

all disciplines will find something of interest in its pages. The editors further demonstrate the value of exploring a particular theme or concept across different periods, regions, and disciplines.

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Griffiths, Fiona J., *Nuns' Priests' Tales: Men and Salvation in Medieval Women's Monastic Life* (Middle Ages Series), Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018; cloth; pp. 424; 29 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. US\$69.95, £58.00; ISBN 9780812249750.

This interesting study by Fiona J. Griffiths explores the way in which the priests who attended to the spiritual needs of medieval nuns made this service central to their own spirituality, and how they rhetorically justified and defended it. The timeframe considered, the late eleventh century to the end of the twelfth, was characterized by a reform of the Church and of the relations between the laity and the clergy. The following promotion of clerical celibacy made access to women one of the major differences between laymen and priests, resulting in an intense scrutiny of the relationship between nuns and the priests who took care of them. Mainstream attitudes declared it dangerous for the spiritual well-being of the priest, since temptation was considered unavoidable, and as an onus with no evident compensation. Therefore, priests who dedicated themselves to this activity appeared 'suspicious and problematic' (p. 18). This perspective, and the paucity of documents that provide the nuns' priests' viewpoint, made these men and their service, which was vital for the salvation of the nuns, mostly invisible in historiography too.

This monograph focuses on these priests and the reasons that motivated their work, which was not considered a burden, but an opportunity. Some of them cultivated spiritual friendships with the women under their care, or founded religious communities that welcomed both men and women. Griffiths starts from the consideration that these men were not as exceptional as previously believed, and considers their writings as representative of larger trends, suggesting the existence of 'a culture of support for the involvement of men with religious women [...] that had a distinctive vocabulary and rhetoric' (p. 37).

Chapters 2 to 4 of this monograph focus on a variety of traditional figures whose endeavours included caring for women, as they represented a major rhetorical support for these priests' work. Chapter 2 looks at how exemplary men of the Bible were used as examples, keeping with trends of twelfth-century reform. Jesus's acceptance of women and his particular attention towards them in his ministry set clearly an important precedent. Other examples that supported the possibility of chaste relationships between men and women were that of John, who took care of Mary as his adoptive mother after Jesus's death; and of proto-martyr Stephen, who was especially dedicated to widows. While offering these models for medieval priests, the gospels' narrative displays the spiritual strength of these women, who accompanied Jesus to his death. For being the first to witness

Jesus's resurrection and announcing it, these female followers were considered 'the apostles to the apostles'. To medieval writers, these exemplary female apostles were evidence that contemporary women too were spiritually worthy of the priests' help.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the example provided by church father Jerome with his care for Roman women, especially widows. His disparate relationships with female disciples became models for twelfth-century spiritual affiliations between nuns and priests, and could be used rhetorically by each, to shape and influence the forms they could take. Jerome's interpretation of devout women as brides of Christ too was influential in the perception of the role of the nun as *domina* (that is, 'female lord', p. 104) to the priest's role of servant of Christ.

Chapter 4 analyses another model for inspiration in spiritual relationships, that of the 'saintly siblings' (p. 113). Although in conflict with the idea of spiritual kinship, blood kinship emerged already in the fourth century as model for monastic life. The *Vitae* of holy men, to enhance their piety, often depicted them as accompanied by sisters, or other female relatives. These relationships set influential precedents for monks, and a model for siblings that spiritually benefited both and, in some instances, could include former spouses too, without coming under suspicion. Chapter 5 considers the reasons why these priests should involve themselves with the pastoral care of women. It analyses the role of women as intercessors, as part of their identification as brides of Christ, often in exchange for the spiritual services provided by priests. Their prayers, considered more powerful than men's, held also a wider social importance, and could be an incentive for donors to help monasteries.

As conclusion the author provides a short overview of the ways in which nuns fought against medieval misogyny, so that their voices could be heard, and their spiritual needs attended to. Even if positioned peculiarly, this last chapter still fits with the overall aim of the monograph, satisfactorily achieved, to show 'the productive ways in which [medieval] women and men nevertheless interacted, and the positive view of "woman" that some religious men held' (p. 197).

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Haki Antonsson, *Damnation and Salvation in Old Norse Literature* (Studies in Old Norse Literature), Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2018; hardback; pp. 272; R.R.P. £60.00; ISBN 978184384072.

As scholars have increasingly appreciated in recent decades, Iceland when its famous sagas took their present shape, largely in the century and a half from about 1180, was a part of Western European Christendom. Haki Antonsson's book is an exploration of the hitherto little examined role played in the sagas by the most fundamental concern of medieval Christians—their fate in the afterlife, whether it be salvation in heaven, damnation in hell, or a period of atonement for their sins in Purgatory prior to admittance into paradise.