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examines the role of books, reading,
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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.

Anne Yardley addresses the place
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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,
hers 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,”

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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 Millenia* (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 minuitiae.

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’ 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.

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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-Yardley’s study of 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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Blumenfeld-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

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