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Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages: The Abiding Legacy of Columbanus (review)

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"When life rather than death is viewed as the crucial factor in demonstrating sanctity, children are at a distinct disadvantage" (p. 64). Or again: "The cult of the Holy Innocents perfectly exemplifies both the substantial difficulty of promoting children as saints and the immense popularity of doing so" (p. 31).

The book deserves a bit more copyediting. The use of *passios* as a Latin form is irritating, as is the use of the hyphen for a dash. More important, there appears a woeful inexactitude in passing references to the "worship" of saints or the Virgin Mary (pp. 2, 91, 135). The Conclusion does not so much draw conclusions as show the survival of the phenomenon of the child saint into early modernity and even into our own day. One is thus left with a somewhat vague sense of what these medieval centuries of childhood and sanctity amount to. Use of works on sainthood in society by Gerhart B. Ladner and A. J. Festugière and a greater reference to the ideas of Peter Brown on the same topic might have made for a richer sense of historical context and led to firmer overarching conclusions. For the most part, however, the author does strive to place individual instances of cults of holy children in their historical contexts. (In one striking instance, however, she may not have gone far enough. Surely, Pope Urban II's canonization in 1098 of the popular but controversial Nicholas Peregrinus must have had something to do with the fact that this youthful saint who wandered about Italy was an easterner, born in Greece in 1075, and thus an opportune model and prod, from the papal perspective, for the coming together of Latin and Byzantine cultures just as the era of the crusades was getting underway.) Whatever one's quibbles and questions, however, the author's meticulous wrestling with complicated and varied data in many given instances over many centuries tells a general and valuable story and shows how a narrow but rigorously lingering focus on a marginal question can serve to give life and substance and coherence to our historiographical images of the spiritual, cultural, and ecclesiastical realities of medieval Europe.

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F. THOMAS NOONAN

Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages: The Abiding Legacy of Columbanus. By Michael Richter. (Dublin: Four Courts Press. Distrib. in the United States by ISBS, Portland, OR. 2008. Pp. 211. \$65.00. ISBN 978-1-846-82103-5.)

The Italian monastery of Bobbio deserves a monograph outlining its early-medieval history. Michael Richter's book is marred by too many errors and misjudgments to be wholly recommendable, although interesting issues are raised. Organized chronologically, it provides an outline narrative from the community's foundation in 613 to the early-tenth century. Throughout, there is careful engagement with the surviving written sources, often quoted directly, but almost no discussion of archaeology, despite excellent recent work by Eleonora Destefanis (*Il monastero di Bobbio in età altomedievale*, Florence, 2002). Richter opens with the earliest royal documents in favor of the community without commenting on what Bobbio was like before the monks arrived, even though evidence of Roman settlement shows that Bobbio

was less remote than Jonas suggested. Richter's assumption that King Agilulf's grant to Columbanus was initiated by a king who "was quite familiar with the area" (p. 18) is hard to sustain: It is probable that Columbanus, who knew of comparable grants made by Merovingian kings, requested it. The contemporaneous "exile" of the Milanese bishop to Genoa may have allowed Columbanus to deal directly with the king. Further, more discussion of references in these charters to properties held by laymen Sundrarit and Zusso would also have helped to complicate the top-down story. Richter's opinion that Columbanus was "one of the formative figures of early medieval Europe" (p. 24) seems unlikely, given that his cult was small; his works hardly read; and his Rule barely followed, even at Bobbio. The valuable discussion of the seventh-century monastic scriptorium concludes that only the arrival of new Irish monks at Bobbio could have resulted in the production of the surviving manuscripts, even though they are few. Moving on, Richter's eighth century is unsurprisingly "dark" because he utilizes only three pieces of evidence: the so-called *Carmen de synodo Ticinensi*, Bishop Cumian's marble funerary stone, and a *preceptum* of Ratchis. Ignoring the few, admittedly fragmentary, contemporary records of land transactions that demonstrate that the monks interacted with locals as well as elites, he stresses the community's Irishness. The Carolingian chapter should have been contextualized with developments north of the Alps, but at least some nonroyal donations are discussed. The weak economic chapter relies disproportionately on a *libellus* of 844 and the two famous *abbreviationes* of 862 and 883, ignoring the ecology of the area. The relative quality of monastic lands thus goes unnoticed, as do seasonal agricultural patterns such as transhumance. The integrated functioning of the whole economy is left unclear by statements suggesting that increased agriculture "must have been at the expense of previous woodland" (p. 133), when the two types of management work in tandem, especially in upland areas. The section on woodland needed to mention leaf fodder for animals and the shredding practices that produced it. Further, grassland does not just produce fodder but also green grass—for summer grazing, salt renders may have been used to cure meat and preserve cheese, and chestnuts were human and animal food. The conclusion that the monastery was largely self-sufficient is unconvincing as many of Bobbio's products were eminently tradable and money was clearly available. The final chapters expand on Bobbio's supposed Irishness, even though Richter notes that "there are no Irish names known among the community after Columbanus" (p. 56n45), and many names of monks are—most unusually—known. If "Bobbio does not emerge as a centre where the Irish language was much written in the eighth century" (p. 185), was it in any real sense an Irish monastery? Throughout the author claims exaggerated originality, undervalues recent work in the field by Ian Wood and François Bougard, and almost completely ignores archaeological work on other north Italian monasteries—especially St. Giulia in Brescia, Novalesa, and Nonantola—to give the impression that Bobbio was more distinctive than it was. There are many technical flaws. The six plates between pages 96 and 97 are useful, but plates 4 and 5 are nowhere discussed, despite the obvious interest of the images. The *libellus*

dated c. 850 in plate 6 is correctly dated 844 at pages 126 and 127. Typographical errors abound: pp. 9 and 186, Valeria Polonio (not "Valerie"); p. 28, *Praefatiuncula* (not "*Paefatiuncula*"); p. 32, Columbanus (not "Colmbanus"); p. 33n51, Hilty 2001 (not Hilty); p. 41, tandem (not "tanderm"); p. 50, Piedmont (not "Piemont"); p. 58, Bobbio (not "Bobio"); p. 59, Theodelinda (not "Theodeline"); p. 79, Schiaparelli (not "Sciaparelli"); p. 87n4, MGH (not "MG"); p. 96n57, Fiori 1996 (not "Fiori"); p. 190, Archivio (not "Archico"); p. 193, Stefano (not "Stefan") Gasparri. There is unnecessary repetition in places (e.g., p. 146n33 is given verbatim as p. 154n74). There also are gaps in the bibliography, some serious, with no works cited of Mayke De Jong, Jean-Pierre Devroey, Albrecht Diem, David Ganz, Simon MacLean, Rosamond McKitterick, or Claire Sotinel. The maps are poor, mostly without scales or topography; those in Destefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio* are much better. Overall, the definitive monograph on early-medieval Bobbio remains to be written.

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The Latin Church in Norman Italy. By G. A. Loud. (New York: Cambridge University Press. 2008. Pp. xviii, 577. \$140.00. ISBN 978-0-521-25551-6.)

G. A. Loud has produced an extremely valuable contribution to the history of Norman Italy and Christianity in the high Middle Ages. It is an especially important book because it discusses a topic that has never before been given such a thorough and in-depth treatment.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the pre-Norman era, when the southern Italian Church lacked organization and coherence, and weak episcopates and the absence of parish structures meant that the region was dominated by private churches. Chronologically the chapter begins with the sixth-century crisis, when many bishoprics in southern Italy disappeared and organized monasticism went into decline, then moves to the monastic revival of the seventh and eighth centuries, ending with the reign of Otto I, who patronized imperial monasteries and created new archbishoprics in southern Italy, which was the first step toward a more organized ecclesiastical structure.

Chapter 2 examines the impact of the Norman conquest on the southern Italian church, demonstrating how it was both a victim of Norman predation as well as a beneficiary of Norman patronage and protection. Loud does an admirable job of showing the complex relationship between the new Norman rulers and the ecclesiastical foundations in the region, focusing most of his efforts on demonstrating the ways in which the Norman conquest both aided and transformed the religious landscape.

Chapter 3 examines the relationship between the papacy and the new Norman rulers, which was an alliance he sees as beneficial for both sides. For the Normans, the popes provided legitimacy, while the papacy received military assistance and revenues, as well as the ability to help in the reform of