER

ARMOURERS. Matthias Pfaffenbichler. 1992.

ISBN 0-71412-054-4

GOLDSMITHS. John Cherry. 1992.

ISBN 0-7141-2055-3

SCRIBES AND ILLUMINATORS. Christopher de Hamel. 1992. ISBN 0-7141-2049-9

ENGLISH TILERS. Elizabeth Eames. 1992.

ISBN 0-7141-2053-9

All in the Medieval Craftsmen series, British Museum Press, London, £6.95 each.

Very few books on medieval art or history sell more than 25,000 copies; the catalogue of the Royal Academy's *Age of Chivalry* exhibition was a startling triumph in this respect. It must be thanks to this that the British Museum's publications office subsequently launched the Medieval Craftsmen series. This latest foursome in the series deserves to be a commercial success, too; the price of £6.95 is very reasonable for a well-bound paperback of 72 pages with 30 to 40 colour illustrations and as many more in black-and-white. Each book has a list of books and articles for 'Further Reading' and – what is all too often omitted from such works – an index.

Pfaffenbichler's treatment of Armourers is to be welcomed particularly for its strongly continental line: he has many illustrations, especially of Renaissance suits or components, that will be unfamiliar to English readers. His latest is of a suit ('armour', as he correctly says according to contemporary practice) made by a Dutch armourer for Charles I, c.1612. His approach is to look at the armourers' design sources (and especially the sixteenth-century pattern-books), then at the centres of armour-making, in Italy, Germany and Austria; then at the armourers' guilds, particularly in Nuremberg and Augsburg; and finally he comes to an examination of the careers of particular armourers. He then broadens out to a look at the relations of armourers to goldsmiths, before concluding with an account of the actual process of making mail and plate armour, and gilding it. Unlike the other authors in this series, he is at his weakest when writing about England – most remarkably in his belief that the Armourers' (correctly, Armourers and Brasiers') Company is extinct (p.29). A very few infelicities of English or mis-spellings make me wonder if his text has not been translated from German (e.g. p.68, 'up to now' for 'hitherto'), while German placenames, especially Nuremberg, are rendered with

a glaring inconsistency.

John Cherry's account of goldsmiths moves more conventionally – and understandably – from the particular – the goldsmith's working method and his products – to the general. He strikes a fair balance between England and the Continent, in both text and range of illustrations; and who can but marvel at the late-fifteenth-century picture of the miners of Kuttenberg at work (figs. 14 and 15)? He then looks at the goldsmiths' guilds and the goldsmiths' role in coin production and the maintenance of gold purity; he concludes with discussions of some goldsmiths' contracts with patrons and of pictures of goldsmiths' shops. Readers of this journal will be delighted that he illustrates (fig. 10) a ring of the type bequeathed by Sir Edmund Shaa, engraved with the five wells of sacred gifts; and it is interesting to see Goetze's painting of Richard III being offered the crown by Shaa in 1483. (Photographic credit for this is given to the Joint Grand Gresham Committee, the trustee of the Royal Exchange where the picture is.) Minor quibbles are at the unfortunate misprint 'Benedictine Cluniac monks' (p.6), and the location of Stourbridge fair in Worcestershire (p.57), rather than by Cambridge. And surely Bartholomew Lamspringe was a German rather than a Dutchman? The word 'Dutch' was commonly used in the fifteenth century to refer to anyone who came from what is now Germany as well as the Low Countries; the town of Lamspringe (up in the Harz mountains, above Hildesheim) is in an area long celebrated for its metalworking.

Despite his title, *Scribes and Illuminators*, Christopher de Hamel has actually covered the whole process of making and selling a book: parchment, paper and ink makers, bookbinders and stationers get as much space as those who wrote and illustrated medieval books. But the result is a splendidly rounded account; as a general introduction to medieval manuscript production it cannot be bettered. It is written with verve and charm: de Hamel has an attractive readiness to draw parallels with modern practices (even inviting the reader to try folding a sheet of paper himself, p.19) and to admit that there are some medieval practices which may be suspected but either cannot be proved or cannot be documented from any medieval manual (use of skins from hunted animals, p.15; hair side facing hair side and watermark side facing watermark side, p.19). I now know what an oak gall looks like (fig. 26, illustrated from his aunt's garden). But from modern calligraphic practice I wonder if the scribe in figure 29, who holds a pen in one hand and a knife in the other, is not holding the knife in his left hand simply as a sort of counterbalance to steady his right hand (rather than to steady the page, as stated in the caption); the scribe who holds something in each hand is of course a recurrent figure in medieval art.

Medieval floor tiles cannot hope to rival illuminated manuscripts in their visual or, perhaps, their historical appeal. Elizabeth Eames's task was no doubt the hardest in the Medieval Craftsmen series; but I do not think she made it easier by limiting herself to *English* tilers. Nor has she made the most of the more attractive aspects of her subject – such as the tiles from Chertsey Abbey illustrating the legend of Tristan and Isolt (illustrated in figs. 52, 55 and 57 but not discussed in the text), or the tiles at Tring church (Herts.) for which a close parallel in a manuscript has been identified (she mentions this in her text but does not illustrate it). She seems to take the view that tiles are of archaeological interest only; she is not hoping for converts to the cause of tile studies. She writes at length of tileries

that have been excavated in recent years, but a broader context is lacking; she is less sure-footed when referring to historical evidence (cf. her mentions of 'the Monastic Chronicle' on pp.29 and 30). And I am saddened by the implications of her statement on page 10 that 'The London tilers were never permitted to form a Guild. No doubt they were despised by the City Fathers...' As some of her pictures show, English tegulistic art could in fact reach a very high level, in the early sixteenth century no less than in the thirteenth.

Overall, this series is much to be commended. The publishers have generally done their task well, although there are more errors in proofreading than one might expect in such a small compass. The captions seem less reliable than the texts, while for de Hamel's booklet it is a great pity that the locations of the manuscripts are omitted: editorial uniformity is presumably to blame. The locations can however be worked out from the list of photographic credits, and all such faults could easily be righted in second editions.

NIGEL RAMSAY

MEDIEVAL DECORATIVE ART. John Cherry. 1991. British Museum Publications, £5.95. ISBN 0-7141-2065-0

John Cherry's booklet on *Medieval Decorative Art* should not be confused with the new British Museum series on medieval craftsmen some of which have been reviewed in recent issues of the *Ricardian*, in spite of its very similar format and size. It discusses not the men and women who produced the medieval decorative arts, but the things they made. Actually, the title is slightly misleading. The booklet is not an introduction to all medieval decorative art, since ecclesiastical work is excluded. It is about secular art. Less than that, it is about the secular decoration of objects – what used to be called the 'Minor Arts' – jugs, spoons, caskets and so forth, rather than wall-paintings or illustrated secular manuscripts. To this more narrow subject the book provides a good introduction informed, as one might expect from one of the world's experts in the field, by a mass of stimulating observations on a variety of well (and lesser) known objects from the British Museum collection and (on occasion) from elsewhere. The high standard of illustrations in other British Museum booklets is also evident here. There are, for instance, excellent photographs of some fourteenth-century French ivory caskets, and splendid plates of the silver seal matrix of Robert Fitzwalter (d.1253) (thoughtfully shown in reverse so one can read the inscription) and the Saintonges puzzle jug from Exeter. Very few of the illustrations in this volume are disappointing and for the colour plates alone it is good value.

Cherry divides his formidably disparate field thematically, giving us sections on Nature and rural life, heraldry, feasting, and courtly love. This is a perfectly defensible division or the subject though, as he remarks, other themes – for instance warfare or medieval women – might equally well have been chosen. Joan Evans in her marvellous, if dated, book on *Pattern, Patton, I, The Middle Ages*, (Oxford, 1931), chose a similar division of her material, with chapters on 'The

Mistress Art', '*Speculum Naturae*', 'The Mark of the Individual', 'Literature and Decoration' and 'The Romance of Distance'.

The medieval economy was overwhelmingly an agricultural one and it is not surprising to find nature and rural occupations a favourite subject of medieval artists. The labours of the months, for instance, are often represented in calendar illustrations of medieval manuscripts and are found in media such as the tiles from Chertsey Abbey. One of the panels on the British Museum gittern shows a man knocking acorns from an oak tree to feed a herd of pigs, a motif familiar from the illustrations to October or November (the unfortunate animals are slaughtered in December). The early fourteenth-century carver who created the admirable tanglewoods with men, huntsmen and hybrids which decorate the gittern may have had patterns in front of him derived from contemporary manuscript illumination of the 'East Anglian' school or from contemporary relief sculptures such as adorned the St Ethelbert gate at Norwich. Perhaps, given the proximity of his work to the decorative sculpture on the Winchester choir stalls, executed by Norfolk carpenters, the gittern also came from East Anglia?

Heraldry was widely employed in medieval art and Cherry provides fine short analyses of objects such as Robert Fitzwalter's seal matrix or the All Souls cup lid. The bronze seal matrix of Richard Duke of Gloucester as Admiral for Dorset and Somerset and the Sword of State of the Prince of Wales – either Edward, son of Edward IV, or Richard's son – illustrated on page 31, will be of particular interest to readers of the *Ricardian*. In a section on feasting, Cherry illustrates the extravagant beauty of some late-medieval cups, spoons and knives, but he also includes numerous pottery jugs, decorated with exuberant vitality. Inscriptions are commoner on vessels made from more precious materials, such as bronze. One example is on a jug decorated with the arms and badges of Richard II.

He that wyl not spare when he may
He schal not spend when he would
Deme the best in every dowe
Til the trowthe be tryid owe

(Cherry's transcription is inaccurate as can be seen from his illustration: I have corrected it against the side of the jug visible on p.53). The jug has an extraordinarily exotic provenance: it was apparently found in the temple of the kings of Ashanti at Kumasi in Africa in 1896!

In the final section, Cherry considers objects illustrating medieval romances and courtly love, again including tiles from Chertsey Abbey, this time some showing episodes from the Romance of Tristram and Isolde. The fact that such subjects were found in an ecclesiastical context, whether or not the designs were first used in a royal palace, reminds us of the sometimes fragile boundary between secular and ecclesiastical in the high and later middle ages. There is a clear increase in the volume and range of secular art during this period, some of it of great interest and sophistication, some of it banal and trite. As Cherry establishes, we need to study all the surviving fragments of secular art if we are to come to a more complete understanding of medieval life.

PHILLIP LINDLEY

During the last two or three decades the remarkable growth of interest in Richard III and his times has both stimulated and fed on a plethora of publications of diverse types. One particularly fertile category has been the volumes of collected essays by the small and varying circle of leading historians which have appeared every few years usually marking an anniversary, a retirement or symposium proceedings. These volumes have provided the opportunity for individuals to present the results of research and debate in print between hard covers and to a wider readership than would otherwise be feasible. It is easier to justify (and produce) a chapter on an obscure corner of the past than a whole book on the same subject.

Richard III: A Medieval Kingship largely follows this established form, but takes a more 'popular' course than some of its predecessors both in the choice of subject matter and its clear treatment. With eight contributors including the editor, variations are inevitable but in general I believe this book can be read with pleasure and profit by a wide range of readers from newcomers to other specialists. Some will also experience irritation and annoyance at some of the writers' logic and opinions in some places. Unlike some of its predecessors this collection of articles does not struggle to find or follow a coherent theme. It is very clearly a survey of certain important aspects of Richard's reign and the influences and events leading thereto.

In the introductory chapter, John Gillingham wisely avoids the thankless task of reviewing and summarising his contributors in detail and instead selects a few of their points to illustrate his own wide ranging article: 'Interpreting Richard III'. This includes a useful compilation of contemporary European comments relevant to Richard's reputation. Michael Hicks is well qualified by extensive research and writings on George Duke of Clarence to deal with 'The Formative Years', ably tracing the gradual transformation of Richard from an insignificant youngest son of an eclipsed Duke to become the King's viceroy in the North.

Chapter III is entitled '1483: The Year of Decision (or Taking of the Throne)', and its author Colin Richmond will probably relish the controversy his forthright anti-Richard views will create. He wastes little space on supporting evidence or alternative interpretations and his phraseology appears to betray an almost personal animosity towards his subject. Regarding the events of 13 June he writes: 'The conspiracy theory was again trotted out.... This unimaginative repetition was believed by few then and *none* now'. Similarly in writing of the widespread belief by the end of the summer that the Princes had been killed, he says: 'It is virtually *impossible* that they had not been'. One is led to wonder whether such arrogant conclusions are sincere comment or merely posturing for attention.

Chapter IV by Rosemary Horrox could almost be designed for contrast. Her formidable record of research in original documents bears fruit in the numerous exemplars and anecdotes with which she is able to garnish a masterly overview of the government of Richard III. Reading her view of how medieval government actually worked is my idea of learning with pleasure.

In Chapter V Anne Sutton draws upon her exhaustive work on the coronation accounts and Richard's library for material to illustrate her survey of the court and

its culture touching especially on the importance of clothing and music to the royal image and emphasising the continuity with Edward IV's court. If Richard has gained a puritanical facet in recent studies it is not borne out by Anne Sutton's article.

Richard III is one of the few English kings to die in battle so the article by Michael K. Jones on Richard as a soldier is an essential part of this survey. Jones postulates that the values and outlook of a military man lay at the heart of Richard's 'own self-image, for which, ultimately, he would die courageously in battle'. Courage in action was something that even the most malicious of the Tudor propagandists would not venture to deny him. The article traces the military inheritance from his father Richard Duke of York and the campaigns which built his reputation. As an aside Jones suggests that Henry Duke of Buckingham's 'remarkable sense of common cause with Richard in April 1483' was grounded in their comradeship and mutual frustration in the French campaign of 1475.

In Chapter VII Alexander Grant first explores the labyrinthine twists of foreign affairs under Richard III to support the thesis that a series of historical circumstances and diplomatic blunders by Richard allowed Henry Tudor against the odds to gather significant support abroad. He then draws on several sources to estimate the numbers of French and Scottish troops in Henry's invasion force and constructs a convincing case for them forming the crucial Tudor vanguard at Bosworth. As he says: 'most English accounts ... play this down but the truth is nearer the French propaganda claims that the Tudor dynasty owed its throne to Charles VIII of France'. This leads almost inevitably to Colin Richmond's question 'what was going on at the battle of Bosworth?' Rather than steal his thunder I will leave the reader to consider Alexander Grant's reply.

The final chapter in this book is chronologically appropriately devoted to 'The Reputation of Richard III'. Peter Hammond has written on the theme before but this does not prevent him from presenting a fresh and skilful overview selecting the significant works and trends from the immense accumulation of 500 years of conflicting, confusing and largely turgid literature.

At £17.99 (hardback) for 149 pages plus index this is a relatively expensive book so one would expect better illustrations. There are eighteen black and white plates compressed into eight pages so that some are reduced too small for comfort. Others have appeared elsewhere as sharper monochrome reproductions or even in colour. It would have been preferable to have omitted these altogether and concentrated resources on better productions of the less familiar. The articles are also 'illustrated' by quotations from contemporary or near contemporary sources with commentary and these are a successful feature which could be emulated in future. However the editor has adopted a policy of no numbered notes and references in favour of a 'further reading' section at the end of each article. Presumably this is intended to avoid overawing the casual reader with the full academic apparatus and to simplify typesetting. This will no doubt be successful but it does make life more difficult for the enthusiast who wishes to follow up the authors sources.

To conclude a review with matters of minor criticism is to risk leaving a wrong impression so it is perhaps not superfluous to recommend *Richard III: A Medieval Kingship* as a scholarly good read.

R.C. HAIRINE

WOMEN AND MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE IN THE MIDDLE AGES.

Francis Beer. 1992, reprinted 1993. The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, £12.95.

ISBN 0-85115-302-X

Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages introduces the reader to women's mystical writings by selecting three women of very different temperaments, from different periods and places. These are: Hildegard of Bingen in the Rhinelands, a twelfth-century Benedictine abbess; the thirteenth-century Mechthild of Magdeburg in north-eastern Germany who was a Beguine, a member of a less formally structured women's religious community, for most of her life but who finally retired to the intellectually and mystically inclined Cistercian abbey of Helfta, and Julian of Norwich, the by now widely-known fourteenth-century English recluse. One man finds a place among the women, the fourteenth-century Yorkshireman, Richard Rolle; this is because of his relationship with, and the works he wrote for, Margaret Kirkby, a nun-recluse who lived on until about 1405. There is, then, little of immediate relevance to the England of Richard's times. However, the reputation of Richard Rolle remained high into the sixteenth century, and the visions of mystics and the words of prophets continued to be heard. Among later mystics that we know of, there were two late fifteenth-century monks, Richard Methley and John Norton, of the Mountgrace Charterhouse, about twenty miles from Middleham, and the maid or nun of Kent who prophesied against Henry VIII's divorce. The world of the English mystics to which Frances Beer introduces us would not have been alien to Richard and his contemporaries, but Marion Glasscoe's *English Medieval Mystics* (Longman, 1993) provides a much better introduction to their world and writings.

Beer claims that the voices of religious women were deliberately silenced by medieval antifeminism, which was particularly marked in the church. In the case of these mystics, that is rather misleading. Writings by Hildegard and Mechthild circulated in manuscript in German, and in Latin for an international, learned audience and, in Hildegard's case, several of her prophecies and scientific works were printed in the early sixteenth century. Both women's writings were edited and printed in Latin in 1513 by the noted French scholar, Jacques Le Fèvre d'Étaples. It was because they were mystics, rather than because they were women, that these writers were regarded with suspicion. Male as well as female mystics were more often than not subjected to various degrees of scrutiny, harassment and censorship by their own religious orders or the church authorities; the experiences of Joachim of Fiore, Eckhart, Lull, John of the Cross and Augustine Baker show that little changed over the centuries. The mystics' personal intimacy with God gave them a spiritual authority that was independent of the hierarchical church. Their revelations and locutions, like those of the Old Testament prophets, were often critical of influential figures or policies of the church or state, and threatened the established order. Nor were visionaries always theologically sound; women were unlikely to have been trained in theology. During the middle ages heresy was considered subversive of ecclesiastical and social order: any hint of unorthodoxy was safer silenced. Beer gives the misleading impression that religious women's voices were silenced by male misogyny.

In introducing and delineating the still little-known writings of Hildegard and Mechthild, Beer shows a mastery of her subjects and the ability to select

appropriate illustrative material. She provides at once a historical context and an insight into the character and writings of the intellectually powerful Hildegard and the intensely emotional Mechthild. Encountering these women is thought-provoking and inspiring. The third of the book devoted to fourteenth-century English mystics is less satisfactory. Rolle may have written for a woman and been involved with the nuns of Hampole, but he was not a woman and his texts were not limited to a female audience. The sketch of Yorkshire convents is superficial and Margaret Kirkby not substantial enough in her own right to maintain the fiction that this chapter represents womens' voices. Beer's wisdom in providing an elementary introduction to the visions of Julian may also be questioned when there are now so many books about her, from introductory surveys to the more substantial discussions of Bradley, Jantzen and Pelphey. There is here no new insight into Julian, as woman, as mystic or as theologian. The best parts of this book concern the writers who happen to be most remote in time and place from the world of Richard.

J.T. RHODES

A LEGEND OF HOLY WOMEN. Osbern Bokenham, *Legends of Holy Women*. Translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by Sheila Delany, 1992. University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame and London, £13.50. ISBN 0-268-01295-4

It is hard to dislike Osbern Bokenham, as hard, in fact, as it is to like Sir John Fortescue and his opportunist misogyny. It is evident that Bokenham was on friendly terms with several of his female acquaintances; whether he was actively 'pro-woman' has to remain doubtful. He really deserves an edition of his 'Complete Works' and the present book with its emphasis on his 'all-female' hagiography creates a false impression.

Bokenham was born about 1393, in Suffolk, and became a friar at the Augustinian house at Clare; its patron was Richard, Duke of York, then Lord of Clare. The literary works now usually ascribed to Bokenham reflect the author's interests: the *Mappula Angliae*, a description of the geography and marvels of England based on Higden's *Polychronicon*; an informative history of the Lords of Clare in the shape of a dialogue between a visitor to Clare priory and a friar who answers his questions; a translation of a part of Claudianus' *Consulate of Stilicho* (fifth century A.D.) which celebrates the virtues and talents of the one man who, it was hoped, could save the Roman state, and which was adapted by Bokenham to fit Richard of York; and finally a great number of saints' lives, probably the translation of the entire *Golden Legend*.

Bokenham had many friends and/or patrons of various backgrounds and both sexes. From his work we get a picture of a mild man, not given to extremes, but obviously enjoying, for example, his clever conceit of suiting the panegyric of the Roman Stilicho to the heir of York. He was active – if all the works attributed to him are really his – and scholarly: he was one of very few authors to edit some of their work in parallel Latin and vernacular texts.

Professor Delany includes a brief and pleasant biography of Bokenham, that tells us nothing new; most of the rest of the introduction is used to explain the word 'legend', the 'four-year compositional process of the work' and the patrons who asked for the translations. The main theory put forward – and presumably the reason for the unexpected title of the present book – is that Bokenham was very much inspired by Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*.

A case is also made for the uniqueness of the collection as the 'first all-female hagiography in any language'. This might be correct if we knew that the collection had been planned by the author, but there is no evidence that it was. The first prologue is here, as elsewhere, taken as prologue to the whole, but is in fact merely the introduction to the life of St. Margaret, the first story. The manuscript's colophon at the end explains that it was copied by a friend of Bokenham's as a gift to a community of nuns, 'so that they would remember' the donor and his sister; this makes it equally likely that the copyist/donor selected the stories from the many lives of male and female saints that Bokenham had written.

Professor Delany also attempts to put Bokenham's 'pro-woman' work in the context of the Yorkist claim to the throne via the female line, and contrast it with Fortescue's 'veritable thesaurus of misogynistic arguments' in his work upholding Lancastrian rights. This 'pro-woman' attitude is deduced from slender evidence; one of the two examples being from the life of St. Margaret: in most versions of the story, the devil, defeated by the saint, complains that he takes it very hard that 'a young tender maid' has vanquished him and not 'a young man'. The manuscript omits his complaint and this is assumed to be significant. It could be argued that if Bokenham had any really feminist sympathies he might well have included Margaret's earlier words to the devil, also omitted by the manuscript but included in other versions: she 'set her right foot upon [the devil's] neck and said to him: 'Lie still, you enemy, under the foot of a woman'. Also, it must be remembered that in the case of manuscripts it is impossible to tell with certainty at what stage and by which scribe words were omitted or added. If the other versions of Margaret's life are also by Bokenham – and they are assumed to be – it may have been the man who presented the book to the nuns who thought some of the phrases inappropriate. It is admitted by Delany that in some other instances Bokenham did not clean up his text.

The present translation is smooth and readable. It is based on the 1938 EETS edition of the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* by Mary Serjeantson. The line numbers of that edition are used in the introduction, rather unnecessarily as they are not given anywhere in the translated text. There is a limited number of useful notes and an equally short and useful bibliography, but no index.

On the whole this is an attractive book that may introduce Bokenham to new readers, but it could have been published wholly on the merits of the medieval text itself and was not really in need of a semi-feminist justification for its existence.

LIVIA VISSER-FUCHS.

FOOD AND FEAST IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND. P.W. Hammond. 1993. Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., Stroud, Gloucestershire, and Dover, New Hampshire, £16.99/\$34.00.

ISBN 0-86299-794-1

This attractive book reflects the recent surge of interest in medieval English food. It joins such general studies of diet, cookery, and culinary ceremony as Bridget Ann Henisch's *Fast and Feast: Food in Medieval Society* and Madeleine Pelner Cosman's *Fabulous Feasts: Medieval Cookery and Ceremony* (both published 1976), and Maggie Black's *The Medieval Cookbook* (1992), as well as more specialised works such as Constance B. Hieatt and Sharon Butler's edition of *Curie on Inglysch: English Culinary Manuscripts of the Fourteenth Century* (1985), and Ann Hagen's *A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Food: Processing and Consumption* (1992).

Food and Feast in Medieval England is intended as an introduction to the subject, and a very thorough introduction it is. In seven chapters, containing only 150 copiously-illustrated pages, the author covers an unusually broad range of topics and a three-hundred-year period, from 1250 to 1550. Chapter One ('Where Food Came From') discusses arable farming, brewing, the growing of fruits and vegetables, animal husbandry, poultry farming, the import of sugar, spices, exotic fruits, and wines, wild foods, and hunting, and ends with a lengthy discussion of fish (both salt-water and fresh-water) and the various means of preserving them. Chapter Two ('Food of the Countryman') describes the diet of the medieval peasant, with its seasonal rhythms, while in Chapter Three ('Food of the Town Dweller'), the focus is on the urban retailing of both food and drink, particularly in London. Chapter Four ('Food of the Gentry') describes the protein-rich diet of the wealthy, both clerical and lay, and the massive amounts of food and drink consumed by great households. Chapter Five ('Adulteration and Nutrition') begins with a survey of common fraudulent practices having to do with food and drink, and the measures taken against them by municipal and other authorities, then turns to a discussion of contemporary dietary theories, and concludes with a consideration of vitamin supply and nutrition in medieval food. Chapter Six ('Table Manners') surveys mealtimes, service, and manners, and includes a detailed description of the kinds of napery, plate, cutlery, and drinking vessels that were used. The book concludes in Chapter Seven ('Feasts') with a detailed examination of feasts, including descriptions of planning, menus, quantities of food consumed, lighting, decorations, exotic or ornamental display dishes (known as 'sotelties'), and entertainments and spectacles.

Although *Food and Feast in Medieval England* is a synthetic work rather than a work of original research, it is based on an extremely wide and up-to-date selection of printed sources, and is fully documented with both notes and bibliography. Despite the author's obvious care, however, a number of errors have crept into the text. Some of these are simple transcription errors. For example, the household accounts for 1289-90 of Richard de Swinfeld, Bishop of Hereford (edited by John Webb for the Camden Society, old series vols. 59 and 62, 1854-5), record that the Bishop's Christmas provisions included four does, not four doves (Hammond p.65), and the number of eggs consumed at Easter came to 4000, not 1400 (Hammond p.74). Other errors, however, reflect a misunderstanding of the material. The *virid' sals'* used at the bishop's table, for example, was 'green sauce'

(a condiment), not 'salted or pickled greens' (Hammond p.71), while the sester or sextary of wine contained four gallons, not one pint (see Webb, vol. 62, p.xiv), so that the eleven sesterys of wine served by the bishop at Christmas amounted to forty-four gallons, not eleven pints (Hammond p.65).

Slips such as these should not, however, discourage anyone from reading and enjoying this very lively and informative book, or from consulting its excellent bibliography and illustrations.

MARTHA CARLIN

Notes on Contributors

Richard Allington-Smith returned to research in 1991 after 35 years in the Anglican Ministry. He is working on a biography of Henry Le Despenser, Bishop of Norwich 1370-1406.

Martha Carlin. Assistant Professor of History, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Author of *Medieval Southwark: The Urban Development of a London Suburb, 1200-1550* (forthcoming). Currently researching food and diet in medieval England.

Mary C. Erler is Associate Professor of English at Fordham University, New York. She is working on a study of women's reading and book ownership in the early modern period.

Heather Falvey is a member of the South Herts Group of the Society and has been researching the More for several years. She is studying for a certificate in local history.

Jean M. Gidman, BA., has been a member of the society for over twenty years and until recently was a librarian at Edge Hill College of Higher Education.

Robert C. Hairsine. Chartered structural engineer. Author of articles in *Richard III, Crown and People*. Working on the Exchequer Warrants for Issues 1480-85 and the fifteenth century Customs Accounts for Poole, Dorset.

Lisa Hopkins teaches English at Sheffield Hallam University. Her publications include *Elizabeth I and Her Court, Women Who Would Be Kings: Female Rulers of the Sixteenth Century*, and the forthcoming *John Ford's Political Theatre*.

Michael Jones. Professor of Medieval French History at the University of Nottingham. He recently published a selection of his articles as *The Creation of Brittany* and, with Patrick Gallion, *The Bretons*.

Phillip Lindley, lecturer in the History of Art at Leicester University; editor, with S.J. Gunn of *Cardinal Wolsey: Church, State and Art*, published in 1991.

Andrew Martindale, Professor of Visual Arts at the University of East Anglia, author of *Gothic Art* (1967), *The Triumph of Caesar by Andrea Mantegna* (1979) and *Simone Martini* (1988).

Nigel Ramsay. A curator in the Department of Manuscripts, the British Library, with the task of recataloguing the Cotton Manuscripts. Joint editor of *English Medieval Industries: Craftsmen, Techniques, Products* (1991).

J. T. Rhodes is librarian of Ushaw College, Durham, has published on late medieval English and Recusant Spirituality and does occasional teaching at Ushaw College and Cranmer Hall, Durham, on the same subjects.

Livia Visser-Fuchs is working on the literary background and propaganda of Anglo-Burgundian relations of the Yorkist period.

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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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