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Meredith Cohen and Justine Firnhaber-Baker, eds., *Difference and Identity in Francia and Medieval France*. Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, V.T.: Ashgate Publishing, 2010. xiii + 237 pp. Figures and index. \$124.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-7546-6757-5

Review by Katherine Allen Smith, University of Puget Sound.

This wide-ranging collection of essays contains much that will be of interest to historians and art historians, as well as specialists in medieval French literature and the history of disability, disease, and sexuality in France. The contributions, nearly all of which began as papers presented at the third annual symposium of the International Medieval Society--Paris in 2006, are mostly the work of junior scholars and collectively signal a shift underway in how a new generation of scholars is approaching the construction of otherness and collective identities in the past. The status of nearly every medieval group designated as marginal by historians in the 1970s and 1980s is re-evaluated here. While no new, overarching interpretive model emerges in these pages to replace the still-influential visions of Jacques Le Goff, Bronislaw Geremek, and R. I. Moore, the authors raise important questions--about the possible coexistence of discourses of persecution and acceptance, the influence (or lack thereof) of rhetorical expressions of hatred on popular sentiment, and the rise of persecutory power structures in later medieval Europe. In so doing, they will surely stimulate discussion and inspire new research on what have previously been thought of as the "margins" of Frankish and medieval French society.[1]

In a substantial editorial introduction, Justin Firnhaber-Baker signals the authors' indebtedness to the "new medievalism," a movement led primarily by North American scholars which has, since the early 1990s, self-consciously embraced the excluded, the marginal, and the strange, and sought to demonstrate how the delineation of others on the margins of medieval society served to define group identities at its center. But, as Firnhaber-Baker explains, what distinguishes the essays in this collection from earlier work in this vein is their attentiveness to the "constructive uses of difference," and their conviction that "difference could produce social and psychological spaces in which charity, altruism, and even humor could meld society's varied parts into a universal whole" (p. 4). Such an approach defines difference in *relational*, but not always *oppositional*, terms.

The eleven essays in the collection are thematically organized into three sections, framed by Firnhaber-Baker's introduction and an afterword by Barbara A. Hanawalt. As the introduction states, the essays have been ordered according to how strongly their authors emphasize persecutory discourses and practices, gradually leading the reader "from the most psychologically negative and alienating examples of exclusion, to instances in which marginalization was tempered with acceptance, sanctity, or even humor" (p. 6). While this organizational strategy supports the collection's goals, it makes for a somewhat disjointed reading experience for those who read straight through the volume, as they are intended to do; within the first six chapters, readers are pulled from the thirteenth century to the eighth, back to the thirteenth, back to the eighth, then to the twelfth, frustrating (perhaps purposely) any attempts to discern some sort of larger chronological progression, whether towards a more or less "persecuting society." But for readers who mine the volume for studies of particular

subjects or contexts—Carolingian Francia and northern France (particularly Paris) in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries are particularly well represented here—its organization will not detract from its usefulness.

The three essays in part one, “Marginalization and Persecution,” deal with religious difference as the basis for the “otherness” of Jews, Muslims, and Cathar heretics. In the first essay of the section, William Chester Jordan explores the sentiment of “yearning to belong” through a close reading of a thirteenth-century *chanson pieuse* addressed to *Douce dame virge Marie*, in which an anonymous Jew laments his thwarted desire for baptism (p. 15). Jordan convincingly demonstrates that this is not simply a case of an outsider being rejected by members of the dominant faith community. He skillfully decodes hints that the author has been slandered by fellow Jews bent on preventing his baptism, and suggests that many young Jewish men must have similarly fantasized about conversion in the midst of growing pressures on thirteenth-century French Jews.

The next contributor, Richard Matthew Pollard, examines the work of a translator known only as Petrus Monachus, whose eighth-century translation of an apocalyptic text called the *Revelationes* acquainted Frankish elites with the recent Islamic conquest of much of the eastern Roman Empire. Petrus, as Pollard shows, stands as an unusually hostile critic of Islam in an age of ambivalence. The strident tone of his translation, which included many new details intended to emphasize the barbarity of Muslims, was in turn softened by early medieval editors of the text, and had to wait until the invasions of the following century to find a receptive audience.

The last chapter of the section, by Einat Segal, connects sculptures in the Augustinian cloister at Saint-Trophime, Arles, to the struggle against the Cathar heresy which reached a fever pitch in the decades around 1200, just as the program at Saint-Trophime was completed. In this reading, various scenes from the life of Christ adorning the capitals and piers of the cloister “served as an affirmation of the canons’ collective identity as distinct from that of the local heretical nobility” (p. 45), an affirmation Segal sees, following R. I. Moore, as an exegetical condemnation of the heretical other. While Segal’s iconographical analysis (particularly of the Flagellation of Christ pier) is tremendously interesting, her discussions of the hostile construction of Catharism and the relationship between local noble families and religious houses could have been enriched by greater consideration of the revisionist work on these subjects recently published by Bernard Hamilton, Mark Gregory Pegg, and Claire Taylor.[2]

In part two, entitled “Foreigners and Outsiders,” three studies address conceptions of ethnicity and its relationship to foreignness across a period spanning the eighth through twelfth centuries. The section opens with Linda Dohmen’s study of Irish and Anglo-Saxon scholar-clerics as “Wanderers between Two Worlds:” their beloved homelands and the Carolingian court where they lived and worked in self-imposed exile. Dohmen employs the sociological definition of “the stranger,” as well as sensitive readings of hagiography, poetry, and letters to understand contemporary reactions to these men’s “foreign” accents and clothing, and ultimately concludes that it was not “ethnic” (Frankish) identity but rather acceptance by Charlemagne, the embodiment of the court’s center, that determined membership in the courtly “in-group.”

The next piece, by Nirmal Dass, examines a little-studied epic poem by Abbo of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, the *Bella Parisiacae urbis*, which offers insights into the articulation of Viking and Frankish Christian identities at the dawn of the ninth century. While acknowledging that, like most contemporary Frankish chroniclers, Abbo paints a picture of Viking raiders as bestial and demonic, Dass contends that the poem nonetheless treats their otherness as temporary, allowing

for the possibility that they might yet be converted to Christianity and civilized through exposure to Classical traditions of which the Franks were the self-appointed guardians.

The final chapter in this section, by Claire Weeda, explores the origins and implications of “Ethnic Stereotyping in Twelfth-Century Paris,” tracing the roots of durable stereotypes—the drunken Englishman, the bellicose German—to Latin texts used in the university classroom. Weeda finds that such stereotypes commonly appear in instructional manuals (*artes*) designed to be internalized or even memorized by students, many of whom later echoed these derogatory sentiments in their own writings. Besides cautioning against reading such sentiments as straightforward expressions of personal prejudice, Weeda suggests that the medieval university’s organization meant that “students’ group identity was multifold and mutating” rather than being constructed in terms of ethnic opposition (p. 130).

Part three consists of four essays on “Strangers and Neighbors” which explore the circumstances under which disabled groups or deviant behaviors might be simultaneously accepted *and* marginalized. This final set of essays is arguably the strongest of the collection, both in terms of its thematic and chronological coherence and the impressive depth of the individual authors’ archival research. In the first study of the section, Elma Brenner explores the surprisingly permeable spatial and social boundaries between the *leprosaria* of Rouen and the surrounding urban community. Building on recent work that has shown belief in the contagious nature of the disease only caught on in the fourteenth century, Brenner concludes that prior to c.1300, despite their disfiguring illness, “lepers were still members of civic society” (p. 139) and, as sought-after recipients of alms, “integral members of the Christian community” (p. 150).

Like Brenner’s essay, the next piece by Mark P. O’Tool emphasizes the spatial and spiritual integration of a supposedly marginal group: the residents of the Hôpital des Quinze-Vingts in Paris, who included not only the *povres avugles* themselves, but their sighted caregivers. While O’Tool acknowledges that some Parisians considered the conspicuous begging of the blind men and women a nuisance, he finds that the prayers of the *quinze-vingts* were eagerly sought by a wide cross-section of French society, including members of the Capetian dynasty as well as artisans and the bourgeoisie. Perhaps most intriguingly, O’Tool finds that the sighted, as well as the blind residents of the hospital embraced a “communal identification with blindness,” (p. 161) which became the basis for a quasi-religious life of prayer akin to that of contemporary Third Orders.

Like the previous contributions in this section, the following essay by Keiko Nowacka demonstrates the limits of persecutory laws and marginalizing rhetoric, in this case as they shaped the lives of prostitutes in thirteenth-century Parisian society. Nowacka rejects the traditional consensus that the medieval prostitute was “an unwanted stranger” (p. 175) in favor of evidence that sex-workers were an integral part of the city’s spiritual life, both as participants in religious rituals (regularly attending mass at Notre-Dame, for example) and as objects of sympathy and charity on the part of contemporaries who recognized the link between poverty and prostitution.

In the final essay of the section, Peter Scott Brown moves from the bustling city to the unassuming Romanesque church of Saint-Pierre de Sévignac on the Via Tolosana, the medieval route by which countless French pilgrims, crusaders, and merchants traveled to the great shrine of Santiago de Compostela. Saint-Pierre’s twelfth-century façade frames a tympanum scene of great seriousness—the *Translatio Legis*, or “transfer of the law” from Christ to the Apostles Peter and Paul—with an archivolt in which male and female figures are shown in various states of inebriation, lustful display, and frivolity. While modern viewers are apt to see this juxtaposition

as puzzling or inappropriate, Brown insists that medieval Christians would have been amused, rather than shocked, at the figures' antics, recognizing them as partaking of *scurrilitas*, a quality associated with "jesting, buffoonery, coarse humor" of the sort found in contemporary *fabliaux* and troubadours' *chansons* (p. 201).

As these brief synopses suggest, the collection encompasses a variety of methodologies--historical, art historical, literary--and the authors employ an equally wide range of theoretical models, drawn from anthropology, sociology, psychology, and philosophy. Nonetheless, the reader is bound to be struck by parallels between particular essays. Both Pollard and Dass, for instance, use early medieval poems as sources for understanding the definition of non-Christian others by Christian clerics, while, as Barbara Hanawalt points out in her afterword, spatial boundaries are a central focus of several of the essays. It is equally noteworthy that some contributors disagree with one another on fundamental points. To take but one example, Nowacka's piece accepts the traditional view of lepers as social outcasts so resoundingly rejected by Brenner two chapters earlier. As the collection stands, it is left to Hanawalt to comment on such points of comparison in her afterword. One cannot help but think that having contributors read and take into account one another's work prior to publication would have led to fruitful interplay between the essays and sections, and lent a greater unity to the collection.

To sum up, this collection is a valuable contribution to the study of Frankish and medieval French society and its margins. The essays are conscientiously edited and this reviewer found only a very few typos (e.g., "Roger Ian Moore" for "Robert Ian Moore" in the introduction, at p. 2 and n. 7). It would make a fine addition to a history or medieval studies courses with a focus on persecution and tolerance, perhaps as a companion piece to the recent second edition of R. I. Moore's eminently teachable *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*. As a teaching text, the collection would be an excellent means of exposing beginning graduate students or advanced undergraduates to a variety of theoretical models and would no doubt set the stage for lively classroom discussion.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Part I: Marginalization and Persecution

William Chester Jordan, "Exclusion and the Yearning to Belong: Evidence from the History of Thirteenth-Century France"

Richard Matthew Pollard, "One Other on Another: Petrus Monachus' *Revelationes* and Islam"

Einat Segal, "Sculpted Images from the Eastern Gallery of the Saint-Trophime Cloister in Arles and the Cathar Heresy"

Part II: Foreigners and Outsiders

Linda Dohmen, "Wanderers between Two Worlds: Irish and Anglo-Saxon Scholars at the Court of Charlemagne"

Nirmal Dass, "Temporary Otherness and Homiletic History in the Late Carolingian Age: A Reading of the *Bella Parisiaca* of Abbo of Saint-Germain-des-Prés"

Claire Weeda, "Ethnic Stereotyping in Twelfth-Century Paris"

Part III: Strangers and Neighbors

Elma Brenner, "Outside the City Walls: Leprosy, Exclusion, and Social Identity in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Rouen"

Mark P. O'Tool, "The *poivres avugles* of the Hôpital des Quinze-Vingts: Disability and Community in Medieval Paris"

Keiko Nowacka, "Persecution, Marginalization, or Tolerance: Prostitutes in Thirteenth-Century Parisian Society"

Peter Scott Brown, "Scoundrels and *Scurrilitas* at St-Pierre de Sévignac"

Barbara A. Hanawalt, "Afterword"

NOTES

[1] Jacques Le Goff, *Pour un autre Moyen Age: temps, travail, et culture en Occident: 18 essais* (orig. pub. Paris: Gallimard, 1977; trans. Arthur Goldhammer as *Time, Work, & Culture in the Middle Ages* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980]); Bronislaw Geremek, *Les marginaux parisiens aux XIVe et XVe siècles* (Paris: Flammarion, 1976; trans. Jean Birrell as *The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris* [Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987]); and R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250* (orig. pub. 1987; 2nd ed., Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

[2] Bernard Hamilton, "The Albigensian Crusade and Heresy," in David Abulafia ed., *The New Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. 5: c.1198-1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 164-181; Mark Gregory Pegg, *A Most Holy War: The Albigensian Crusade and the Battle for Christendom* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Claire Taylor, *Heresy in Medieval France: Dualism in Aquitaine and the Agenais, 1000-1249, Royal Historical Society Studies in History*, n.s. (Woodbridge, Suffolk and Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2005).

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