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*The Bar Books: Manuscripts Illuminated for Renaud de Bar,
Bishop of Metz (1303–1316)* by Kay Davenport (review)

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REVIEWS

Kay Davenport. *The Bar Books: Manuscripts Illuminated for Renaud de Bar, Bishop of Metz (1303–1316)*. *Manuscripta Illuminata* 2. Turnhout: Brepols, 2017. 728 pp., 254 black and white illustrations + 45 color illustrations. €100. ISBN: 978–2–503–57467–7.

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KAY DAVENPORT'S *THE BAR Books: Manuscripts Illuminated for Renaud de Bar, Bishop of Metz (1303–1316)* is the second volume to appear in the new series *Manuscripta Illuminata* published under the auspices of Brepols. The study derives from the author's 1984 doctoral thesis, which up until now remained an essential reference for the exquisite group of illuminated liturgical books commissioned by Renaud de Bar, Bishop of Metz (d. 1316). The group includes a breviary divided between two volumes, the winter portion now London, BL MS Yates Thompson 8, the summer portion Verdun, BM MS 107; a summer missal now Verdun, BM MS 98; a ritual, formerly Metz, BM MS 43, destroyed in 1944; and a pontifical, also in two volumes, now Cambridge, Fitzwilliam MS 298, and Prague, NL MS XXIII.c.20. *The Bar Books* represents a significant refinement of Davenport's thesis, one that more than accomplishes the rather humbly stated objective to gather all information about the group in one place for convenience and "as a first step in consolidating related books." The revised study comprises a chronology of production vis-à-vis the life of Renaud, an analysis of textual contents and codicology, a look at each artist's contribution, and a comprehensive account of the spectacular heraldic decoration in the breviary. This is followed by a series of

appendices detailing the heraldry of the breviary (with prosopographical information), the contents of the manuscripts' calendars, and an index and study of every marginal vignette, accompanied by line drawings. Chapter III, "The Artists," makes up the better part of the book. Here, Davenport's opinions on style and the division of labor between the group's illuminators mostly align with those of Alison Stones, who recently discussed the Bar group manuscripts in her monumental corpus of French Gothic manuscripts of 2013 and a subsequent article of 2015. Davenport's most important and provocative claim where style is concerned is that the superb illuminator called by Stones the "master of the Metz faces" (Davenport's "artist 3") was also the carver of the splendid ivory crozier still clutched by the bishop when his tomb was opened in 1521. The crozier remains in the treasury of Metz Cathedral.

The Bar Books is a solid art-historical work, but there is much here that will appeal to historians of ecclesiastical politics, liturgy, and manuscript culture at the turn of the fourteenth century. As Davenport shows, the Bar manuscripts were a "working library" designed for an aristocrat during his meteoric ascent through the ecclesiastical ranks. The survival of an integral group of manuscripts, each of which furnishes indisputable ties to a single, identifiable patron, is unparalleled in the record of this time and place and therefore particularly worthy of the close analysis Davenport brings to bear. Drawing on idiosyncracies of text and image, she aligns production of the manuscripts' components with Renaud's career path, from his promotion from subdeacon to deacon (between February and September 1302), his preparation for the priesthood, and finally to his assumption of the episcopal throne of Metz (January 1303). To take but one example, the Missal (ca. 1298), which was likely created prior to Renaud's entering major orders, was later adapted for the parallel use of Verdun and Metz when its owner, as subdeacon, was granted canonries at both locations; subsequent adjustments to the manuscript's sanctoral (namely, the elimination of Verdun feasts in favor of Metz), however, probably signal Renaud's preparation for the priesthood. The great strength of Davenport's work lies in her linkage of such textual clues to the rich iconographic and heraldic content of the group. Her meticulous interpretations of painted ecclesiastical vestments

and “portraits” of the owner that appear in the book’s numerous historiated initials and *bas-de-page* vignettes often parallel or even elucidate textual peculiarities; together, these clues point to discrete developments in Renaud’s career.

A particularly notable aspect of Renaud’s manuscripts—one that embodies his dual identity as noble scion and prince of the church—is an extraordinary commitment to heraldic display. For Davenport’s purposes, the most important feature of the heraldry is the selective application of the bishop’s crozier on Renaud’s personal shield. That this *brisure* occurs on only some of Renaud’s shields in the group provides further evidence with which Davenport is able to triangulate the dates and circumstances of production. But the heraldic landscape of the Bar group is infinitely more complex. A hallmark of most members of the group is the distinctive heraldic border or frame that surrounds the text block at important liturgical openings, a motif that usually incorporates alternating charges of Bar and Toucy. The latter was surely a nod to Renaud’s mother Jeanne de Toucy, patroness of the now-lost genealogical window in the chapel of St. Quentin at St. Nicaise, Reims (ca. 1291–1292), and a figure whom Davenport regards as an important catalyst to or “prime mover” behind Renaud’s bibliophilia. Jeanne’s own predilection for careful heraldic display was evident in the St. Nicaise window but also, Davenport argues, in her commissions of the so-called Jennart Bible (Reims BM MSS 39–42) and the enigmatic Hours for the use of St. Croix, Poitiers (BNF NAL 560). The latter manuscript, which Davenport suggests was a gift to one of Jeanne’s daughters, appears to contain the earliest iteration of the heraldic border that would later develop into the leitmotif of Renaud’s library. Indeed, Davenport posits Jeanne as a likely “instigator” behind Renaud’s breviary. If the familial and dynastic interests of Renaud’s mother ultimately underlie the Bar books’ signature heraldic borders, Davenport supplies another explanation for the profusion of authentic heraldic shields in the interstices of the breviary’s initials, namely the 1301 Treaty of Bruges that saw the humiliation of the Counts of Bar by Philip IV. She suggests that we view this visual assertion of noble identity (the breviary contains about 425 authentic shields, 180 of which belong to other great northern houses) as an expression of the anxiety and

discontent felt by the house of Bar and other great families as their powers diminished relative to those of the king. This is a satisfying explanation, one that could be applied in a general fashion to any number of works of art and architecture executed in northeastern France in the decades surrounding 1300.

A particular virtue of *The Bar Books* is the author's extremely careful study of the fine biographical details of Renaud's life and career, an approach that informs her sober consideration of the manuscript evidence as a whole. As recently as 2008 the Bar manuscripts were described as expressions of Renaud's profligacy, their numerous marginal decorations and heraldry a measure of his disinterest in the spiritual duties of his office. Davenport's careful and sensitive reading of the major events of Renaud's career makes clear that such cynical readings are unwarranted. Certainly, Renaud had a flair for the dramatic in keeping with the character of his library, but neither his flamboyancies (for example, his triumphant entry into Metz on the occasion of his consecration) nor his interest in visual rhetoric (his books) should be taken as signs of insincerity where his commitment to his office was concerned. Indeed, for Davenport, Renaud's considerable expenditure on the Bar group manuscripts (and other regalia, including his crozier) demonstrates exactly the opposite, which is to say a determination to enshrine local liturgical practice as honorably as possible.

The Bar Books contains over two hundred black-and-white illustrations and some forty-five gorgeous color plates. Particularly valuable are the photographic reproductions of the destroyed ritual. The lack of a conventional index is curious in a study otherwise so comprehensive, but this detracts little from an otherwise majestic work. The author deserves congratulations for a study full of new and provocative insights that will be of use to scholars across a broad spectrum of medieval studies.