

*vitae* tended to emphasize “living in the world,” especially contributions to communal life. Histories of each convent displayed the self-awareness of each community and the desire to record its accomplishments, thus providing the “institutional memory” so lacking in the beguine movement of the earlier period.

Chapter 7, “Two Spiritual Friends from Facons,” analyzes writings that, unlike those above, resemble the spiritual outpourings of the earlier period: an account of a journey through hell and a recounting of conversations with Christ. Scheepsma devotes Chapter 8 to Alijt Bake (d. 1455), one of the women in the movement who most resembles those earlier beguines. In pursuit of the mystic life Bake entered the convent of Gallilea in Ghent. Reading, writing, reflecting, and eventually writing for others were important steps on her spiritual path. However, she was eventually deposed as prioress and banished from the convent, and after she died the Chapter at Windesheim issued a prohibition that forbade nuns to write down visions or other mystical phenomena. Bake clearly regarded her writing as part of a reform movement to inspire others, and although she was banished, her works continued to circulate. Five manuscripts of her treatise on the Passion have survived from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, attesting to her widespread influence in the region.

The final chapter, “Literature and the Choir Nuns of Windesheim,”

examines the role of books, reading, and writing in the lives of the convents’ most educated members, the choir nuns. For these nuns, spiritual literature played a key role in the process of interior transformation. Scheepsma’s study demonstrates that by the fifteenth century, religious women in Northern Europe carefully negotiated the line between the flamboyant individualism of their predecessors (and may have had, indeed, little knowledge about them), and the creation of a deeply personal spiritual life that depended upon reading, writing, and reflecting. Their achievements, the types of writings they produced, and the institutional memories they created came with the cost of limits on individual expression and authority.

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**Anne Bagnall Yardley.**  
*Performing Piety: Musical Culture in Medieval English Nunneries.* (The New Middle Ages.) Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. pp. xvii + 326.

**A**nne Yardley addresses the place of music and liturgy in the lives of English medieval nuns, covering the broad chronological span of tenth through the early sixteenth century and adopting a perspective that (helpfully) cuts across

monastic orders. Yardley's synthetic approach assesses the surviving clues to a generalized liturgical practice on the part of female religious, followed by a series of case studies exploring particular details of musical life in specific places. Yardley's sources range from monastic rules, visitation records, musical codices and other surviving manuscripts, convent inventories, letters, and architectural and pictorial evidence. From them she extracts the pieces for what she describes as a "mosaic" of evidence for the lived experience of a life devoted to a daily cycle of sung worship. Given the roles accorded women by the church, the liturgical practices of women's houses necessarily differ from those of male monasteries; thus, her study fills an important gap in monastic scholarship. Little has been written heretofore on the ways in which late medieval women's cloisters adapted to the constraints and to the opportunities inherent in a sung liturgical practice, and scholars of all sorts will be grateful to Yardley's endeavors. In short, this study makes a significant contribution to women's history and to monastic studies in general.

There has been a recent efflorescence of monastic studies on women. In addition to large collaborative projects like Matrix Monasticon <<http://monasticmatrix.usc.edu/monasticon>> and synthetic studies such as Jo Ann McNamara's *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Harvard, 1996), innumerable recent studies have addressed aspects of monastic life within individual houses or taken up

particular concerns such as *clausura*, the observant reform movement, or the financial footings of convent life that link the monastic experience to gender in important ways. Yardley's book adds an important reminder that gender shaped the liturgical practices of women's monasticism as well as its legal, social, and economic aspects. Several important monographs have, of course, studied women's liturgical practice in depth, notably those by Craig Monson and Robert Kendrick, but the emphasis in the scholarly literature to date has been on Italian convents and on later eras. Yardley's point of departure, on the other hand, is in some ways the intellectual history of medieval women's monasticism as found in David N. Bell's *What Nuns Read* (Cistercian Publications, 1995), for she is grounded in the tangible evidence of liturgical practice and the details of what resources were (and were not) available to medieval convent women. She is working in a time frame that differs sharply from the Tridentine world explored to date by musicologists and in a cultural practice—late medieval liturgy—that is almost overwhelmingly fraught with minutiae.

Yardley's focus is the performative experience—the lived liturgy, enacted through music—in these women's lives. She elucidates the significance of gender for the role of the abbess', for example, exploring the ceremonial aspects reserved to male clerics and what authority could be accorded a woman as convent leader. She further contextualizes the abbess'

role by assessing the other important musical/liturgical roles in the convent: the place of the cantrix, *magistra*, sacristan, and *ebdomadaria* [weekly reader]. This is itself a profoundly useful contribution, and the culmination of a broad and thorough reading of extant evidence.

In addition to teasing out the place of convent leadership within liturgical practice, Yardley explores the place of the liturgy within women's monasticism more generally, quoting at length from extant rules. She also elucidates aspects of a less idealized monastic practice, cited in visitation reports and convent inventories, and uses the evidence there to examine significant elements of daily life. For example she addresses education, departures from expected behavior including problems in performance and attendance at convent ceremonies, and material culture within the convent, such as the presence or absence of musical instruments.

The first portion of the book ends with a chapter devoted to surviving service books. A table lists extant psalters associated with nunneries followed by descriptions of clusters of manuscripts and the evidence for their use. Other kinds of service books, including the Nunnaminster volume that might have served as an "exercise book," Books of Hours, and various sources containing the liturgy surrounding death and dying, are also evoked, and here a separate table of manuscripts discussed might have been useful, though the index entry on "manuscripts" can help. The

nature of the sources themselves—non-standardized collections of disparate materials for a wide range of purposes—makes the discussion in this chapter particularly episodic, but the author balances this brief survey by case studies that form the second portion of the book.

The case studies address aspects of women's monastic life that can be elucidated given surviving manuscript evidence. One chapter addresses processions, particularly during Holy Week; another explores the consecration ceremony and makes comparisons across different orders. The last two chapters are devoted to two centers for which the most evidence survives: the Benedictine foundation of Barking Abbey and the Bridgettine house at Syon. Appendices provide further information: a "list of nuns holding the position of cantrix" which includes the variable titles these women are assigned; an excerpt which describes the duties of the chantress from the *Addition to the Rules of Syon Abbey*; a transcription and translation of the theoretical material from Wherwell Abbey; and an edition (with music, text and translation) of the *Visitatio* from the Wilton Processional.

The book is not always an easy read. The local details of liturgical practice are always profoundly messy, and teasing out important points of comparison—why a particular variant is significant—can be difficult. The detailed descriptions that some readers may skim lightly, others

may study in depth, and indeed, the challenges inherent in the material are balanced by the generous array of descriptions. The book is particularly rich in direct quotations and translations of primary sources joined, in the latter chapters, by a generous allotment of musical examples to illustrate particular points. This is an expert's book in the best sense, providing enough detail for the liturgist or musicologist to have plenty of leads for future study while giving the generalist sufficient guidance to reward careful reading. Yardley's study will likely take its place alongside Anne Winston-Allen's *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing About Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (2004), another book that looks at how monastic women create and support their own culture, as a foundational study for future research. Explorations of the differences between the cultures of women and men religious provide important insights about the spiritual, emotional, and musical life of our medieval ancestors.

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**Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski. *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006. pp. x + 240.**

**B**lumenfeld-Kosinski's new work is not an examination of the politics of the Great Schism, nor is it an exploration of the religious significance of the prophets and visionaries that fill its pages. Rather, as she states in her historical and methodological introduction, it treats the Great Schism "as a problem to illuminate medieval thought processes," (12) in order to analyze "the subjectivity of the people affected by the Great Schism as it manifests itself in texts and images, the only traces that remain of their thoughts" (14). In three sections focusing on visionaries, poets, and prophets, Blumenfeld-Kosinski seeks to paint the portrait of the "*imaginaire*" of the Great Schism (pp. 12-13). As she points out, the genres of texts she addresses had a large audience, and indeed "they are as much part of the historical reality as the military offensives, intrigues, and murders that punctuated the Schism years" (14). She sums up the questions these texts can speak to: "How did [the variety of people affected by the Schism] express their anguish and frustration? By which means did they try to intervene in the politics of their time? What kinds of solutions did they offer?" (12) Rather than implying