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*Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic: Child Saints and Their Cults
in Medieval Europe* (review)

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In the concluding essay, Felice Lifshitz argues that as the Carolingian period witnessed the use of litanies as instruments for “reforming” liturgical and other practices in an effort to exclude women from the most important historical leadership roles, including martyrs, the litany category of *virgo* emerged as the primary tool that prevented the eradication of women from Christian liturgical activity and officialdom. Because the term *virgo* was so multivalent and stemmed from the cult of the Virgin Mary, it could not be altered to eliminate women in the same manner as the masculine gendered categories, such as *apostle*. As a result, achieving the title of *virgo* wielded such power that some virginal men sought to reclaim the status for themselves.

Overall, the collection is an admirable attempt at defining those points in the medieval world where gender and religion intersect. Because the essays span more than a thousand years of the Western religious tradition and employ a wide array of techniques, they explicitly demonstrate how many venues are yet left to explore before historians can understand fully medieval concepts of gender and religion. Perhaps, the greatest achievement of the collection as a whole is that it clearly demonstrates the fluidity of such notions.

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Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic: Child Saints and Their Cults in Medieval Europe. By Patricia Healy Wasyliw. [Studies in Church History, Vol. 2.] (New York: Peter Lang. 2008. Pp. 203. \$67.95. ISBN 978-0-820-42764-5.)

Patricia Healy Wasyliw has produced a general survey, and at the same time an impressively thick description, of the veneration of children as saints across fifteen centuries of Christian Europe. The *Acta Sanctorum*, the *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, and many other more specific sources and studies have been learnedly excavated and ransacked. The work is heavily footnoted (indeed, so much so that readers will long for the notes to have been placed at the bottom of the page rather than at the end of the text). A complicated historical route has been ably traced through the literary, liturgical, and popular devotions surrounding deceased children in Europe. We hear of the Holy Innocents, child martyrs, children murdered (often not for any ostensibly religious motives), and alleged victims of specifically ritual murders. Although an admittedly marginal subject matter, sainthood that was accorded to children is a fascinating and colorful historical thread running through Europe’s formative centuries. Wasyliw’s marshaling of evidence sheds light on the place of children and on ideas of childhood within European society. It also illuminates developing conceptions of sanctity, piety, and innocence within that society. The world described in this study—a world of relics, miracles, and shrines; of hagiography and theology; of chronicles and histories—helps to document the intersection of lay, clerical, and theological forces at play in the often problematical fashioning of the infant or youthful saint, whether for a local audience or on a larger stage that often included much of Europe. The author can be quite pithy in describing the complexities of her subject:

"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.

The Library of Congress

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