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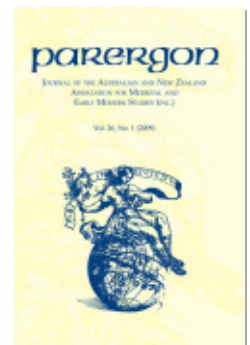
Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615 (review)

Pamela O'Neill

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All in all, the papers make up a rich tapestry. The editorial attempt to group the contributions under four headings was worthwhile, but none of them fit comfortably in any box. A lot of the interest in the volume comes from the raw angularity of the findings, the multiplicity of connections, and the subtlety and complexity of the picture that takes shape. The editors, Helen Barr and Ann Hutchinson, and the publisher, Brepols, have served scholarship well. But honour and gratitude are most due to Anne Hudson. As the last stanza of Rigg's *encomium* puts it:

Pro multis laboribus, post tam longum bellum,
Tibi preparavimus sapidem morsellum
Partibus durissimum, partibus tenellum
Oramus, accipias hunc parvum libellum!

[For your efforts for us all, after all the labour,
For you we've prepared a dish, full of taste and flavour;
Some of it's rather tough, some of it is tender:
Please accept this little book, from a grateful sender.]

Michael Bennett
School of History and Classics
University of Tasmania

Blanton, Virginia, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007; cloth; pp. xiv, 349; 16 illustrations, 2 maps; R.R.P. US\$65.00; ISBN 9780271029849.

Virginia Blanton has herself a devotion to St Æthelthryth (also known as Etheldreda or Audrey) of Ely, if this beautifully presented book is any sort of evidence. It would pass as a cult object, with its interleaved grey pages with a tasteful medieval motif, its autumnal embossed end papers, and its full-colour dust jacket reproducing a painting from Ely Cathedral of the saint's translation. One wonders whether it was a conscious addition to the extensive catalogue of cult objects with which the book concludes. The one drawback to all this beauty is that it apparently left insufficient budget for the important illustrations to be reproduced in colour. Since the artefacts in question are mostly painted panels from roodscreens and the like, colour photographs would almost certainly have added to the reader's appreciation.

The book is divided chronologically, the first chapter covering Æthelthryth's lifetime up to Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, the second chapter considering the times of Æthelwold and Ælfric, the third chapter examining the early Norman period, the fourth chapter spanning the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, and the final chapter considering lay texts and material goods of the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries.

The opening chapter presents a now all-too-familiar view of Bede's presentation of women, where the usual arguments alleging Bede's denial of agency to women are rehearsed. The arguments are at best weak. The idea that Bede's placement of the Cædmon story after the narration of Hild's death silences Hild is groundless: Bede wished to set out two exemplary lives, and in separating the narratives had to place one before the other. Doubtless the same critics would have accused Bede of relegating Hild, had Cædmon's story come first. Similarly, the attribution of ignoble motives to Bede's non-reproduction of the text of Cædmon's hymn can be disregarded, for a vernacular text would have no place in the Latin composition that was the *Ecclesiastical History*.

In the same vein, Blanton notes, as if with surprise, Bede fails to report Æthelthryth's personal interactions and miracles, which are 'a conventional element in hagiographical texts' (p. 38). Given that the *Ecclesiastical History* is not a hagiographical text, the surprise hardly seems warranted. Blanton also remarks on the absence of posthumous miracles performed by the saint in Bede's text, with the miracles that do occur being a result of contact with the linen or coffin in which she was buried. Since this is quite a standard motif in the period, the point of Blanton's claim that the miracles 'do not disclose her sanctity so much as they support it' (p. 53) is obscure. It is difficult to see how this kind of textual exegesis adds value to our understanding of Æthelthryth or Bede, given its refusal to engage with the writer in his own context.

A similar perspective seems to colour the second chapter, with some contradictions emerging. Having pointed out a visual focus on Æthelthryth's womb implicit in the drapery arrangement in the *Benedictional of St Æthelwold* and imputing an emphasis on her 'chastity as a woman' (p. 95), Blanton then goes on to explain that the miniatures of Christ, Benedict and Swithun share the same characteristic. Presumably she does not mean to suggest that the three last-named also had wombs or were chaste women. In recounting Ælfric's story of a thegn and his wife who

choose to live chastely, in reward for which the thegn is admitted to the heavenly company, Blanton makes much of the fact that the wife ‘does not warrant a position in the saint’s celestial company simply because she did not become a nun’ (p. 119). This, however, is not stated by Ælfric, who simply omits the wife from his account. This is unsurprising, given that, as Blanton points out, Ælfric is trying to deliver a particular message to his male target audience.

Space does not permit a similarly detailed comment on the final three chapters here. It is probably worth mentioning, though, that there are methodological issues with the survey of material objects in the final chapter. Insufficient consideration is given to accidents of survival and recording, and while these are referred to in passing, they almost certainly mean that the tentative conclusions drawn in the course of the discussion are flawed.

The book is an interesting enough account of the changing perspectives and purposes of those who depicted Æthelthryth over the course of some thousand years. It certainly reflects wide-ranging research amongst primary texts, secondary sources and material objects, and for that reason is worth reading. The exhaustive list of material objects relating to Æthelthryth appended to the book is similarly valuable, although more extensive annotation would have rendered it considerably more so.

Pamela O’Neill

*School of Letters, Art and Media
University of Sydney*

Brundage, James A., *The Medieval Origins of the Legal Profession: Canonists, Civilians, and Courts*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008; cloth; pp. xvii, 492; 5 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. US\$49.00; ISBN 9780226077598.

James A. Brundage maps the development of the legal profession as the institutions of Roman law are rediscovered in Western Europe from the early twelfth century to the mid-thirteenth century. He argues that Roman law and its institutions were eroded during the Barbarian invasions of the early sixth century, but when they were rediscovered in the twelfth century, a recognizably modern legal profession developed and flourished. Brundage carefully illustrates this process by examining how the law was written down, how the courts worked throughout this period, the development of