Reviews

The *Parergon* editorial team wishes to alert readers to an erroneous bibliographical reference that was included without the author's approval in Michele Seah's review of Abigail S. Armstrong, *The Materiality of Medieval Administration in Northern England* (Brepols, 2024), appearing on page 199 of Issue 42.1. The erroneous bibliographical reference cited in relation to P. D. A. Harvey's seminal body of work was *Manors and Maps in Rural England, from the Tenth Century to the Seventeenth* (Routledge, 2010). The correct references should have been *Manorial Records* (British Records Association, 1999) and *Manorial Records of Cuxham, Oxfordshire* (HMSO, 1976).

Crow, Jason R., *A New Material Interpretation of Twelfth-Century Architecture*: *Reconstructing the Abbey of Saint-Denis*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2024; hardback; pp. 224; RRP €122.00; ISBN 9789462982260.

We are so conditioned to think of Gothic as the architecture of tradition that we can easily become blind to the extraordinary process by which this style—with its tall, pointed arches, slender columns, and great glass windows—came into being in the twelfth century. Previously, churches had been built in the Romanesque style, characterised by thick walls and small round windows. This was a pre-eminently defensive style of architecture, tracing its origins to Roman military fortifications and designed to keep enemies at bay. The Gothic revolution arose not merely from technical developments, but from the practical necessity of building much larger churches without the roof either sagging or collapsing. This transformation involved a fundamental shift in attitude, or mental space: sacred buildings were no longer so much an escape from the world as a place where the world was transformed.

The achievement of Jason Crow's book is to transform how we understand this change in mental space by focusing not on light—as has traditionally been the case—but on materiality. He examines this transformation through France's greatest monastic church, the Basilica of Saint-Denis, which developed the key architectural features of the Gothic style some twenty years before work started on the new cathedral, as documented by Abbot Suger.

The standard way of interpreting the originality of Gothic as primarily concerned with light was put forward by two German art historians who emigrated to the United States: Erwin Panofsky in 1951 and Otto von Simson in 1956. They argued that Suger was primarily inspired by a set of mystical writings at his monastery, attributed to Dionysius (Denis) the Areopagite, and above all by the phenomenon of light itself. While Gothic windows indeed admitted more light, Crow argues this was possible only because of their material construction. He

draws attention to new thinking in the twelfth century about the act of creation, in which God was conceived as the builder of the universe—a concept developed through commentary on the creation account in Genesis and Plato's *Timaeus*, as translated by Chalcidius. Crow privileges how the builders of Saint-Denis understood matter as shaped through the imposition of form.

This emphasis on materiality allows for attention to building details that are often overlooked, such as the central role of water in any religious community. Crow reads the imagery of water sermons by Bernard of Clairvaux and Aelred of Rievaulx with the eye of a builder, an architect who understands that these features are vital to any construction. In many ways, the Gothic revolution resembled a kind of twelfth-century modernism: a rejection of an established philosophy of building that had persisted for over a thousand years, dating back to the great Roman fortifications of antiquity. For the Romans, building was primarily a matter of making walls thick and strong so that people inside could feel safe and secure from the barbarians by whom the Empire always felt itself surrounded.

A curious feature of the twelfth century is that, while we know the names of many intellectuals, such as Peter Abelard, we tend not to know the names of the actual architects who presented their plans to the abbot of Saint-Denis or to the bishop of Paris. These were practical people who understood what it meant to cut stone and shape wood. They recognised that form is just as important as matter in crafting objects of beauty that serve not to keep us from the world, but to transform it.

Saint-Denis is unusual because of Suger's witness in documenting his own involvement in its reconstruction. In many ways, the radical reconstruction of Notre-Dame Cathedral was a much more significant event, given its larger size and the speed of its completion. Much of the rebuilding of Saint-Denis was not completed until the late thirteenth century.

Yet Crow's argument does have implications about how we understand the expansion of the new style into the new cathedral. What matters is not the light from the windows, but the latest way in which matter and form were brought together into a unified whole. This integration made it possible for the windows and exterior sculptures to provide a fresh narrative of salvation history. The new architecture was closely related to contemporary developments in polyphonic organum under the aegis of Leoninus, as well as theological teaching in an ordered and rational manner, as outlined in Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. Crow draws fascinating parallels between relying on light as a central category and our contemporary dependence on digitised, virtual reality. If we focus only on light and digital copies of buildings, we risk losing touch with the materiality of the world in which we live. Nothing replaces being in a building to feel at home within a larger structure.

Crow's monograph offers practical wisdom about a revolution in building style of enormous importance in shaping medieval culture in the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The questions he raises should make us think afresh about

many church buildings in which we have only the physical remains, without the written record connected to Saint-Denis.

Constant J. Mews, *Monash University*

Debiais, Vincent, *Inscrire l'art médiéval. Objets, textes, images* (Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy, 60), Turnhout, Brepols, 2024; pp. 337; 47 b/w, 102 colour illustrations; RRP €100.00; ISBN 9782503597409.

Vincent Debiais's *Inscrire l'art médiéval* is an intriguing book. The title itself is suggestive, as it brings together two distinct yet interconnected fields: epigraphy and art history. This compact formulation, almost oxymoronic in nature, immediately signals a disciplinary crossing that is both productive and conceptually charged. The relationship between texts and 'objects, images' (as indicated in the book's subtitle), between inscription and visual form, is thus placed at the centre of the investigation. Yet while the title affirms this convergence, the titles of the chapters—for example, 'Cet objet-là, cette image-ci', 'Poétique de l'objet'—are deliberately elusive and somewhat enigmatic, offering more in the way of suggestive prompts than explicit academic guidance. The book's genre is intriguing in itself. Is it a textbook, a monograph, a pedagogical guide? Denying any methodological ambition, the author defines his piece as an *essay*—a deliberately flexible and ambiguous form—'an essay and nothing else' (p. 306), which nonetheless strives to offer a synthesis of two decades of research at the intersection of medieval epigraphy and art history. The result is a text that resists rigid categorisation, blending scholarly rigour with interpretive openness.

Debiais first clarifies his corpus, made of western Christian texts 'inscribed, engraved or painted in stone, wood or metal, or incorporated into mosaics […] that are omnipresent in the images, objects and monuments produced during the Middle Ages' (p. 3), and which he groups under the term 'inscriptions'. The book's aim is to question 'the nature and meaning of epigraphic writing when it occurs in the field of art' (p. 10), to examine 'what writing produces in art' (p. 17). The author claims to consider 'the relationship between inscriptions and medieval artworks from a new perspective, analysing them through the conditions of their creation rather than through the filter of medieval studies disciplines' (p. 19).

Indeed, Debiais aims to free epigraphy from its status as an auxiliary science of history by 'not confin[ing] epigraphic production to documentary servitude' (p. 127). For example, the author proposes (Chapter 1) 'to analyse the date mentioned in the inscription for what it reveals about the relationship between writing and time'—he insists that 'Rather than considering whether it confirms or infirms, we should consider whether it informs us about phenomena of synchrony, discordance, and duration' (p. 53).

Capitalising on disputes among experts (as explained in the rather lengthy Chapter 2: Paul Deschamps and Meyer Schapiro, Jean Wirth, and Yves Christe), Debiais suggests that inscriptions allow us to observe the craftsman at work. He considers the signature carved in the artwork as a 'committed graphic gesture'

(p. 118), providing information 'not only about the authority of the object or image, but also about the nature of that authority, namely a creative relationship' (p. 119), noting that epigraphy draws 'more on historical anthropology in its investigation of the graphic manifestations of identity and their social and spiritual implications' (p. 124).

Debiais identifies the relationship between writing and the image or object as one of 'simultaneously of concordance and divergence' (p. 162). According to him, writing in medieval art is the means of saying 'what the image is and something other than the image'. Debiais states that the name inscribed in the image 'is not only a means of identification; it allows […] to say what the artefact is, what it is solely—it is that and nothing else—and to say what it is completely—it is entirely that' (p. 162).

A thorough analysis of *hic* and *ubi* used in inscriptions, which enables us 'to see, and perhaps create, a relationship between the text, the material and the place; a three-way relationship that is encapsulated in the notion of opus and which transforms the theoretical product of art into an object in its context' (p. 191), convincingly demonstrates that 'epigraphic writing is incredibly situated' (p. 163).

Before turning to a chapter entirely devoted to 'Conques as a laboratory' (p. 273), Debiais dedicates two chapters to the analysis of poetry in epigraphy, because 'historiography has not sufficiently examined the reason for the use of verse in images' (p. 220). According to him, 'The use of poetry suggests that there is more going on in the image and in the object than their forms suggest' (p. 237). Debiais argues very convincingly that poetry 'intervenes to make the image say more than what the form contains and to bring out the deeper meaning of what is represented' (p. 249).

There is, however, an impression of repetition, both between chapters—for example, the two chapters about 'names'—and in relation to research the author has already published elsewhere (as evidenced by the extensive bibliography; in particular, his book *La croisée des signes: L'écriture et les images médiévales (800-1200)* (CERF, 2017). But even a non-expert reader, like myself, has the impression of entering into a productive and stimulating conversation with the author, who guides us through multiple case studies—a wooden reliquary with ivory plaques on display at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the shrine of Saint Heribert of Cologne in Deutz, the Bayeux tapestry, the sculpted capitals crowning the columns of Moissac Abbey, the paintings adorning the portal of the Abbaye Sainte-Foy in Conques, presented with a wealth of illustrations (142 high quality photographs) while allowing us to hear his reflections, doubts, and questions along the way. This book offers a compelling approach to rethinking the relationship between text, image, and object, and to viewing medieval art from a fresh perspective.

Véronique Duché, *The University of Melbourne*

Elias, Marcel, *English Literature and the Crusades, Anxieties of Holy War*, *1291–1453* (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature), New York, Cambridge University Press, 2024; hardback; pp. 237; RRP £107.00; ISBN 9781108832212.

Focusing on Middle English crusade romances and employing a history of emotions approach, this book seeks to explore the deeply conflicted crusade culture in England in the period after 1291. Marcel Elias points out that crusade historians have not utilised many texts shedding light on this consideration. Beholden to a tradition of post-colonial scholarship and finding significance in the work of Edward Said, especially his epochal *Orientalism*, Elias deploys a methodology he describes as 'engaged historicism' (p. 6) to draw attention to the value of romances as 'remarkable cultural objects' (p. 132). These works constitute popular fiction, and Elias employs a hybrid methodology that combines 'historicist inquiry, attention to practices of translation or adaptation, and analysis of emotions' (p. 17). The approach is sure to attract scholarly discussion.

Where Elias finds resonance is the argument that English romances are deeply invested in ongoing debates about the Crusades in the later medieval period. What emerges is a tradition of complaint about the Crusades, their disturbing failures, and questions that spring from defeat and disappointment. The First Crusade stimulated much writing. Up through the fall of Acre in 1291 and the crusader collapse at Nicopolis in 1396, Western writers continued to reflect on the meaning of the crusade enterprise. The corpus of late medieval Middle English texts offers a rich collection of material for exploring several key themes. It is arresting to find evidence of a history of blasphemy and religious doubt pervading this genre of English literature. Elias confidently declares his book demonstrates a post-1291 crusade culture that is ambivalently self-critical, filled with debate and tension, and steeped in anxiety. Albert of Aachen may have been prescient, but Pope Urban II, Adhémar of Le Puy, Raymond of Toulouse, Bohemond of Taranto, Godfrey of Bouillon, Tancred of Hauteville, and Baldwin of Boulogne may have been confounded by such evaluation.

In four concise yet thoroughly documented chapters, the reader is drawn into a fascinating world that bridges the traditional histories and romances. The latter include *The Siege of Milan*, *The Sultan of Babylon*, *Guy of Warwick*, *The Siege of Jerusalem*, *Richard Cœur de Lion*, and the Otuel romances, including three discrete texts: *Otuel*, *Otuel and Roland*, and *Duke Roland and Sir Otuel of Spain* (each dating between 1330 and 1400). What is reflected in these texts is a sustained criticism of crusading. A priest accuses the Virgin Mary of failing to protect her followers. Those declining to join the Crusades are denounced as living in heresy. Increasingly, one finds emotional indifference. A typical response to the crusade ventures is one of blasphemy. God, Christ, Mary, and the saints become targets of derision. Consequently, common people were persuaded to come dangerously close to apostasy, heresy, blasphemy, and unfaith. It becomes apparent that negative projections mask deep insecurities. The values of *sapientia*, *potestas*, and *caritas*

fade and are replaced by defeat, disillusionment, and despair. Christians admire the victorious Muslims, apostatise, convert to Islam, or faint at the sight of the Eucharist. These texts provide ample opportunity for commentary, criticism, and a reimagined crusader motivation by suggesting disunity, the futility of waging holy war for earthly glory, and questioning the morality of religious violence.

Some of the less edifying chapters of crusade history are disproportionately magnified into a case for the absolute condemnation of crusading as an anti-Christian contradiction. The topic of cannibalism is lionised and advanced as evidence for the dehumanised ethos of holy war. What might be made more apparent is that crusader cannibalism appears only in Western accounts—puzzlingly, no Muslim sources mention it. Similarly, the overwrought accounts of the siege and capture of Jerusalem in 1099 repeat the exaggerated claims of crusaders forging ahead with blood flowing as high as horses' bridles. Thomas Madden convincingly dismissed such mischief a dozen years ago. Nonetheless, such stirring tales serve crusade criticism nicely.

Knightly bloodshed, motivated by wrath, is linked to the presence and influence of the devil. Alleged crusade atrocities are magnified, enhanced to levels beyond medieval horror and the basis for evil. Richard Lionheart becomes an ambivalent model whose moniker comes from a startling episode. A hungry lion is placed in Richard's prison cell. The depraved king seizes the beast, rips its heart out, and proceeds to the dining hall, where he seasons the heart with salt and devours it before his horrified captor King Modard (p. 121). The morality of violence is repeatedly underscored. In the *Siege of Jerusalem*, Caiaphas is executed by being flayed alive, dragged behind horses, and hanged upside down on gallows while ravenous wild beasts tear his flesh before the hapless persecutor of Christ is tortured to death (p. 109). In *Richard Cœur de Lion,* the eponymous villain receives emissaries of Salāh al-Dīn for a meal. On the table are the heads of their fallen comrades, shaven, sitting on platters, slanted upwards, their mouths twisted into sinister smirks and bearing identification tags (p. 126). What more should be said about the demonisation of the Crusades? Muslims are esteemed while Christians are derided.

Crusaders failed the test of emotional conduct—no wonder they lost the Levant. It was not just, as the Latin formula put it, *peccatis exigentibus hominum*; it was total depravity and godlessness. Even Muslims pointed out that crusaders had ignored their own faith, were unjust, vile, and led lives of disorder. As the French lawyer Honorat Bovet put it in his 1387 *L'arbre des batailles*, Christians had the superior claim to the Levant on account of the *passio* of Christ, but they had no right to evict the Muslims. The latter had been blessed by God. Why should they be deprived by Christians? (p. 134) This introduces a puzzle. Did the Muslims hesitate to take the region from Christians in the seventh century? If not, this tends to reinforce notions of Christian superiority. Scholars working on crusade history would do well to thoughtfully ponder the arguments presented in this book.

Thomas A. Fudge, *University of New England*

Falcucci, Beatrice, Emanuele **Giusti**, and Davide **Trentacoste**, eds, *Travelling Matters across the Mediterranean: Rereading, Reshaping, Reusing Objects (10th–20th Centuries)* (Histories in Motion, 1), Turnhout, Brepols, 2024; hardback; pp. 288; 9 b/w illustrations, 24 colour plates; RRP €85.00; ISBN 9782503610054.

The inaugural volume in the Brepols book series 'Histories in Motion', *Travelling Matters across the Mediterranean,* explores the movement and reinterpretation of objects from the tenth to the twentieth century within the Mediterranean, broadly defined. The 'Introduction', authored by the three editors, deftly frames the theoretical considerations of the volume, which comprises nine chapters. Though it may be cliché to describe the volume as 'ambitious' in its scope—and it is—the chronological breadth of the work is secondary to its thematic strength. The volume presents research by scholars exploring how objects are shaped, reshaped, and recontextualised by their movements across temporal, spatial, and cultural boundaries within the Mediterranean. The editors explain that they aim to 'connect the repurposing and "second-handedness" of displaced objects—namely the acquisition of new forms, functions, and meanings as they move—with their changing relations and (self-) perceptions of the communities involved in their displacement' (p. 24).

Among the contributions, those by Judith Utz, Matthew Martin, and Claudia Stella Valeria Geremia stand out for their strong engagement with the volume's central concerns. Utz's chapter surveys the transportability of medieval bronze doors made in Constantinople for use in Italian liturgical settings. The weight and logistical complexity of relocating such objects would seem to make them unlikely candidates for 'objects in motion', yet Utz notes that 'the intention to enhance their transportability influenced the way they were made, with all the components being produced separately' (p. 96).

Martin examines the appearance of Chinese porcelain in European princely collections and the epistemological questions these unfamiliar materials raised. Confronted with a material whose composition and method of production were unknown, European natural historians formulated competing hypotheses that were followed by experimental efforts. This chapter highlights how the transcultural movement of objects could lead to technical innovation and the production of knowledge.

Geremia extends the volume's geographical reach by focusing on African ritual items in the Canary Islands following the Spanish conquest. The chapter frames the islands as 'projected from an isolated position to a *plaque tournante* or a hub of intense economic exchanges between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic' (p. 135), where the colonial violence of the Spanish Inquisition shaped the reinterpretation of material culture.

Oded Cohen's chapter, though fascinating, diverges from the object-centred interactions that form the primary focus of the volume. It provides a biographical sketch of the printer and scholar Benjamin Me'eli HaKohen, treating Hebrew

texts primarily as intellectual rather than material objects. This differs from Maria Vittoria Comacchi's analysis of the circulation of Guillaume Postel's annotated copy of the *Taqwīm al-buldān*, where Comacchi examines the influence that a single copy exerted on sixteenth-century cartography and geography.

The inclusion of high-quality illustrations and the availability of the volume in both hardback and open-access formats ensures its accessibility. While the disparate topics may not provide an overarching and cohesive account of economic history and trade across the Mediterranean, this is not the editorial aim. Instead, the editors have assembled a work of significant value to historians working with material culture and scholars in the Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums (GLAM) sector. The chapters engage with theories of object biography and agency, while also highlighting the stages in the lives of objects: displacement, repurposing, and the acquisition of new meanings.

Lauren Murphy, *La Trobe Univ*ersity

Firth, Matthew, ed., *Pre-Conquest History and its Medieval Reception*: *Writing England's Past* (Writing History in the Middle Ages, 11), York, Boydell Press, 2025; hardback; pp. 270; 1 b/w illustration; RRP £80.00; ISBN 9781914049194.

Writing England's Past is the eleventh book in the Boydell series Writing History in the Middle Ages, and is aptly composed of eleven essays from scholars associated with institutions around the globe. These contributions delve into accounts of England's history before the Norman Conquest of 1066, specifically examining how medieval authors in the post-Conquest era interpreted pre-Conquest events. The book contributes to the objective of the Boydell series, which aspires to situate the study of history-writing as fundamental to our understanding of cultural memory and social identity in the Middle Ages. The idea for this book stemmed from discussions at panel sessions held at the 2022 Leeds International Medieval Congress and is organised into two thematic strands: Part I, 'Writing the Past', and Part II, 'Writing Identity'.

Part I contains five essays exploring the authors responsible for writing histories of England's pre-Conquest past from the eleventh century onwards. Daniel Anlezark's contribution, 'Constructing the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*', examines the development of the different versions of the annals in the *E Chronicle*, analysing where thematic interests in the annals differ and converge to draw conclusions about authorship. He demonstrates that delineating authors of the annals is helpful for understanding why these texts appear to undergo noticeable shifts in vocabulary, thematic interest, and the depiction of rulers and notable figures—allowing modern readers to identify these anonymous authors as individual contributors through the opinions and style they employ in their accounts across the years. Eleanor Parker likewise emphasises the influence of the author on the transmission of history in her contribution, 'Eadmer of Canterbury and the pre-Conquest Church'. Drawing on examples from many of Eadmer's

texts, Parker shows how his personal memories of the pre-Conquest English church influenced his interpretation of contemporary, often traumatic, events and reforms that appear in his history writing. Eadmer's interest in researching and rewriting the lives of Anglo-Saxon saints is explained as stemming from a desire to 'provide a link of continuity' (p. 44) with the worthy aspects of the pre-Conquest church, despite seeing Norman influence and reforms as an opportunity to build a better, more godly community. Michael Staunton's chapter on 'Usable Pasts in Angevin England' notes that many twelfth-century history writers drew on British and Anglo-Saxon pasts to defend the contemporary actions of the church and the crown. His case study of Gervase of Canterbury and Richard of Devizes, however, highlights two authors who not only involve source criticism, personal commentary, and reflection on the past in their accounts, but also elaborate on historical narratives and legends in a 'spirit of curiosity' (p. 56) and to demonstrate that events of the past were entertaining and engaging in their own right and important to be studied. Stanislav Mereminskii's contribution moves away from the 'elaborate histories' (p. 76) published by well-known figures for well-educated audiences, and instead introduces simple texts such as epitomes, brief chronicles, memoranda, lists of dignitaries, and other manuscripts 'lacking stylistic pretensions' (p. 77). This chapter focuses on the *Libellus de primo Saxonum aduentu*, a short twelfth-century compendium that is explicitly addressed to 'less-educated readers' (p. 76) and contains a genealogical chart alongside a depiction of Woden and his descendents—such useful diagrams and the inclusion of a list of English legal provinces further suggest this underappreciated text was pedagogical in nature and aimed at a non-expert audience. Mereminskii presents these brief and often overlooked texts as especially significant because they more accurately reflect the ideas about the past held by common audiences of the period, providing insight into how England's history was articulated and to whom it was being circulated in the Middle Ages. Jacqueline M. Burek's contribution, 'Language and Landscape in Robert Mannyng's *Story of Inglande*', examines a fourteenth-century chronicle of the same name, which Burek argues is a compilation of translations from other texts, including Bede's eighth-century *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* and William of Malmesbury's twelfth-century *Gesta regum Anglorum*. Burek argues that Mannyng's depiction of an 'English'—rather than 'Anglo-Norman'—historiography is deliberate and allegorised in the poetic descriptions of the burial sites, shrines, and relics of kings, which become intrinsically linked to the maintenance and transmission of historical memory (p. 111).

Mainly concerning examples of twelfth-century history writing produced in the south of England, the focused case studies from Part I draw conclusions about the cultural, intellectual, and conceptual frameworks from which history of the pre-Conquest period was written by authors in the post-Conquest era—suggesting routes of transmission between history writers who experimented with style, language, and biographical representation in their development of England's historiography through the reinterpretation of and continued engagement with

pre-Conquest sources. The second strand, 'Writing Identity', comprises five essays that examine the subjects within historiographical texts, exploring how the identity and legacy of institutions, regions, and individual figures in pre-Conquest England evolved in response to their treatment by post-Conquest historians.

In 'Lessons from the Past in the *Relatio de Standardo*', contributor Connor C. Wilson discusses the text of the same name written by the twelfth-century abbot Aelred of Rievaulx. Wilson believes this account of the Battle of the Standard was aimed at the 'high-ranking, arms-bearing laity of northern England', produced not simply to recount details of the battle but also as a 'self-conscious examination of the value of history itself' (p. 155). Wilson notes that Aelred's emphasis on the actions of both lay and religious community members 'could echo through that same community to the end of the twelfth century and beyond' (p. 156). By framing the battle rhetoric and narrative history writing that appears in the *Relatio* as a didactic text, the author depicts the historic Battle of the Standard as a defining victory and catalyst for the development of a communal northern English identity. Julian Calcagno's chapter, 'Transmission and Adaptation in Post-Conquest England', traces how post-Conquest chroniclers worked from what little commentary was available about the reign of the Anglo-Saxon king Offa and contributed to a significant legacy. Calcagno suggests that post-Conquest narratives of Offa's reign were reimagined by Anglo-Norman rulers to suit a variety of purposes. Offa's reception was adapted by some historians as a didactic tool 'to encourage qualities of 'virtuous kingship' or to 'indicate patterns of vice' (pp. 169–70), while other ecclesiastical authors are thought to have eulogised Offa's legacy to legitimise the legal claims abbeys held over land. Despite pre-Conquest sources never implying that Offa envisioned a united English society, post-Conquest chroniclers nevertheless constructed a legacy for Offa that situated his identity as a 'source for the continuity of English history' (p. 191). In the only contribution to focus solely on the historiography of a female figure from pre-Conquest England, editor Matthew Firth's chapter, 'Anglo-Norman Memories of *Æthelflæd* of Mercia', analyses the largely consistent treatment of Æthelflæd's reign and character depicted by post-Conquest historians, who drew information from similar versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*. However, Firth argues that the additional details that eulogise and embroider descriptions of her life in post-Conquest texts, written by the likes of Henry of Huntingdon and William of Malmesbury, indicate that twelfth century historians were also 'responding to cultural memories' (p. 194) of Æthelflæd's reign from their own time and grappling with contemporary concerns of 'perceived tension between Æthelflæd's gender and the "masculine" nature of her achievements' (p. 194). Outlining the evidence for a continued reception of her legacy long after the tenth century, Firth demonstrates how post-Conquest authors presented the history and identity of Æthelflæd as a 'didactic exemplar' (p. 193), unique from the post-Conquest treatment of other royal women from pre-Conquest England. In the final chapter, 'Walter Map's Parable on the Colonisation of Wales', Kimberley Lifton examines

the life and exploits of the Anglo-Saxon rebel Eadric Silvaticus. Lifton explains that Eadric is described in the *Domesday Book* as a tenant with six manors in the remote Welsh marches who was resistant to Norman colonisation and fought with the Welsh to resist the Normans. Yet these accounts of his resistance are seamlessly assimilated into the Anglo-Norman regime by twelfth-century author Walter Map in *De nugis curialium*. Detailing violent events and monstrous characters that Eadric engages with in the liminal spaces of the Welsh border in this fantastical and embellished account, Lifton explains that Map's tale is a warning against colonisation by brute force. This is reconciled when Eadric's half-human, half-succubus son is cured of palsy in Hereford Cathedral and bequeaths his inherited estate to the bishop. Lifton explains that such parables of colonisation are authorial attempts to 'renegotiate ethnic identity in post-Conquest England on an individual level through historically grounded, if fictionalised, figures' (p. 220).

The essays in Part II offer compelling examples of how ethnic, institutional, and individual identities from England's past were developed through history writing and the sustained engagement with and reinterpretation of historical sources in the post-Conquest era. In the introduction, editor Matthew Firth does acknowledge that such a book can never be the final word on the topic of perceptions of the past in post-Conquest historiography. The wealth of named historians and authors from twelfth-and thirteenth-century England means there will always be an appetite for new considerations of how these authors utilised pre-Conquest history to 'construct a narrative that emphasised, even advocated for, cultural continuities across the socio-political upheaval of conquest' (p. 12). The variety of approaches and diverse materials discussed in this collection spark exciting possibilities and avenues for future research and discussion on the topic of how authors and audiences navigated the writing of England's pre-Conquest history in the medieval period. Where this volume most noticeably contributes new knowledge on perceptions of the past in the post-Conquest historiography of England is its inclusion of analyses of lesser-known texts and historical figures alongside the better-known works of history writing. Opening with Anlezark's inspection of the contributions made by individual authors to the *E Chronicle*, from the much-studied *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, rightfully places this text as the central source for the essays in this collection and as the central source of pre-Conquest historiography available to twelfth-century historians. The following contributions, such as Mereminskii's examination of the *Libellus de primo Saxonum aduentu* and Lifton's review of Eadric the Wild's story in *De nugis curialium*, for example, allow the reader to consider how texts and figures that have not received as broad and comprehensive a study as the likes of the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* nevertheless exist in conversation with the larger corpus of twelfth-century historical texts and the networks of medieval history writers. Where the volume adds to existing scholarship on the specific writers, texts, and historical figures discussed within, it can also be used by students and educators to introduce new ways of thinking

about the role post-Conquest historians and authors have played in shaping our interpretations of pre-Conquest England to this day.

Rebekah Day-Wood, *Independent Scholar*

Firth, Matthew, *Remembering England: Cultural Memory in the Sagas of Icelanders* (Studies in Medieval History and Culture), New York, Routledge, 2025; hardback; pp. 268; 13 b/w illustrations; RRP AU$305.00; ISBN 9781032501253.

Based upon its author's doctoral dissertation, this relatively short book focusing on how England is portrayed in the Sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*) covers a remarkable range of topics relating to them, England in the Viking period, saga age Iceland (here approximately 870–1050), and the Icelandic age of saga writing (*c.* 1220–*c.* 1320). Somewhat typically, therefore, it is a contribution to both saga literary criticism and to Viking Age and later medieval history.

The 'Introduction' states that 'This study proposes methodological approaches to the historical analysis of saga literature, informed by theories of cultural memory, intertextuality, and cultural exchange' (p. 1). This distinguishes it from the most extensive previous study of England in the sagas, Magnús Fjalldal's *Anglo-Saxon England in Icelandic Medieval Texts* (University of Toronto Press, 2006). Matthew Firth is somewhat unduly dismissive of the earlier work, which provides some insightful saga analysis, and whose conclusion—that for thirteenth-century Icelanders, Viking-age England was something of a fantasy land—has similarities to his own. But he undoubtedly provides a considerably more sophisticated and in-depth study of the subject as it relates to the Íslendingasögur. Unlike Fjalldal, he does not consider other saga genres in detail. He brings to his analysis a detailed consideration of critical memory theory as it has developed in recent decades, thoroughly exploring explicit and implicit intertextuality to reveal how and why thirteenth-century Icelanders remembered Viking-age England. He stresses that though saga authors thought of themselves as presenting history, they were writing for their contemporaries, and their work was intended to serve the expectations and needs of that audience.

Though other sagas are considered, the focus is on three of the so-called *skáldsögur,* a subset of the Íslendingasógur that deals with the lives and verse compositions of saga-age Icelandic poets, *skálds*, masters of intricate verse forms which could inter alia be employed to win fame and fortune by composing praise poems for kings and other rulers in the Norse world. According to the saga narratives, the eponymous central figures of *Bjarnar saga Hitdœlakappa*, *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, and *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* all visited royal courts in England, composed verses to honour kings ruling in that country, and performed valuable services for English monarchs. Firth devotes a chapter to each of these sagas, examining in detail their English episodes and what they tell us about how thirteenth-century Iceland remembered them. He detects both significant similarities and noteworthy differences among them, exploring what

the significance of generally benevolent English kings might be for Icelanders in the thirteenth century, who had reason not always to look on Norwegian kings favourably. Considering the historical aspect, he concludes that 'The Íslendingasögur cannot alone illuminate English history. Rather, English history illuminates those passages of the texts that are set in England, demonstrating both the knowledge and the ignorance present in Icelandic cultural memory of events in the region' (p. 198).

Firth demonstrates both wide-ranging and in-depth research activity here, exploring numerous matters on which leading scholars have contended and evaluating their contributions to the debate in making his own. For example, in 'Saga Age England' there is an extended discussion of whether Old English and Old Norse were mutually intelligible, as *Gunnlaugs saga* claims. In the chapter on *Egils saga,* there is a closely argued discussion of whether the saga's Vinheiðr battle can be equated with the one commemorated in the Old English poem 'The Battle of Brunanburh', and whether the Yryc recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as reigning in York was the same man as the Eiríkr Blóðøx whom Egill visits at York in the saga.

A great deal is encompassed in a short space in this book. That it is intended for the historian as well as the saga scholar is signalled by the preliminary matter, which includes a 'Chronology of the Saga Age' and four maps, as well as a listing of four Anglo-Saxon coin photos that appear through the text—surviving coins, it is suggested, having a mnemonic role in forming the cultural memory of England for later Icelandic generations. The 246 pages that follow include some 40 pages of end-of-chapter notes, mainly but not exclusively bibliographical, and an 18-page bibliography reflecting very wide reading.

Unsurprisingly, in a work based on a doctoral thesis, this book is often tendentious, critically presenting and assessing the views of other scholars. Its readings of the saga texts are almost unfailingly interesting and insightful (though one would have to question the statement on page 122 that 'Hallfreðr and Kormákr fail to win permission for their desired marriages and are forced from Iceland's shores', and it seems at least an open question whether his servant *accidentally* killed Earl Hákon in Óláfs *saga Tryggvasonar*, as stated on pages 161 and 170). It is probably a book for the experienced scholar rather than the newcomer to saga or history studies, and its style is not always unchallenging. There is some awkward expression that can make the argument difficult to follow, and rather ungrammatical or illogical uses of 'as such' (for example, on pp. 134, 147, 189) in developing arguments. But serious scholars of the Íslendingasögur, and especially the *skáldsögur*, will need this book. While professional historians of Anglo-Saxon England today are generally aware of the need to treat Icelandic saga evidence with extreme caution, medieval historians will find the analysis of how memories of events in England during the Viking Age manifested themselves in the cultural memory of a medieval society geographically distant several centuries later to be rewarding.

John Kennedy, *Charles Sturt University*

Flannery, Kristie Patricia, *Piracy and the Making of the Spanish Pacific World*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024; hardback; pp. 296; 9 b/w illustrations, 3 maps, 2 tables; RRP US$50.00; ISBN 9781512825749.

Piracy and the Making of the Spanish Pacific World is an exhaustively researched, highly readable, and compellingly argued account of the many Indigenous people who supported the imperial Spanish Philippines. Focusing on the hybrid forces formed against waves of maritime predation from the colony's enemies, Kristie Flannery challenges popular narratives through those 'whose actions fail to fulfil modern, nationalist ideals of the rebellious anti-colonial Filipino subject' (p. 2). She presents an imperial society 'formed […] from below' (p. 4), whose singular resilience emerged not solely through violent coercion, Catholic mission, or economic reform, but also the galvanising, unifying effects of maritime violence.

While modern scholars might dispute the label, Spanish colonial authorities (and the people who experienced maritime attacks) grouped the massive Chinese fleets which boomed in the early–mid-seventeenth-century Ming–Qing transition, the troops of Muslim raiders (*moros*) attacking from the southern Philippines and northern Indonesia, and the combined forces of the British Royal Navy and East India Company who occupied Manila in 1762 under the joint banner of 'pirates', and so rhetorically invoked a parallel response tinted with holy war (pp. 5, 97–99). These waves of maritime predation encouraged the colonial government to form agreements with Indigenous Filipinos, Chinese migrant communities, and sovereign Asian states as they negotiated and renegotiated 'the colonial bargain'; in so doing, this predation shaped an intertwined history of ethnic and religious groups in the region (p. 6).

The British would hardly accept being called 'pirates', but in Chapters 3 and 4, Flannery makes convincing arguments both for their piratic behaviour in 1762 and how structures and ideologies reacting to *moro* and Chinese raiding powerfully influenced the course of the British-initiated conflict. This profoundly detailed account of a relatively short period may be viewed as the core of the book, framed by the legacies of previous waves (Chapters 1, 2) and informing Spanish imperial reconstruction (Chapter 5). Here, in my opinion, Flannery makes her most distinctive (and provocative) contribution to the historical narrative.

'The deeply rooted tradition of fighting sea-robbers', Flannery writes, 'meant that every town in the Philippines was "a sleeping army"' (p. 132). British forces expected the Indigenous Filipinos to welcome their invasion enthusiastically, and indeed some did—particularly some Chinese merchants in Manila—but overall, they met opposition. Soon, they participated in a three-way war between a grassroots Indigenous rebellion (fighting to overthrow both 'corrupt' Indigenous-Spanish elites and the anti-Catholic maritime aggressors, though they later allied with them) and a polyglot loyalist army of Indigenous (the vast majority), Spanish, Mexican, Chinese, *mestizo*, and defected British imperial soldiers, funded by 1.5 million pesos sent from Spain to combat the *moro*s, supplied and armed by

Catholic priests and friars (who overwhelmingly rejected both British and rebels), and accordingly calling themselves holy warriors.

In Chapter 4's pioneering study of the latter, Flannery shows that an overlapping matrix of material rewards, threatened or actual violence, Catholic piety, personal feelings of connection to Spanish royalty, and anti-piracy politics became the powerhouse of this loyalist army (pp. 142–53). Though they 'have been excised from public space and public memory', their defeat of both the British and the rebels in 1762–64 'laid the foundation for another one and a half centuries of Spanish rule in the islands' (p. 132). Chapter 5 follows the end of the war, viewing reconstruction through the waves of forced expulsions directed at Chinese migrants, whose real and imagined disloyalty—to the extent of displacing the British invaders 'in the theatre of public memory' (p. 177)—led to aggressive measures.

This book is engaging, packed with arresting anecdotes and incisive connections. Its archival basis is exceptional in both depth and breadth, surveying records of 'imperial Spain's transoceanic bureaucracy' in Spain, Mexico, the UK, the USA, and the Philippines (pp. 13–14). Reading 'along' as well as 'against the grain' (p. 61), Flannery treats her sources with both sensitivity and probing critique. Individual moments like the mass killing recorded by Sangley stonemason Juan Ynbin (p. 75), the Manila anti-*moro* collections of 1751 and 1754 (pp. 90–92), the British-perpetrated looting, rape, and summary violence in Manila (pp. 104–105), or the complete lack of evidence for disloyalty or apostasy among the expelled Chinese in Pampanga (pp. 185–86) offer piercing and often painful insight into individual Filipinos' connections to broader movement. The book provides sufficient context to be accessible to non-area specialists, and critical insights into pre-colonial Filipino maritime and military practices (see pp. 8, 26, 43, 54–55) powerfully illuminate the unique conditions that shaped Spanish colonial policy. The fascinating, convoluted diplomatic and religious negotiations surrounding the erstwhile Sultan of Sulu Muhammad Azim ud-Din provide a welcome throughline between diverse chapters (pp. 16, 21, 35–42, 87, 108, 151–52).

There are a few places where Flannery's analysis or structure could be improved. Her stated intention to provide a chronological account beginning with *moro* piracy (p. 16) conflicts with the bulk of her analysis of that wave being based in the 1730s–50s: this is far later than the Chinese piracy discussed next (though half that chapter similarly concerns the (post-piratic) mid-eighteenth century, pp. 80–94), and only slightly removed from the British invasion. Rather than overlapping waves across centuries, Flannery's best-attested exchanges played out almost simultaneously. Her excellent account of how anti-Muslim rhetoric and terminology transferred from Spain's Reconquista to the Americas and then the Philippines (pp. 22–27), and global survey of Spanish possessions subjected to slave-raiding (p. 52) surprisingly ignore the contemporaneous conflicts between Spain and the Islamicate Maghreb, which featured widespread maritime predation, Spanish occupation of Maghrebi port cities, and the forced movement

of hundreds of thousands of captives on both sides (see Daniel Hershenzon, *The Captive Sea: Slavery, Communication, and Commerce in Early Modern Spain and the Mediterranean* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018)). Maghreb-based corsairs—the most proximate and powerful 'pirates' to which metropolitan Spain was exposed—were surely a crucial imaginative backdrop to Spanish-Filipino elites, and a reference to 'an ambassador of Tunisia' who converted to Christianity (p. 38) shows the connection was made. A more quotidian error is the almost word-for-word repeated explanation of the *barangay* on pages 8 and 26. These minor points, however, hardly detract from this book's substantial value.

Piracy and the Making of the Spanish Pacific World will be of great interest to historians and students of the Spanish Philippines in its imperial context, Indigenous–colonial relations, maritime predation, relations between religion and militarism in the Spanish empire, the Chinese diaspora in South-East Asia, and the Pacific theatre of the Seven Years War.

Nat Cutter, *The University of Melbourne*

Gerrits, G. H., trans., *The Sisterhood of Master Geert's House, Deventer: The Lives and Spirituality of the Sisters, c.1390–c.1460* (Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts, 33), Turnhout, Brepols, 2024; hardback; pp. 352; 1 b/w, 3 colour illustrations; RRP £105.00; ISBN 9782503602493.

This book is a gift, enabling readers to penetrate the world of religious women in Western Europe at the end of the Middle Ages. Anonymously compiled between 1460 and 1470, the *Sisterbook* presents the *vitae* of sixty-four women translated from Middle Dutch. Each of these women died between 1398 and 1456 and lived in Deventer in a house established by Geert Grote (d. 1374), a well-known figure often regarded as the founder of the Modern Devotion. The anglophone reader has the benefit of recent important studies by Regnerus Post and John van Engen. At the same time, this labour of love by Gerrit Gerrits opens the door to this fascinating world ever more widely.

Before plunging into the sixty-four *vitae*, the reader is treated to a lengthy but important 'Introduction' (pp. 13–76). Here, the neophyte encounters expert commentary on the nature, extent, and history of Geert's house. Notably, the *Sisterbook* was created by, about, and for the sisters, serving as a source of edification while preserving memory. We learn that the sisters were not Beguines. Pierre d'Ailly provided a portable altar to facilitate daily Mass. A papal interdict between 1425 and 1432 proved disruptive to their religious life. Calvinism exerted a negative influence throughout the sixteenth century, though Geert's house lasted only until 1599. There are important prosopographical details (pp. 30–34). The average age of sisters joining was fifteen. They wore distinctive garments, distinguishing them from general society, nuns, and Beguines. Their primary beverage was beer, and there was a general aversion to eating vegetables. Some sisters helped to establish new houses, and in two instances, Beguinages were transformed into Sister Houses. The sisters were admonished to avoid heresy,

thus the *canonica monitione* issued against Beguines by the Council of Vienna in 1311–12. The Sister Houses also frowned upon mysticism.

We are introduced to daily life, but are not told how the oral histories or memories were collected. Unfortunately, the *vitae* reveal little historical information. The *vitae* are neither hagiographical—though there are hagiographical tendencies—nor strictly biographical. The editor notes that three-quarters of the extant Middle Dutch texts are of a religious nature, with most originating from the Modern Devotion (p. 9). The *Sisterbook* of Geert's house is filled with biblical vocabulary. Gerrits consulted the manuscript of the *Sisterbook* along with the critical edition published in 1919 by Dirk de Man.

A careful reading of Gerrits's erudite 'Introduction' is amply rewarding. Rich detail is present in the *vitae*, which is both illuminating and disturbing. The incipit immerses the reader in the lives of the sisters, who are likened to candles on candlesticks, providing light to the house (pp. 81, 83, 141, 204). Emotion is evident. Surprisingly, Gese Broekelants refers to another sister as a Beguine (p. 88). Some sisters eagerly heard Mass (pp. 110, 223, 273). Their quotidian activities were expressions of piety. They achieved uncommon knowledge of Scripture. They took informal vows similar to those of religious: purity, obedience, and the absence of personal property. The sisters, some of whom lived fifty years in Geert's house, went to great lengths to avoid every 'obstacle and hindrance to the inflowing of the Holy Spirit' (p. 84).

The *Sisterbook* must be read and understood within the history of the medieval spiritual life. From the time of Pseudo-Dionysius, this consisted of three stages: purgation, illumination, and union. There is little evidence that the sisters in Geert's house in Deventer progressed beyond the purgation stage. Pestilence was considered a gift (p. 85), and silence a virtue (pp. 115, 140, 152, 172, 181, 214, 253, 256, 267, 295, 311) that sometimes persisted for days at a time. Many chose to wear the poorest quality, dirtiest, or least attractive clothes. Others preferred the most wretched diet: Fenne vanden Gronde subsisted on dry bread (p. 110), as did Johan van Dusseldorp (p. 228); Griete van Nijenbeeke found a cooked mouse in her dish but took little note (p. 125). Sometimes eight or ten sisters shared a single spoon because they did not have one of their own (p. 151). Purgation indeed.

At meals, some sat on the floor to eat (pp. 180, 176–77), others practised sleep deprivation (p. 165), and some requested they be beaten or flogged themselves (pp. 176, 279, 283, 294, 299, 301). They embraced pain as the means to thorough purgation. Resistance to natural desire was encouraged. Eefce Neghels knew no man by sight (p. 130), and the sisters tried hard not to look at anyone. The more pious undertook the heaviest work, labouring with the worst tools (p. 140). They pursued penitence and humility. Alijt ten Sande refused to warm herself, believing the cold was conducive to spirituality (p. 199). Engagement with purgation caused some to cough blood (pp. 179, 198, 214). Laughter was discouraged. Fenne Mensen 'was always up to her neck in heavy and dirty tasks' (p. 218). Some dressed so poorly they resembled scarecrows (p. 250), and purgation caused others

to almost cease to be human (p. 118). Relaxation was avoided, and mortification was pursued. Some families tried to abduct loved ones (pp. 153, 177). Suffering was extolled. Excessive asceticism yielded spiritual growth. Friends and family were seen as impediments to spiritual progress. Only total self-denial permitted Christ to enter. Mette van Delden declared she would rather be smacked on the chin than hear a yawn (p. 289). Some were slapped in the face, others compelled to eat from dishes on the floor where the cat dined (pp. 276–77). Whatever was enjoyed and produced pleasure was eliminated. This included the pulling up of a tree, root and all, and throwing it into the Ijssel River (p. 311), and Jutte von Ahaus was ordered to drown both her lap dogs before permission to join the sisters was granted.

Illumination and union did not occur in Geert's house. Instead, purgation consumed the sisters. Some suffered from mental illness (pp. 132–33), while others appear to have engaged in false humility, perhaps succumbing to the sin of pride. Still others may have participated in contests of spirituality, trying to outdo one another and surpass previous feats of purgation. Stijne Zuetelincks even 'nailed herself' to the cross of penitence (p. 242). They lived well by hiding themselves well, fulfilling Ovid's observation (p. 269). We should be grateful to the anonymous compiler of the *Sisterbook* and to G. H. Gerrits for bringing the sisters of Deventer to our attention.

Thomas A. Fudge, *University of New England*

Goffe, Tao Leigh, *Dark Laboratory: On Columbus, the Caribbean, and the Origins of the Climate Crisis*, New York, Doubleday Books, 2025; hardback; pp. 384; RRP US$45.00; ISBN 9780241628553.

In the 'Introduction' to her new book, Tao Leigh Goffe recalls sitting in a graduate seminar taught by the former prime minister of the United Kingdom, Tony Blair, where the 1970s were celebrated as the genesis of globalisation. Her professor, the teaching assistant, and fellow students celebrated the era 'as a booming period of economic and technological growth that brought the four corners of the earth together like never before'—she writes—'I thought of the violence of the modern world wrought by Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Caribbean carrying the cross. Faith and globalisation. Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe were all joined across the chain of islands where Indigenous peoples were dispossessed and murdered […] Was this not globalization?' (p. xxiv). *Dark Laboratory: On Columbus, the Caribbean, and the Origins of the Climate Crisis* might be read as a response to this provocation. It traces the origins of the present climate crisis to the navigator's first voyage to the Caribbean in 1492 and the waves of European imperial expansion in the Atlantic and the wider world that it unleashed. Written for a popular audience, this is a highly readable and engaging contribution to the environmental humanities.

Dark Laboratory considers the historical and persistent entanglement of environmental destruction, Indigenous dispossession, the exploitation of enslaved

and coerced labour, and the formation of racial hierarchies. Building bridges between labour and climate historiographies, Goffe demonstrates that these interconnected processes cannot be understood in isolation from one another. The study is mindful of the profoundly unequal impacts of rising ocean levels and other contemporary climate-related disasters. It locates the roots of this injustice in deep histories of racial capitalism, colonialism, and colonial difference. The book's nine chapters are organised thematically, and in each, the author travels fluidly between temporalities, moving between the present and the past. As a historian, I am more comfortable with a more disciplined, chronological ordering of information. However, as I moved deeper into the book, I came to appreciate Goffe's method of juxtaposing evidence of environmental crimes and multi-species survival stories from different places and eras to reveal continuities and echoes. Goffe draws on an expansive archive. Reflecting the author's training as a literary scholar and a historian, the book engages with the writings of pan-American Black intellectuals and artists, including Édouard Glissant and James Baldwin, the imprisoned poet George Jackson, and Jamaican reggae singers and songwriters like Peter Tosh. Goffe also speaks to the Caribbean and the natural world imagined by Ian Fleming, the British novelist and spy who created the James Bond universe. The book also analyses the writings of scientists, drawing attention to the hidden racism embedded in Western studies of the natural world. Goffe thoughtfully brings these texts and these worlds of science and critical theory into conversation.

There is a lot of the author in the book as well. Embracing autoethnography, Goffe weaves her own family history into the larger narrative, reflecting on the transoceanic life of her Jamaican-born Chinese grandfather who migrated to Hong Kong, and her own experiences as a migrant of mixed African Asian ancestry with transregional kinship networks. Reflections on personal experiences and family histories shed light on the vast networks of displacement and connection that the British Empire established between the Atlantic and Pacific worlds.

The book's central hypothesis is that, from the late fifteenth century to the present, the Caribbean has served as a laboratory for capitalists and agents of empire, a controlled space for experiments aimed at developing new technologies of power and profit. Goffe develops this thesis across *Dark Laboratory*'s nine chapters. Chapter 7, for example, considers a nineteenth-century experiment in bioengineering that saw a Jamaican sugar plantation–owner intentionally import the Calcutta mongoose into the island, anticipating that this South Asian mammal might destroy the rats that were eating cane (and thus his profits) in the field. This colonial project disastrously failed, as did so many others, Goffe discusses. The mongoose thrived in its new island habitat. Instead of killing the rats, the mongoose caused a 'mass extinction' of native island flora and fauna, including ground-nesting birds (p. 207). The idea of the Caribbean as a laboratory has deep roots in interdisciplinary Caribbean and Latin American Studies. Walter Mignolo theorised that Renaissance Latin America became a laboratory for modernity.

Susan Reverby exposed how men imprisoned in Guatemala became a public health testing ground for horrific United States Government–backed syphilis experiments in the 1940s. Greg Grandin demonstrated how United States government agencies made Central America a workshop for testing and refining their Cold War counterinsurgency measures. In the 1980s and 1990s, Chicago School economists used Chile under Pinochet as a laboratory for neoliberal policies.

Yet Goffe shows that Caribbean life worlds were also sites for experiments in developing knowledges and practices that actively undermined empire and capitalism or made it possible to survive and thrive in a dying world. Enslaved people who fled plantations and formed maroon communities in high-altitude zones experimented with how to live 'with little'. Goffe emphasises that we can learn from these long-dead ancestors by recovering fragments of their resistance in colonial archives, and from the learnings their living descendants preserve and protect. The more-than-human world also offers survival strategies. Even the Calcutta mongoose embodies lessons in resilience—as a species that collectively breastfeeds and raises their young, it offers 'lessons in collective care, nurturing, and communal nourishment when we contend with climate precarity' (p. 213).

The book's main limitation is its sparse use of footnotes. Popular presses often impose limited notes; however, these hinder readers who want to delve deeper into the rich examples that Goffe examines and trace the lineage of the ideas that the book develops.

Kristie Patricia Flannery, *Australian Catholic University*

Grabowski, Antoni, *The Craft of History: Turning History into a Discipline in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centur*ies (Knowledge, Scholarship, and Science in the Middle Ages, 4), Turnhout, Brepols, 2025; hardback; pp. 298; RRP €100.00; ISBN 9782503611044.

In this book, Antoni Grabowski draws on the writings of twelfth- and thirteenth-century historians in a historiographical study that examines the evolution of history from an auxiliary discipline to theology and law to a separate field. The works he focuses on are the anonymous *Status Imperii Iudaici*, the *Chronicle* of Hélinand of Froidmont, the *Chronicle* of Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, and Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum Historiale.* The anonymous *Status Imperii Iudaici* was a short chronicle about the history of the Jews up until the destruction of the Temple. The author is referred to as the 'compiler'. The works by the Cistercians Hélinand of Froidmont and Alberic of Trois-Fontaines were universal chronicles. Both demonstrated an awareness of the tools invented by theologians and lawyers, including the marking of sources and the establishment of truth. The final work, by Vincent of Beauvais, became a standard reference; it was a more simplified and less complex work that drew on the tools developed by Hélinand. History was written for a variety of reasons that are not covered here, as this book focuses on a specific approach found in certain chronicles. Each history discussed here contains a compilation of sources.

Students who studied law or theology at medieval universities were expected to learn sacred history or the historical background that informed legal judgements. Applied history was thus a featured part of their studies. Grabowski sets out to explore what tools were used to transform history into something equivalent to law and theology. It did not become part of the emerging university curriculum.

The works chosen here were marked by an interest in using some of the tools that had already been developed in the construction of scholarly texts in the already-mentioned disciplines. The writers were not the only authors who drew on these approaches; for example, Ralph de Diceto was also interested in these approaches. These were not just textual but also formal. There was an awareness of the complexities of page design, including marginalia. Curiously, the visual devices such as *signa* used by Diceto and others, including Matthew Paris, which were also related to these new approaches, are not referred to here. The works explored here, however, were more systematic and substantial in their use of these tools. Page design, as well as the shape and size of the parchment, influenced how a text appeared and how it was used. Indeed, M. B. Parkes has connected this new page design (*ordinatio*) to both academic life in Paris and to emerging preaching orders such as the Dominicans. Making books more searchable through the inclusion of chapter headings, headers, and other signs, such as the use of colours, made these texts more approachable for readers. Given the importance placed on how these books were marked, it does seem to me perverse that no images are provided to aid the current readers to see how this was done, nor clarification of what is meant here by the term 'mark'.

The book is organised into five chapters. The first examines changing approaches to compilation and how the four authors approached their sources. The second chapter is at the heart of the discussion, as it discusses the use of source marking both in theological works (from Bede to Peter Lombard) and legal collections (such as Gratian's *Decretum*). These had an impact on how the histories at the heart of this study were written. It is here that the lack of illustrations is most keenly felt. For all the clarity of writing, the visual image would have demonstrated the author's communication more effectively. As noted in the book, the 'Appendix' further expands on this chapter by providing additional examples of source marks from authors writing in various genres.

In the third chapter, Grabowski examines how these writers approached authorities. Hélinand and Alberic provided readers with an insight into the contributions various authorities had made, as well as the beginnings of a history of historiography. The fourth chapter explores terms such as *autor*, *auctor*, and *actor*. These are terms, together with 'compiler', that they use to describe themselves. In the final chapter, entitled 'The Truth is out There', Grabowski focuses particularly on the work of Alberic of Trois-Fontaines to discuss how 'truth' might be established. Here, he discusses what materials were included, the role of fiction, and the use of authority and careful reading. Peter Abelard and Hugh of Saint-Victor were also significant contributors to the construction of this chronicle.

One of the ideas that Grabowski presents is that Vincent of Beauvais's work marked a simplification and a retreat from the types of histories that Alberic and Hélinand produced. I would be interested in a more substantial discussion of this idea, fleshing out this point. I realise that this would probably change how this book was shaped, but it is a provocative idea that could be a fruitful one for further research. In conclusion, I would say that Grabowski has written an account that discusses topics of great interest, even as I occasionally disagreed or thought of different ways of framing the material.

Judith Collard, *The University of Melbourne*

Menini, Romain, and Luigi-Alberto **Sanchi**, *L'Antiquité selon Guillaume Budé. À l'école d'un humaniste érudit* (essais, 51), Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2025; paperback; pp. 256; 8 b/w illustrations; RRP €25.90; ISBN 9782251456584.

This book, awarded the Prix Zappas 2025 of the Association des Études Grecques, reinvents the Renaissance scholar Guillaume Budé (1467–1540) for our day, whilst situating his work in the intellectual and political environments of his own time. Published in the Belles Lettres 'essais' series, it lives up to the expectations of the essay genre. In it, information is at the service of ideas. Hence, the book does not attempt to rewrite David O. McNeil's *Guillaume Budé and Humanism in the Reign of Francis I* (Droz, 1975), absent from the 'Bibliographie'. However, Sanchi has elsewhere called it 'the best English introduction to Guillaume Budé' (*Oxford Bibliographies Online*, s.v. 'Budé'). Instead, *L'Antiquité selon Guillaume Budé* stems from recent advances in the francophone study of Budé's works and his role as a public humanist.

Romain Menini and Luigi-Alberto Sanchi do not just reinvent Budé, they heroise him. For them, he is '[l]e plus singulier des lettrés français de la première Renaissance' (p. 11) and a 'géant héroïque des lettres françaises' (riffing on Rabelais, another admirer) (p. 16). It is difficult not to follow them in this, such is the persuasive verve of their writing. His achievements were only the greater because he was, as he says in a letter written in Greek, 'a late starter, an autodidact, and bad at learning' (p. 22). The problem nowadays is that he wrote mainly in Latin and occasionally in Greek. He is hardly ever read and very little cited. His major works have not been translated, except for *De Asse*, which is included in the first volume of Sanchi's recent edition *De Asse et partibus eius / L'As et ses fractions, Livres I–II* (Droz, 2018). One of the enjoyable aspects of this book is getting glimpses of the newest discoveries that are extending the understanding of Budé's work: for example, the work now being done to track down Budé's manuscripts, printed books (some heavily annotated), and notebooks ('Dans l'atelier de l'humaniste: Budé parmi ses livres' (pp. 61–68), with 'Aperçu de la bibliothèque de Guillaume Budé' (pp. 191–213).

The book has three main parts: 'Saisir Protée: contours de l'encyclopédie budéene', 'Le philologue au travail: chemins de la recherche érudite', and

'Guillaume Budé, bâtisseur de la modernité française', each divided into further subsections. Recurring topics are encyclopedism, philology (thinking about and through words), multidisciplinarity, stylistic and generic variety, and cultural revolution. The three 'pièces maîtresses' on which Budé's fame largely rests need the most advocacy, as they are barely known today and formidable in their titles: *Annotationes in Pandectas*, *De Asse et partibus eius*, and *Commentarii linguae graecae*. They are briefly introduced in the first part (pp. 47–60) and occupy most of the second part (pp. 73–136).

Simply providing a short description of their main subjects does not significantly reveal their achievements and significance. *Annotationes in Pandectas* (1508) addresses one of the most significant works on Roman law, Justinian's *Digest,* and separates it from the Italian exposition that had become dominant in the Middle Ages. *De Asse et partibus eius* (1515) begins by addressing the difficulty of understanding how the ancient Romans expressed sums of money, particularly large ones, and solves some complex problems for the first time. It also ranges widely in other questions concerning Roman history and society. *Commentarii linguae graecae* (1529) is a sort of lexicon of Greek juridical terms and acts as a stimulus and 'apology' for the study of Greek. After their initial publications, Budé continued to work unceasingly on these projects. Revised and enlarged editions were issued, even after his death.

But what do these massive treatises really offer? To begin with, the riches of philology (see *De philologia*, 1532), which, broadly conceived, encompass philosophy, history, and literature. Budé's focus is primarily on the ancient world, up to and including the church fathers, but often shifts to the modern one: his works contain 'un volet politique très marqué' (p. 60); in *De Asse*, for example, he advocates renewing the formation of the French élites and digresses on the French kingdom's economic and international policy. To bring out these riches and show in just how many directions reading Budé can take us, in Part II, the authors offer a series of lively case studies that explore points arising in each of the three major works. These have much to offer both neo-Latinists and anyone interested in the French Renaissance.

Throughout the book, we, the readers, are invoked. For us, the authors have in mind two specific interrelated aims: they want to draw younger scholars to the study of Budé's works, and, by showing 'la merveilleuse complexité de la vision de l'Antiquité qui fut celle de l'humaniste', to encourage classicists to interrogate their own relationship to the Greco-Roman heritage (p. 11, with the concluding 'Ouverture: L'Antiquité selon Budé est-elle l'avenir des études anciennes?' (pp. 159–62). Humanist scholarship, however off-putting it may sound, *is* an engrossing field of study, and Menini and Sanchez have admirably succeeded in demonstrating that part of their argument. And it is nice to dream of a Budé-led renewal of ancient world studies.

Frances Muecke, *University of Sydney*

Mertens, Thom, *Spiritual Literature in the Late Medieval Low Countries: Essays by Thom Mertens*, ed. by John **Arblaster**, Patricia **Stoop**, Daniël **Ermens**, Veerle **Fraeters**, and Kees **Schepers** (Collected Essays in European Culture, 7), Turnhout, Brepols, 2024; hardback; pp. 472; 1 b/w illustration; RRP €120.00; ISBN 9782503581002.

Thom Mertens has long been a towering figure in the study of Middle Dutch spiritual literature—as the editors of this volume rightly point out, he often 'found himself in the vanguard of innovations' in the field over the course of his thirty-three-year career (p. 11). It is fitting, then, that his retirement should be marked with this impressive laudatory volume. Mertens's colleagues from the University of Antwerp have assembled a collection of fifteen of his most seminal essays, nine of which are translated here into English for the very first time.

The collection is divided conveniently into three thematic sections, each covering a distinct aspect of Mertens's scholarship. The first of these, 'Spiritual Literature in the Late Medieval Low Countries: An Overview', is aptly titled. Together, the three chapters included in this section serve as a valuable introduction to Middle Dutch spiritual literature in general, as well as to the vital analytical tools that Mertens himself pioneered. Chapter 1 was initially published as the introduction to Mertens's edited volume *Boeken voor de eeuwigheid* (Books for Eternity) (Prometheus, 1993), but here it functions as a practical overview of late medieval vernacular spiritual prose. Mertens attests to its great variety and sheer volume, as well as the diversity of its authors and readers, both religious and lay. Chapter 2, 'Mystical Culture and Literature in the Late Middle Ages', encourages readers to move beyond a strict definition of explicitly mystical literature and introduces the notion of a 'mystical culture' in which a wider range of texts are produced by cultures coloured by mystical teaching. This broader concept allows for the consideration of texts aimed to 'direct, curb, or even repress the mystical idea', and especially interesting is Mertens's demonstration of the strategic regulation of mystical texts in monastic settings (p. 84). Chapter 3, finally, is an effective demonstration of the vital role played by monasteries in the production of religious literature in the Low Countries.

The volume's second section, 'Middle Dutch Sermons', narrows the focus somewhat to sermon studies. It is a fitting centrepiece for the collection, given that this is an evolving domain of research effectively founded upon and shaped by Mertens's own scholarship. Opening the section is his influential 'The Middle Dutch Sermon: A Premature Synthesis'. First published in 2009, the essay provides an enormously effective introduction to the genre and works towards rescuing it from undeserved obscurity. Mertens examines the formal structure of these sermons with close attention, their thematic concerns, and the important delineation between sermons as written artefacts and as oral performances. The following chapters in this section then narrow the focus somewhat. Chapter 5 explores the role of formal *colloquies* (conferences) within the *Devotio Moderna* movement of religious reform, highlighting the importance of written codices

in the eventual evolution of these conferences from discourse into addresses. Chapter 7, meanwhile, examines the sermons of the famous fifteenth-century Dutch preacher Johannes Brugman and convincingly demonstrates that surviving sermons ultimately fail to capture the extent of his famous dynamism, eloquence, and verve. The highlight of this section, however, is Chapter 6, 'Ghostwriting Sisters'. Here, Mertens brilliantly subverts prior characterisations of the sermon as an entirely male genre, instead drawing attention to the crucial role of women in convents who wrote down and compiled sermon texts. It is a fascinating study, and one through which Mertens highlights the complex interplay between genders in the production of spiritual literature—he notes, for example, that these women frequently edited sermons under the implied persona of the preacher himself, writing in his name and with his authority in order to 'completely simulate a preaching situation'.

The final section of the collection is concerned primarily with issues of genre. The book's introductory chapter acknowledges that this section may initially appear somewhat disparate, with the five concluding essays being only tenuously linked. While this is true to an extent, it effectively showcases the immense diversity of Mertens's scholarship and his capacity to engage deeply with spiritual literature across the often-murky divides between genres. The essays in this section explore topics as wide-ranging as the interrelationship of reading and writing (Chapter 9), spiritual testaments (Chapter 11), mystical literary dialogue (Chapter 13), and even Middle Dutch song cycles (Chapter 12). They are all excellent, although it is challenging to sing their praises adequately in a review of this length. This reader was especially taken with Chapter 12, 'Consolation in Late Medieval Dutch Literature'. Consolatory literature is a famously complex and varied genre, but it is also an area of rapidly increasing scholarly interest. Mertens's essay is a significant contribution to this emerging field, offering a thoughtful and comprehensive overview of the genre's thematic concerns and development within a medieval Dutch context.

Overall, this volume may not break entirely new ground, but that is only because that ground has been decisively broken by Mertens already. It is wonderful to have a selection of his most important and innovative essays collated here in one convenient and beautifully produced volume. It is exciting to have his work showcased to a broader English-speaking readership, finally. As John van Engen rightly notes in his lovely tribute at the front of the book, this collection opens a 'new world' for scholars and lay readers alike (p. 41). Many of the texts examined here may indeed be 'Books for Eternity', but it is only thanks to the diligent efforts of scholars like Mertens that they can speak to us today. This is a fitting tribute to a formidable scholar, and a genuine pleasure for anyone interested in Middle Dutch literature or the history of spirituality more broadly.

Mitchell Thompson, *The University of Adelaide*

Mitchell, J. Allan, *Instrumentality: On Technical Objects and Orientation in the Later Middle Ages*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2024; pp. 160; 11 b/w illustrations; RRP US$108.00; ISBN 9781517917388.

J. Allan Mitchell's new book is a challenging and timely intervention. Drawing on comprehensive scholarship and underpinned by Mitchell's perceptive close reading, *Instrumentality* excavates the role of *instrumenta* in medieval thought to propose a critical instrumentality that counters the narrowly utilitarian instrumentalism that—especially when allied with transactionalism and neoliberalism—continues to sledge the humanities in plain sight. Its argument arcs towards the present in which universities find themselves, but it avoids any tinge of presentism by being firmly situated at the disciplinary intersection of manuscript studies, the history of medieval science, and the pedagogy of the medieval university. This is an original and insightful approach that maps a new area for research.

The book is structured with an 'Introduction' that lays out the argument, followed by three case studies taking up three aspects of *instrumenta philosophiae.* Chapter 1, 'Intelligent Objects', begins with the astrolabe and Geoffrey Chaucer's treatise on its 'expedient and banausic ends' (p. 20), but is alert to the instrument's 'speculative' as well as pragmatic uses (p. 21), its figuring of 'art, animacy, cognition, and embodiment' (p. 20). Mitchell points to the value of instruments formalised, by the twelfth century, in the *scientia ingeniorum* and then unwraps the poetics of instrument-making, which begins at least with Ptolemy and the practice of *organopoiia*. Technical objects—the astrolabe, navicula, the diagrams, tables, models and their hybrids—and the words for their parts and processes—Sacrobosco, John of Harlebeke, John of Lignière, Bartholomeus Anglicanus, the texts of pseudo-Māshā'allāh, among others—turn out 'reveal themselves to have a very large imaginative scope' (p. 32). This is the pivotal move in Mitchell's argument: to make visible the rhetoric of *instrumenta* and thus the capacity of instruments to create, rather than narrowly compute, knowledge. And it's this expanded idea of instrumentality that Mitchell offers as 'a check against a reflexive modern anti-instrumentality' (p. 42).

Chapter 2, 'Graphic Interfaces', begins with Chaucer's techno-poetical *House of Fame* and its sometimes-satirical distinction between book learning and physical (sublunary) experience. Mitchell argues that texts, instruments, graphic media, and mechanical modes are all part of an ensemble encompassed by instrumentality. Such diagrammatic figures 'are not inert marks, but rather transitive and intransitive objects, graphic figures with technical facilities that enable movement between domains, made to equip the medieval scientific imagination' (p. 46). This chapter then considers point, line, and chord as fundamental but dynamic elements moving across disciplines and situated in a rich textual environment: Ptolemy's *Almagest* in Gerald of Cremona's translation, Gerbert of Aurillac's *Geometria*, Richard of Wallingford's *Quadripartitium*, Hugh of St Victor's *Practical Geometry*, Roger Bacon's *De scientia experimentali*, and others. Within these texts—British Library, MS Harley 334, British Library,

MS Royal 15 B XIX, among others—Mitchell is especially attentive to their architextuality (Elaine Treharne), that is, how they *work* to represent, convey, and create knowledge.

Chapter 3, 'Learning Devices, or Instruments of Language and Literature', begins with John Gower shooting arrows in *Vox clamantis* to probe connections between poetry and philosophy, the arts and sciences. Instruments and the conceptual apparatus they generate—instrumentality—sit right at the heart of the scholarly curriculum of the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, as Mitchell demonstrates. This chapter proceeds chronologically and takes its lead from Hugh of St Victor's *Didascalicon*, 'totius philosophiae instrumenta sunt' (p. 72), to track Hugh's efforts to 'accommodate internal and external topics and disciplinary expertise, looking to construct a theory that knits them together' (p. 75) via *logos*.

Mitchell then extends his scrutiny of the changing liberal arts curriculum through Martianus Capella's *De nuptis Philologiae et Mercurii*, Thierry of Chartres's *Heptateuch*, Dominicus Gundissalinus's *De divisione philosophiae*, and John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon*. He is also careful to note the tradition of the language arts as identifiable disciplines, as seen in the work of tenth-century writers like Abû Nasr-Farabi, especially Farabi's *Enumeration of the Sciences*, which was made available through (as always) Latin translations by Gerald of Cremona and Gundissalinus. Words become *instrumenta*; cognition depends on language. As Mitchell puts it, for John of Salisbury, 'an instrumental view of a liberal education is a bulwark against a tawdry transactionalism' (p. 79).

Robert Grosseteste's *De artibus liberalibus*, Bonaventura's *De reductione artium ad theologiam* and Brunetto Latini's *Il Tesoretto* shape the context for Mitchell's reading of Robert Kilwardby's *De ortu scientiarum* and its account of the relationship between language and logic (*scientia scientiarum*). Two of Kilwardby's conclusions are particularly apposite: while the *possessio*/*usus* distinction recognises individual methods and concepts of, say, logic, nonetheless, logic remains 'an instrument for all and support for all' (p. 80). The second is a structural model to connect methodologically separate disciplines and subdisciplines. *Subalternatio* recognises the autonomy of subdisciplines but structures their relation to disciplines through descending pairs. 'The astrolabe and sphere are subalternate to geometry in the same way that astronomy is subalternate to geometry' (p. 80). The point here is that abstract concepts may be concretised within the stability of this structure. For Kilwardby, the 'speculative sciences are practical, and the practical sciences are speculative' (p. 80).

This chapter concludes with a section titled 'Mechanical Arts and the Invention of Literature', commenting that 'Didascalic writings that anatomize the arts are not just reporting on them; they are composed with them' (p. 86). Returning to Gower, this time his *Confessio Amantis*, Mitchell recognises that in Book 4 Gower argues that language is a learned craft and, in a moment of cool self-consciousness, figures that learning in the imagery of ploughing, the 'language of technology' (p. 87).

Mitchell achieves a great deal in this short, incisive, and lucid book: exploring a new research area, outlining some of its main directions, and developing a lexicon for its concepts and structures. He is particularly adept at *subalternatio*: transmission *across* science, codicology, and pedagogy without compromising disciplinary autonomy. Much is due to Mitchell's strategy of address: structure is supple but sustained; signposting is crisp; selection of topics from three large fields is rational and coherent. The writing is lucid and poised: there's no sign of what a colleague once called the 'anxiety of erudition'. So, when he turns to his 'Conclusion: Towards a Critical Instrumentality', we understand why 'Anti-instrumentality is not really a viable option' (p. 21). Such a position ignores not only our own disciplinary training but also the suasive insights of Mitchell's argument, grounded as it is in the *instrumenta* of scholarship, analysis, and close reading.

The 'critical' in critical instrumentality derives its heft from Mitchell's reading of the philosophy of work, beginning with Heidegger's analysis of the 'tool' (*Being and Time*) and Gilbert Simondon's *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* (Aubier and Montaigne, 1958) which sees the technicity as 'an integral part of the social fabric' (p. 93). The Frankfurt School made available a conceptual lexicon that situated the individual self as acted upon and disenfranchised by bureaucracy and managerialism. Stanley Fish was only one among many who have railed against the 'instrumental defence of the Humanities' (p. 94). Mitchell's important contribution here has been the reminder 'that the question has never been whether the liberal arts are instrumental, but in what ways' (p. 95). Enumerating those ways is one step in inventing (*inventio*, again) critical instrumentality, and Mitchell acknowledges the increasing spectrum of progressive approaches that rethink agency, usefulness, and transdisciplinary responses to generating new knowledge. There is no silver bullet here, no single solution that will decisively overturn the pervasiveness of sclerotic instrumentalism. Mitchell's challenge is 'a recognition that many fine instruments of logic, language, and literary analysis will continue to be *indispensable* in generating and sustaining positive social change' (p. 100).

Jenna Mead, *The University of Western Australia*

Sävborg, Daniel, ed., *Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries in Studies of the Viking Age* (The North Atlantic World, 4), Turnhout, Brepols, 2022; hardback; pp. 365; 1 b/w, 10 colour illustrations, 1 table, 1 map; RRP €90.00; ISBN 9782503592961.

Daniel Sävborg's collection offers a fresh approach to Viking Age enquiry through 'genuine interdisciplinarity' (p. 10). Scholars have long relied on a combination of fields to understand Norse culture and society, including history, literary studies, philology, archaeology, and religious studies (p. 9). Sävborg notes that while these disciplines are commonly represented in collective volumes, they are applied in a way that is more accurately defined as multidisciplinary. Multidisciplinary investigations are 'built up around questions' of the same kind (p. 10). Experts

contribute to a collective volume with an overarching historical question. This question is then answered from the perspective of the expert's discipline, which is usually related to a type of source material. The aim of Sävborg's collection, however, is to answer historical questions through true interdisciplinarity. This occurs when 'different disciplines are combined to achieve synthetic knowledge' (p. 10).

Sävborg's introductory chapter, 'Interdisciplinarity in Viking Age Studies. An Introduction', provides a comprehensive and helpful definition of interdisciplinarity as well as outlining its benefits and limitations. Interdisciplinary approaches to Viking studies are highly controversial due to concerns around the source material. The validity and value of sagas are, for example, contested by some scholars who see them as 'literary motifs' (p. 22). The rejection of sagas as a historical source, however, inhibits valuable connections between them and other sources, such as archaeological finds or religious texts. This problem is directly addressed in this volume with the eleven contributors combining Old Norse texts with other disciplines.

Leszek Gardeła's essay examines Old Norse texts with burial sites and Viking Age iconography to analyse a topic that continues to capture the imagination of scholars and the general reader: female warriors. It is well recognised that women played distinct and prominent positions in Norse society. Gardeła advances this research by investigating the relationship between women and the sword. This analysis allows the author to present new and astute insights that extend beyond the shield-maiden archetype. When inquiring into the Norwegian grave at Nordre Kjølen, Gardeła focuses on the physical position of the deceased and their accompanying sword. Traditional examinations immediately classify such sites as female warrior burials. Gardeła posits this is an oversimplification that inhibits more complex interpretations about the woman and her place in society from emerging. Such an interpretation appears when Gardeła investigates Old Norse texts that describe women using swords. According to these sources, women not only used weapons in physical combat, but also to defend themselves or their property, to take revenge on someone, or to make a statement of power and strength (p. 154). From this, Gardeła asserts that female swords promulgated notions of empowerment. This interdisciplinary approach therefore provides a nuanced understanding of Viking women and their weapons, as well as how this relationship informed and reflected their identities, roles in society, and how they were memorialised. These conclusions will be useful not only for scholars of this period but also for historians of gender.

Klas Wikström af Edholm's contribution combines archaeological evidence with Norse sagas and the history of religion to examine human sacrifices in late Iron Age Scandinavia. Edholm asserts interdisciplinarity is essential to studies of human sacrifice because both disciplines are necessary for 'the interpretation of each other's source material' (p. 185). Archaeological evidence, for example, establishes that a violent death, sacrifice, or ritual killing has occurred. The

intention behind the killing is, however, more difficult to distinguish, define, and categorise. Sacrifice implies something holy, sacred, and assumes divine receipt. A ritual killing, on the other hand (such as a human grave gift), is 'ritualised, but is not a sacrifice' (p. 189). The interpretation of archaeological finds is therefore dependent on written sources. Textual sources provide historians with a rich dataset of sacrificial killings. Old Norse texts discuss the ritual killing of captive enemies, the deployment of the 'blood-eagle' to signify a decisive and violent defeat, self-sacrifice after defeat in battle, and even corpse-sacrifice. When combined with the archaeological evidence, it becomes clear that ritual sacrifice was a highly nuanced practice with 'chronological and regional variations' (p. 207). Edholm's essay provides significant insight into Norse religion and society, while adding credence to the (often contentious) argument that human sacrifice was indeed practised throughout the Viking Age.

Viking Age ritual is also at the forefront of Olof Sundqvist's essay, which investigates rites of pre-Christian royal inauguration ceremonies, also known as the erfi-feast. Sundqvist relies on Old Norse prose, poems, runes, archaeological finds, and placenames to outline the stylised nature of the feast and reveals the 'ritual setting' in which the new ruler had to confirm their legitimacy through 'religious, mythic and genealogical knowledge' (p. 219). Sundqvist emphasises the likelihood that medieval customs evolved from these pre-Christian, Viking rituals and societies.

If stylised feasts, sword-wielding women, and ritual human sacrifice didn't pique your interest, this volume also contains essays on Norse vessels, Varangian princes, and the concept of home. These essays follow the methodological scope of the volume by combining Norse texts with other historical evidence, including archaeology, toponomy, non-Norse literature, iconography, genealogy, the history of religion, ship burials, and even reconstruction. The representation of a vast array of disciplines enables individual authors to provide significant insights into the complexities of Norse culture, religion, and society. Both the individual essays (with their distinct methodological approaches) and the collection as a whole (in which an array of experts, as well as chronological and geographical interests, are represented) achieve Sävborg's goal of interdisciplinarity and successfully promote the value of interdisciplinarity in Norse studies. For these reasons, this book is not only recommended to historians of the Viking Age, but to scholars interested in different methodological approaches to historical enquiry. This collection would also be invaluable to tertiary (and perhaps even secondary) educators whose curriculum features Vikings.

Grace Waye-Harris, *The University of Adelaide*

Sonne de Torrens, Harriet M., *Crusader Rhetoric and the Infancy Cycles on Medieval Baptismal Fonts in the Baltic Region* (Europa Sacra, 30), Turnhout, Brepols, 2024; hardback; pp. 492; 448 colour illustrations, 8 tables, 7 maps; RRP €100.00; ISBN 9782503599380.

This volume examines baptismal fonts found throughout northern Europe from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, with particular focus on Scandinavia—specifically Denmark and southern Sweden (Gotland). It is a meticulously compiled work featuring a large collection of 448 coloured photographs, 8 maps, and an extensive appendix of tables (Appendix 1) that spans 49 pages. It is drawn from a larger database of baptismal fonts, the Baptisteria Sacra Index: An Iconographical Index of Baptismal Fonts, referred to throughout the volume as BSI, a comprehensive database housed at the University of Toronto. The BSI aims to record all known fonts from the Early Christian period to the seventeenth century, with over twenty-five thousand fonts recorded, including documentation of their churches, inscriptions, and iconography. From this larger corpus, the current work focuses specifically on the Infantia Christi Corpus, referred to throughout the volume as ICC. The BSI identified 150 fonts with infancy themes, of which 147 yielded readable images. While the survey encompassed pan-European fonts, the majority of those featuring infancy themes were found to have originated in Skåne (Scania), a province of medieval Denmark, and the island of Gotland. One hundred and twenty-four were produced in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries during the rule of the Valdemarian dynasty. Twenty-three came from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The remainder were found in German-affiliated regions, in Italy, Spain, Britain, and France. Most fonts were designed exclusively for infant baptism. However, those found in Castile-León were also intended for adults, reflecting the importance of adult baptism during Spain's aggressive Christianisation campaigns. This includes the forced baptism of adults, as depicted on one font in Valcobero—a practice that parallels tactics used during the Baltic Crusades. These northern crusades involved the forced Christianisation of pagan Baltic, Finnish, and West Slavic populations with papal sanction. These campaigns employed crusader rhetoric and theology to legitimise their actions, and as such, Harriet Sonne de Torrens argues that infancy iconography gained particular relevance during this crusading period.

The infancy programmes represented were, however, a distinctive departure from typical Romanesque fonts, which generally depicted a broader range of Christological events. These fonts were predominantly found in parish churches, although some also appeared in monasteries or cathedrals. Most fonts were carved from sedimentary stones, particularly sandstone or limestone. Bronze fonts also existed, though these were primarily from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, reflecting the period's expanding bronze and bell-making industries. The fonts were also subject to destruction and loss due to various factors over subsequent centuries. Natural disasters such as flooding caused significant losses, while the religious upheavals accompanying the rise of Protestantism and Lutheranism led

to the deliberate destruction or removal of many baptismal fonts throughout the region.

The book is organised into two parts, each containing three chapters. Part I, 'The Historical and Political Context', examines the economic, political, and artistic connections that gave rise to the northern stone industry responsible for producing these baptismal fonts. Part II, 'The Iconography, Liturgy and Crusades', focuses on the symbolic and religious dimensions of the fonts. Sonne de Torrens emphasises the international ties revealed through these fonts, connecting the workshops active in Denmark and Gotland with other Continental groupings and identifying common stylistic and iconographic trends across regions. The presence of the Cistercians in this region was also significant to this artistic development, as was the archbishopric of Lund itself. Archbishop Eskil Thrugotsen was closely connected to Bernard of Clairvaux, whose sermon at Vézelay in 1146 convinced many, including Louis VII of France, to join the Second Crusade. This network of intellectual and religious influence extended further through several archbishops of Lund, including Absalon Hvide and Anders Sunesen, who had studied in Paris and were well-versed in the writings of Hugh of St Victor and Bernard of Clairvaux. These connections facilitated the reinforcement of Roman Catholic liturgy and standardised practices in Lund that proved influential to the region's artistic production.

The second part of this study focuses particularly on the imagery found on these baptismal fonts. Sonne de Torrens explores how these depictions relate to the liturgy of the Mass during the Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany seasons. She undertakes an iconographical analysis of scenes and motifs ornamenting these fonts, demonstrating corresponding models on the Continent, as well as parallel compositions found in various locations, including wall murals, altars, and exterior sculptures. Beyond the central infancy scenes, these fonts featured a range of saints—from crusader and warrior saints, such as St George and St Eustace, to those associated with the Christmas feast, including St Stephen and St Thomas Becket, as well as royal saints like St Olaf and St Canute Lavard. Additional imagery included representations of the Holy Sepulchre and pilgrims, among other motifs employed during this time of forcible conversion.

The chapters are sometimes disjointed, as the author tries to combine largely disparate elements. The monograph's origins as a catalogue are sometimes very evident, as is her arguably irritating use of the abbreviations ICC and BSI throughout, presumably reflecting this larger project. The photographs, though generous, are small and crowded into ninety-eight pages. Given that this is not a complete collection, fewer, larger images would have been more satisfying. At the same time, the scholarship and wealth of material used are to be acknowledged, as is the ambitiousness and comprehensiveness of this interdisciplinary study.

Judith Collard, *The University of Melbourne*