Guynn reviews scholarly opinions on Christine’s written responses to the poem and also reminds us that the forced penetration of the rose undoubtedly had a counterpart in women’s historical reality.

*Allegory and Sexual Ethics* will be of interest to medievalists concerned with the history of sexuality and gender studies. Throughout, Guynn matches his close attention to textual details with an exhaustive review of recent and key critical approaches to his selected texts. Moreover, each chapter stands well on its own, and can serve as an aid in teaching the three works selected. While the temporal and geographic scope of *Allegory and Sexual Ethics* is limited to twelfth- and thirteenth-century France, Guynn’s readings, in advocating a move away from considerations of the aesthetic value of allegory and towards an analysis of the coercive power of rhetoric and its incisive role in social relations, have wider applications. In keeping with his focus on allegory’s political importance, Guynn concludes on an activist note by suggesting that an understanding of medieval allegory’s “pernicious ideological fictions” can and should impact upon our own reality as scholars and lead us to “challenge the oppressive, violent legacy of premodern ethics and sexual ethics” (174).

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Augustine Thompson.

Augustine Thompson’s *Cities of God* is a magnificent book, a tour de force of archival scholarship that argues persuasively for the central role of religion in the civic culture of the northern Italian communes. Thompson thus corrects the standard understanding of communal governments as principally “secular” phenomena. He aims to elucidate “the religious life of ordinary laypeople,” largely overlooked in recent scholarship that has focused instead on “heresy, the mendicants, and women’s mysticism” (1). This meticulously documented work employs much of the best secondary scholarship and, especially, an impressive array
of archival and printed primary sources including, for example, statutes from some two dozen communes, chronologies, ecclesiastical constitutions and councils, liturgical works, confraternity documents, saints’ vitae, and devotional literature. Thompson writes in a crisp, direct, and jargon-free style.

The book includes an introduction, two parts of five chapters each, and an epilogue. Part 1, on the “Citade Sancta,” discusses the civic and religious institutions of the commune. Chapter 1 shows the central place of the cathedral, the “Mother Church,” in the life of each commune. Citizens gathered there for important civic functions, markets, and other business. Chapter 2 focuses on lay penitential piety, particularly confraternities, and relies especially on the work of Gilles Gérard Meersseman. Chapter 3 considers the religious identity of the communes, including collaboration between civic and church authorities, saints as communal patrons, and the commune’s presence in sacred spaces. Chapter 4 shows how public rituals such as marriage, processions, candle-offerings, and bell-ringing were both civic and religious acts that helped to create families, neighborhoods, and the city. Chapter 5 deals with the civic identity and function of saints.

Part 2, on “Buoni Cattolici,” highlights the shared religious behavior of the people who belonged to the groups and institutions presented in Part 1. Chapters 6-8 focus particularly on the liturgy. Chapter 6 discusses attitudes and practices regarding the divine office, Mass, and communion. Thompson argues that the faithful were no mere passive observers at Mass, but participants who understood the liturgy and actively engaged with it through their prayers and gestures. Chapter 7, on the liturgical calendar from Christmas to Lent, explains how Catholics celebrated Christmas, the four Lents, and Carnival, and also treats private and public penance, and confessional practices. Chapter 8 covers Holy Week to Pentecost. Thompson shows how baptism, more than Mass, communion, or confession, was the communal event par excellence. Chapter 9 focuses on Catholics at prayer: the prayers they knew, the gestures they used, mental prayer, religious literature, and books of devotion. Thompson’s last chapter considers how Catholics died: the dramatic rituals surrounding their deathbeds, the crowds that might surround them, the processions of neighbors and clergy.
accompanying the dead person, the funeral, and finally the funeral meal, replete with flowing wine.

This brief summary cannot capture the numerous, fascinating details that Thompson adduces to show how intricately joined were commune and Church. A few examples here suffice. Each commune stored its battle wagon, the *carroccio*, in the cathedral complex; the wagon even became the center of a religious cult in one city. Public, mass baptisms, Thompson shows, were centralized events performed in the “womb of the commune,” the cathedral baptistery; baptism, frequently administered in assembly-line fashion, simultaneously made individuals into citizens and created the community of the Church.

Thompson draws the reader right into the world of the Italian communes with a plethora of everyday details. He explains, for example, who staffed the numerous small urban and rural churches, how many and what size they might be, their significant architectural features, the role of these churches in the life of the laity, who owned the property, and where the churches fit in the intricate network governed by the bishop and Mother Church, which constituted the single parish encompassing all the churches. Similarly, for other topics, Thompson exploits his sources to paint lively and detailed pictures.

Two thought-provoking suggestions regarding the evolution of religion in the communes are sure to elicit further discussion. Thompson argues that the communes’ success, after the rise of the Popolo, in developing an administration distinct from the Mother Church was paralleled, paradoxically, by the striking growth of religious language and imagery in communal legislation. Lacking the sacral aura of either empire or Church, the popular communes needed to establish that their authority derived directly from heaven. Second, Thompson conjectures that religion lost its civic centrality once the popular communes lost their independence to the princes in the fourteenth century.

A few reservations are worth noting. The first and most important is that while Thompson periodically acknowledges the hagiographic or prescriptive character of some of the sources he employs, he regularly slips into drawing on such texts as if they provided evidence for the actual experience and practice of ordinary laypeople. For example, as evidence for
lay reliance on Mary’s help at the time of death, Thompson recounts a story about the death of an “ordinary laywoman” that was included in a collection of miracles about Mary (384).

Second, although Thompson periodically addresses issues regarding gender and includes tantalizing bits of evidence (e.g., in Bergamo, there was “a procession of cathedral clergy each Sunday to a different cloister of nuns” [150]), one could have wished for greater depth and consistency. In a few cases, I was not sure if Thompson was employing “brothers” to denote men and women, rather than men alone; or using gender-neutral terms, such as “penitents,” to include both sexes. Midway through a paragraph on penitents, for example, one realizes that the “penitents” being discussed are men (87). One wonders then if later discussions in the chapter (e.g., p. 93) principally regard men. Thompson also theorizes that the absence of women from communal statutes “arose from the women’s aversion to elaborate organization and their desire for autonomy,” and he notes their numerous “ad hoc groups” (97-98). Many such penitent women found themselves in a dual bind that Thompson overlooks: excluded from the mendicant orders, whose spirituality and lives of service

many penitent women sought to emulate, they also could not afford significant overt organization because this attracted the sort of attention that led to a host of regulations, including greater clausuration, that impeded the service and devotions they wished to practice in the first place.

Third, Thompson intentionally left the mendicants (and heretics) mostly to the margins of his story because they have been discussed so often and because he wished to discuss the people who produced Saint Francis rather than the saint himself or his followers. The title of the book’s epilogue, “Communal Piety and the Mendicants,” might raise a hope for a more focused discussion, but after some brief and noteworthy remarks, the epilogue instead provides a detailed account of a late-thirteenth-century Dominican inquisition in Bologna and an ensuing popular revolt. It is riveting reading, but it does not fill the void left by the relative absence of the mendicants, key players in urban Italian communes during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.

These reservations are slight alongside Thompson’s impressive achievement: a convincing and very important book that opens new avenues of discussion
regarding religion in the Italian communes.

The Pennsylvania State University Press should be congratulated for its willingness to publish a 500-page monograph, with notes, moreover, conveniently placed at the foot of each page and hardly a single typographical error in the entire book. Sixty-one photographs significantly enhance the volume; a map would have been welcome.

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Pauline Stafford, a prolific scholar on English monarchy, is well known to political historians interested in either, or both, kings and queens because of her influential work on the political interplay of masculinity, femininity, and gender relations before the Norman conquest. Much of her work is available to American and European scholars, most notably two groundbreaking studies of English queens—*Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (1983) and *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (1997). _Gendering the Middle Ages_, a valuable collection of essays from the issue of _Gender and History_ (2001) that she edited with Anneke Mulder-Bakker, is ample evidence of her impact on a new generation of scholars in the field of gender studies. Her essays in the 2003 edition of the _Oxford Dictionary of National Biography_ are elegant summations of much of her work that are readily available online. So why should we care about a Variorum edition?

We should care because this volume is much more than a simple gathering of a prodigious body of work by an influential scholar. What makes this volume worth reading, beyond the fact that it includes several essays published in journals with limited circulation in the United States and one published here for the first time, is that it traces the trajectory of the development of women's history since the 1970s as practiced in England. In this, it serves as a survey of the diverse methods that transformed the discipline—sociology,