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Review of Episcopal Culture in Late Anglo-Saxon England, by M.F. Giandrea

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Book Reviews

MARY FRANCES GIANDREA. *Episcopal Culture in Late Anglo-Saxon England.* Anglo-Saxon Studies 7. Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2007. Pp. xv+245. $85.00 (cloth).

This fine book treats the English episcopacy in the tenth and eleventh centuries, a period the author claims has not so much been neglected as read through the eyes of the Conquest. The paucity of reliable sources compounds this, so that scholars often look at works written in the Norman period, which often attempted to play down the Anglo-Saxon achievements in order to justify the Normanization of the English church. Mary Frances Giandrea has attempted to rectify the situation.

The book starts where all revisions must start, with previous scholarship. The author takes a sound approach, pointing out the shortcomings of previous works but not patronizing their authors. Instead of just citing medieval writers, she examines how their literary pretensions might have influenced their work and thus later understanding of the period. She also notes that this period presented insuperable problems for Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics, especially prelates facing deposition and Benedictine monks facing loss of land and reputation to rapacious Norman nobles and bishops. A period of fluctuating values does not provide the stable worldview necessary for the Anglo-Saxon clergy to record and judge an age. Giandrea well establishes the need for revisiting this topic and this period.

Note the title—this is not a history of Anglo-Saxon episcopate in its final decades but a study of the culture in which that episcopacy functioned. Giandrea breaks this into several parts, including *servitium regis* (duties owed to the king); cathedral culture, or how the bishops functioned in the sphere they dominated; pastoral care, or bishops at their best; and episcopal finances, or bishops at their worst.

Anglo-Saxon kings who had to worry about Vikings in the tenth century and Normans in the eleventh governed a country that they could not unite. Bishops functioned as petty monarchs in their diocese, so they supported royal government. Furthermore, the bishops almost all came from noble families and thus grew up appreciating the benefits of hierarchy. Bishops belonged to the king's *witan*, or advisory council; enforced the law where royal officials were not available; and became royal confidants. They played a significant role in uniting the country under royal rule.

In their home cathedrals, the bishops supported intellectual life. Giandrea calls them "singularly invaluable" (71) as barometers of the interests of literate men and women of the era because the records of the books that bishops ordered have survived and, in many

cases, the books themselves have survived. Any notion of Anglo-Saxon England as a backwater province dragged by the Normans into Europe's intellectual milieu falls by the wayside. Significantly, the bishops supported the writing of books in the vernacular, something their Norman successors would mostly repudiate.

The bishops' central responsibility was the pastoral care of the people, which always included the personal element of how the faithful responded to the bishop. Since this is unknown because the people did not record their views, Giandrea offers a thorough analysis of canon law texts, liturgical documents, monastic rules (since several bishops were Benedictines), and *vitae sanctorum*, which provide little biography but do make clear what saintly bishops were expected to be.

Giandrea provides a balanced treatment of episcopal wealth, showing its necessity for the cost of the church and the cultivation of cathedral lands but also for maintaining the bishop's status in the *witan*. She does much on endowments, especially from wealthy laypersons demanding prayers for their souls after their demise. In a humorous aside, she notes that the clergy rejoiced when the king appointed a wealthy bishop upon whose largesse they could count.

Well constructed, well argued, well referenced, and with a detailed appendix surveying episcopal holdings, this is a sound and welcome study. But, *caveat lector!* The scarcity of written sources has forced Giandrea to work heavily those that do survive, to which she adds whatever other evidence, such as archaeology, may be available. To establish a historical trend, she often rehearses all that one piece of evidence can provide and then goes on *seriatim* to the next and to the next, which sometimes makes the book read like a reference work. Yet, even though she provides whatever evidence exists to prove her point, we still find troubling comments like "we shall probably never know" (80), "for the most part, however, we must be satisfied with a general impression" (83), and "however flawed they [the sources] may be" (124). The nonmedievalist may take Giandrea's approach to be an overemphasis on particulars, with sometimes meager results, but the medievalist will recognize the genre and the author's dilemma.

Although this is resolutely a book for the specialist, *Journal of British Studies* readers should consider it for the university library since it covers a major topic in a crucial period, and it is not likely to be replaced for some time.

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CAROLE RAWCLIFFE. *Leprosy in Medieval England*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006. Pp. 421. $105.00 (cloth).

It is fair to say that Carole Rawcliffe has written the definitive study of leprosy in medieval England. Comprising more than 350 pages of text with illustrations, this meticulously researched work explores the topic from every imaginable angle by exploiting an impressive array of evidence. Rawcliffe explodes modern myths about the treatment of lepers in the Middle Ages, some of which were constructed to bolster modern agendas, and the result is a book that should have broad appeal to modern as well as medieval historians.

After a brief introduction, Rawcliffe launches into a discussion of the misuse of the medieval evidence by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century politicians, bureaucrats, and missionaries concerned with the outbreak of epidemic disease in their own time. The science of microbiology was in its infancy, and the debate between the so-called "hereditary" and "contagion" theories continued to rage. The cause of the "contagionists" was furthered by the death in 1899 of a Belgian missionary working among lepers in Hawaii, and calls for strict segregation, medieval-style, soon followed. Rawcliffe artfully explores how the