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Élisabeth Lusset, *Crime, châtement et grâce dans les monastères au Moyen Âge (XII^e-XV^e siècle)*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2017. 406 pp. Bibliography and index. €120.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2-503-56765-5.

Review by Frans Camphuijsen, University of Amsterdam.

There are subjects that fire the imagination to such a degree that one does not automatically expect to encounter them in the context of a serious academic study. The criminal monk is one of those subjects. Surely, monks hurting or killing their fellow regulars can be no more than a marginal historical phenomenon, mainly limited to the field of fiction? On the contrary, as Élisabeth Lusset shows in her recent book, the definition, persecution, and penalization of criminality among conventuals was a prominent aspect of monastic organizations, which stood at the center of some of the defining tensions within and developments of life in a cloister context.

Lusset positions her book at the interface between histories of crime and punishment on the one hand and monastic studies on the other, two fields that have so far only met to a limited degree. However, rather than simply combining the insights from both fields, her book clearly shows how the sum of two parts can actually be more than the whole. The thematic approach she follows in her book is immensely multifaceted. Thus we not only read about the institutional and political developments in the penalization—or, to use a more specific term, correction—of regulars, but are also treated to an elaborate socio-cultural history of monastic life through the eyes of those involved in legal cases. The analysis of large-scale judicial power-play alternates with descriptions of the daily comings and goings in a cloister context as well as the meanings attributed by the monks themselves to various aspects of their lives. This constant movement between the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels allows Lusset to show us the multiplicity of agencies involved in shaping the practice of monastic penalization. She considers not just the motivations of popes, bishops, general chapters, and cloister priors, but also highlights the way in which these “grand schemes” interacted with the socio-judicial strategies of individual monks and monastic communities.

Lusset impresses the reader with her coverage of research themes as well as the scope of her research. Spurred by the wide geographical dispersion and relative rarity of criminal cases in her source material, Lusset has chosen a very broad approach to her subject matter both chronologically and geographically. Chronologically she covers the twelfth through early sixteenth centuries, allowing her to tease out many of the long-term developments relative to monastic penalization. These developments over the *longue durée* are constantly present in the background of the other arguments she makes, but she also conveniently presents them as a brief chronological overview on their own in her conclusion (pp. 331-32). Geographically a similar extensiveness is present. Even though the majority of cases comes from France (45%) and the British Isles (22%), her book essentially covers monastic communities from all over Christian Europe. This has the added advantage of providing a clear sense of the cloister infrastructure of some of the larger orders, like the Cluniacs, Cistercians, Premonstratensians, and Carthusians, as well as the differences that existed between houses in the orders’ heartlands and on their peripheries. For example, in her treatment of intra-cloister conflicts between religious from various geographical and linguistic backgrounds, Lusset shows how such conflicts are attested mainly in the

cloisters on the edges of the Christian world, where local monks would live side-by-side with those sent from the mother-house abroad (pp. 177-180). Even if Luset's choice for a broad scope is born from necessity, its advantages far outweigh any possible disadvantage.

Such a broad and multifaceted study requires a well-structured book to remain surveyable for the reader. Fortunately, that is exactly what Luset provides. On the outset she follows what looks like a traditional setup for works on the history of crime and punishment. In six chapters Luset elaborates on the institutions involved in the penalization of regulars and their surviving documents (chapter one), on the procedures followed for this penalization (chapter two), on the types of, circumstances of and motivations for crimes as encountered in the documents (chapters three and four), and on the forms of punishment, correction and grace distributed in these cases (chapters five and six). Yet, at the same time, these chapters also present the reader with additional arguments about monastic life, cleverly weaving the thematic richness of her research through the basic structure. Thus both the first and fifth chapters explicitly relate their subject matter to a broader tension between seclusion and publicity in monastic life. In the third chapter, Luset touches on the relative value of certain places, times, gatherings and interactions in daily monastic life, thereby teasing out some of the experience of living like a medieval conventual. And in her fourth chapter she places the motives provided for some of the crimes against superiors in the context of a broader developing rhetoric on the persecution of reformers (pp. 196-211). Luset's combination of a fairly traditional structure with thematic highlights makes for a very clear and readable book, leaving the reader both with a good understanding of the basic information on offer (formal structures, types of crime, etc.) and of the broader socio-cultural arguments which so strongly enliven the world she describes.

The richness of Luset's monograph is also helped by her broad selection of sources, both normative and descriptive. This selection is again mainly the result of the scattered nature of the surviving evidence of monastic correction among the many authorities involved in its execution. Luset has not just consulted the statutes and visitation reports stemming from the monastic orders themselves, but also episcopal registers and documents from the Papal Chancery and Apostolic Penitentiary which treat cases involving the penalization of regulars. Given the immense scope of the sources it is laudable that Luset has managed to present her material in a manner that is both enjoyable to read and analytically well thought through. She often brings the reader close up with the sometimes curious details of her criminal cases. Thus we are presented with an extensive treatment of the enquiry into alleged acts of violence by the thirteenth-century prior of Wootton Wawen (pp. 97-104). And elsewhere we read about a case in which three English monks are accused of seeking the help of the Pythonesque-named necromancer, Robert, to secure a stash of gold (p. 134). Presenting her material in such detail, Luset convincingly shows the immense richness of these documents. Yet she also provides the documents themselves with a context of practice. In her first chapter in particular, the texts used to reconstruct monastic criminality are treated as an intricate part of the development of the institutions concerned with this criminality. Taking a step beyond simply using the documents as sources of information, or letting the inherent bias of the texts limit any meaningful use to be made of them, Luset integrates their production, use, and archiving in the changing practice of monastic penalization she seeks to analyze.

What would have further profited the clearness of Luset's presentation of her material would have been the inclusion of some of her findings in the form of tables or maps. Even though, especially in her third and fourth chapters, she often provides figures and percentages for the modalities of the crimes encountered (types, locations, times, motives, etc.), a clear overview of these modalities vis-à-vis each other is lacking. A summary in table-form would have provided an even clearer sense of the relative weight of phenomena as well as further clarifying possible relations between specific crimes, alleged circumstances and resolutions. A similar clarifying function could have been fulfilled by the inclusion of several maps of the locations and networks of cloisters, or of the geographical origins of the cases encountered in the documents. For a book that makes the tension between overarching monastic networks and the individual geographically and socio-culturally embedded house so clear, some more visualization of these tensions is a clear want. That such extra-textual means to present her findings

would have further profited the book is actually confirmed by the two tables that Lusset does include: one on the nature of crimes pardoned by the apostolic penitentiary (p. 303) and one on the documentary provenance of the crimes analyzed in the book (p. 335). The added clarity that these two tables bring makes the reader aware of the absence of something similar in earlier parts of the book.

The combination of a comprehensive study of some five centuries of monastic penalization with a clever analysis and well-considered presentation makes this book an absolute must-have for those either interested in the histories of crime and punishment or in monasticism and ecclesiastical institutions in a broad sense. Navigating between multiple centuries, regions, institutions, sources and levels of analysis, Lusset provides a convenient starting point for any study of crime in a monastic context, while clearly leaving her own mark on the field. Given the broad chronological and geographical scope of the study, an English translation of the book might be seriously considered to broaden its potential public even further. This could, incidentally, also serve as an occasion for the publisher to reconsider the book's excessive price.

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