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Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe. by Frederick S. Paxton

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the ductus of their swinging loops can only be understood as running under the black paint. Fourth, while the reference to the worshiper in the unpainted Mass of the Virgin is feminine, those in the black areas are mixed—*famulo tuo* in the *Obsecro te* and the bisexual *Ego miserrimus peccatrix* in the *O intemerata*—and, last, the letters on the coif of the lady at the window are probably “RIM,” a partial anagram of Marie. Using these and some iconographic clues one can reconstruct a history in which Margaret ordered the book for herself shortly after her marriage in 1468, had van Lathem continue it in the early 1470s, as a betrothal or marriage present for her stepdaughter, the object of several marriage negotiations in these years, and had the Burgundy Master finish it in the months after Charles’s death for Mary and her secret and absent fiancé, Maximilian of Austria. This last campaign would have involved scraping and painting the text areas, for lack of time limited to the nonliturgical texts and the titles of a few of the offices, and replacing some of the inserted leaves with images related to Mary’s situation, because much of their iconography seems to allude to mourning, separation, and intercession. While Thoss denies that black pages are necessarily connected with mourning, she has elsewhere cited manuscripts that explicitly make such a connection, and the owners may have left the shields unpainted in memory of their sentiments at this time.

These are just a few of the ideas that will be stimulated by this excellent work. A catalogue that does this is more than an instrument for research: it is a partner in conversation.

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FREDERICK S. PAXTON, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe*. Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1990. Pp. xv, 229; frontispiece, tables. \$31.50.

The heart of Paxton’s study of the process by which a unified ritual for the passage of the Christian soul from life to death emerged in the Latin West is a detailed analysis of the various stages and developments of the rites as preserved in Merovingian, Visigothic, Irish, and Carolingian sacramentaries (chaps. 2–5, pp. 47–200). The very abundance and technical nature of the information, which may make this book valuable to the specialist, render it frustrating for the nonspecialist. Moreover, while a text-based study, few texts actually appear: ceremonies are presented in tabular form, which may be efficient, but the format forces a reader to go elsewhere, often to several sources, to assemble the full text. Paxton misses the opportunity to convey the very magic and majesty of the language that ultimately made these ceremonies efficacious and inspired their continual adaptation. Nor does Paxton help the reader imagine the impact of concomitant aspects of liturgy: gesture, costume, music.

Paxton does painstakingly chronicle the successive stages of reconstructible liturgies. Nonetheless, he has difficulties turning these into coherent history. The problem is more than the classic no-forest-for-the-trees perspective. At one point Paxton writes that a “change . . . almost certainly had to do with a change in spirituality among the Frankish aristocracy, who, deeply affected by the asceticism of the Irish monks, turned toward a more penitential lifestyle” (p. 56). Assuming they were thus affected, the question remains: why at that point? Elsewhere, referring to the eighth century, Paxton writes, “Since priests had to shun the dead in order to avoid ritual pollution, they were led to give special attention to the sick and the dying” and hence revised “an old ritual for the visitation of the sick” (p. 86). Why did these particular men feel compelled to innovate at precisely this moment?

The opening sections are in general the weakest parts of the whole. In “Introduction:

History and Ritual" (pp. 1–18), Paxton explains how his book "is informed by closely related fields . . . , especially anthropology and the new field of ritual studies" (p. 5). He adduces van Gennep's tripartite framework of "rites of passage," but the anthropology in these few pages is superficial summary and, insofar as it rarely informs his analyses in the body of the book, seems in retrospect more like marketing than fundamental principle. Paxton adduces, quite rightly, another anthropological insight, what one might call (though Paxton does not) the performative function of ritual (p. 8); however, while this is central to the conclusions he would draw, he backs away from a thoroughgoing analysis of ritual semeiosis.

Paxton is clearly on more comfortable ground when discussing "ritual studies," and his criticisms of earlier work as too often sectarian and teleological are well taken. Paxton's methodology, "deriv[ing] from the tradition of the social rather than the ecclesiastical sciences, . . . permits [him] to explore and understand the Christian tradition without concern for questions of the theological 'correctness' of a ritual practice or its relation to a ritual tradition unconnected with Rome" (p. 14). This is indeed of great value.

The first chapter, "The Mediterranean Background to the Sixth Century" (pp. 19–46), is in my view the most disappointing, a perfunctory and simplified jumping-off point for his study proper. Paxton's "Mediterranean" amounts to little more than Italy and Judaeo-Christian Palestine, with very few references even to Eastern Christianity. Now this may be all by way of underpinnings that Paxton's study, exclusively Western and Latin once it reaches its main section, requires. Why then arouse expectations by a term that should rightfully designate more cosmopolitan studies? Even within his more limited purview, Paxton's treatment is spotty. Among the aspects of the non-Christian Italian background not mentioned by Paxton are Roman burial societies. Paxton writes that "Christianity emerged and developed as part of this multicultural system" (p. 21) as if there were one Christianity from the start. Paxton gives little sense of the different currents and classes within early Latin Christianity.

There is much of value, both in detail and in general observations, once Paxton hits his stride, particularly following page 61. To cite but two of many possible examples: "the main task was not so much to Romanize as to Christianize" (p. 93), or "The conception of the mass as a gift to God which he would reciprocate arose . . . from the natural tendency of northern Christians . . . to model their religious behavior on the structures of their social life, in which gift giving played a central role" (p. 99). Paxton frequently negotiates the tricky passage from general to specific. One of the more interesting paragraphs in the book gives us an idea how individual parish priests actually worked with parishioners and how changing views may have been incorporated in larger books (p. 114; see also p. 165, n. 7, for telling use of a tiny detail). Also very suggestive is his description of what one might call creative copying: "As soon as the Gregorian sacramentary began to be regularly copied and disseminated . . . , scribes took liberties with its structure and content, breaking it up, adding material where it was needed, and gradually transforming it into a new type of book" (p. 156). As is now well known, medieval scholars themselves recognized several gradations between author and scribe, including *compilator*. The opportunity for change and adaptation at the point of creation of every exemplar will seem familiar to the age of desktop publishing and the appearance of revisable texts in electronic formats.

Paxton seems unprepared or unwilling to handle the complex problematics of literary history and intertextuality his topic demands. As tracker of the fortunes of various prayers, Paxton describes the Vatican Gelasian as a mixture of "old Roman texts with more recent material developed outside of Rome" (p. 104, with more detail following). But Paxton does not convey what particular sense, if any, Roman or non-Roman origins had for the liturgists who put together what is from Paxton's perspective a conglomerate

or what meaning Roman origins, if discernible, might have had for participants or listeners. Use rather than provenance matters in such a system. Of the same compilation Paxton writes that “Roman, Gallican, and Visigothic elements jostle one another in uneasy juxtaposition. The compilers . . . collected and transmitted material, but did not transform it into a coherent whole” (p. 106). So it seems to Paxton, but he offers no argument that it seemed thus to those who used the compilation in question. That subsequent rituals developed it is no proof that it was superseded because of its mixture of sources. (Paxton’s view of what would make “a coherent sequence” intrudes again on page 126.) The reader is the more keenly disappointed because Paxton proves himself capable of more subtle formulations, for example, when he discusses a similar problem in terms of “liturgical sensibility” (p. 59).

Citing the *Vita sanctae Balthildis*, Paxton assumes without comment that the hagiographer has represented the saint’s thoughts accurately (pp. 56–57). The reportage that Balthildis chose to let “the illness take its course and rejoic[ed] in the opportunity offer[ed] by her suffering to prepare for death” suggests linkage with the rich terrain Caroline Bynum has opened up; even though Bynum heads Paxton’s list of inspiring spirits (p. xi), Paxton misses this opportunity to explore the subtleties of either representation or gender (so also p. 79, n. 120). In another field, it seems odd to find nothing on the alleged “birth of purgatory,” if only a dismissal of Le Goff.

One of Paxton’s most important insights is that a study of the rites of sickness and dying displays an oscillation, even tension, between institutional and liturgical diversity and uniformity. Paxton sounds this note from the very beginning, but it is particularly well handled in the conclusion (pp. 201–9). Yet this theme itself presents problems for some of his intermediate conclusions. For example, “[t]he liturgical products of St-Amand between 850 and 875 point up the need to resolve the state of tension among the different approaches to sickness, death, and dying which had emerged during the preceding three centuries” (p. 179). Now if, as Paxton has argued, at other times and in other contexts diversity is tolerated, how can we be sure any such change in fact reflects a felt need “to resolve tension”?

Without checking the wide range of liturgical publications Paxton has used, not to mention the manuscript sources, I cannot control the accuracy of Paxton’s citations throughout. However, at least once in the first chapter, where Paxton is dealing with basic biblical material, he garbles the different levels of Latin sources to the point that leaves this reader completely confused. One note reads: “Psalm 113B.9, 11: ‘Domus Israel speravit in Domino; adjutor eorum et protector eorum est. . . . Qui timent Dominum speraverunt in Domino; adjutor eorum et protector eorum est.’ So the Vulgate; the Septuagint has ‘auxilio et protector’ ” (p. 40, n. 83; Paxton’s ellipsis). Now if Paxton ever tells the reader what edition of the Vulgate he uses, he has hidden it so that I cannot find it. What Paxton gives as the “Vulgate” is, according to the *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem* of the Württembergische Bibelanstalt (R. Weber, ed., 3rd ed. [Stuttgart, 1983]), the text of “*Psalmi iuxta LXX*” (1:916). Granted, this text of the Psalms translated from the Septuagint was since Alcuin (and even before that in Gaul) the “vulgate,” but to call it the “Vulgate” does not respect the complex history of the Latin Psalms. What Paxton calls the “Septuagint” is not the “*Psalmi iuxta LXX*,” nor is it the text of the “*Psalmi iuxta Hebraeos*,” unless Paxton has erroneously written “auxilio” for “auxiliator” (1:917). Is it one of the *versiones veteres Latinae*? Presumably, but Paxton gives no source.

The translations from the Latin are quite accurate (but “dedit” is “gave,” not “gives” [p. 189], and “salutem suam operari dissimulet” must mean “pretend that he is on the mend” rather than “feigns to work for his health” [pp. 164–65]). However, a misplaced zeal for literal translation leads him frequently into unidiomatic English: “on the end of . . . the nostrils” for “at the tip” (p. 159), “conserve this your servant” for “preserve”

(p. 189). "Lord, send down from heaven the Holy Spirit your Paraclete into this olive oil" (p. 30) sounds like the prelude to a first attempt at an Italian recipe. On the other hand, on more than one occasion Paxton has, arbitrarily it seems, chosen to render unambiguous if "unmarked" Latin masculines with "marked" female English pronouns, a procedure which projects an anachronistic sensitivity to grammatical gender onto medieval Latin texts (e.g., pp. 80–81 [with nn. 126 and 128]; see also pp. 129, 164).

There are a few other minor errors. "Consumate" (p. 154) should be "consummate"; "to" should be "te" (p. 182, "Ritual 9"); and the title of chapter 15 of Jonas of Orléans's *De institutione laicali* in Migne is "De mortuis sepeliendis, et cura pro eorum animabus," not ". . . sepeliendi . . . animibus" (p. 197, n. 100).

In sum, *Christianizing Death* draws together a vast number of details of interest largely to historians of liturgy but would do little to persuade a skeptical nonspecialist that liturgical studies have much to add to an appreciation of medieval culture. I think that Paxton and his editors may have miscalculated, or misled, his audience; the title and opening sections would seem to invite a wide readership, yet the involved recitations that constitute the bulk of the book are likely to fatigue all but the most indefatigable. The very density of the book has forced me to scattered criticisms, and I regret if that gives an impression of overall disapproval. There is, as I have said, much of value and interest, but it is not easy to uncover. I would recommend readers turn first to the conclusion, where Paxton is consistently successful in describing succinctly but without oversimplification the evolution he argues the ritual underwent. I at least draw the conclusion that "Christianizing Death" is itself a subset of "Christianizing Life." For early Christians, it was death that marked entry into full Christian life. No wonder, given the widespread conviction of the early church that the millennium was nigh. But as the years lengthened, the church—ever more hierarchy and less "assembly"—was drawn to regulate what now seemed likely to be a long succession of Christian lives, of which death and sickness unto death were now parts. Several generations of innovative liturgists responded by devising, to pick up one of Paxton's more evocative terms, Christian "deathways" (p. 204) for believers to follow.

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PIERRE DE LANGTOFT, *Le règne d'Edouard Ier*, 1, ed. Jean Claude Thiolier. Créteil: CELIMA, Université de Paris XII, 1989. Paper. Pp. 488; 4 black-and-white illustrations. F 300.

JEAN CLAUDE THIOLIER, *Pierre de Langtoft: Historiographe d'Edouard Ier Plantagenet*. Communication faite en mars 1988 à l'occasion du cinquantenaire de l'Anglo-Norman Society. Créteil: CELIMA, Université de Paris XII, 1990. Paper. Pp. 19.

Peter of Langtoft's chronicle, comprising three books, has long been recognized as a valuable source for historians and specialists in Anglo-Norman literature. Of the three books, the third, covering the reign of Edward I, has been most prized by historians for its contemporary view of the troubled last years of Edward's rule and relations between England and Scotland as well as its inclusion of popular ballads offering a small, yet valuable, window into popular attitudes of the time. Until now, there has been no systematic analysis of the textual tradition of the chronicle so that historians have been content to use the edition produced by Thomas Wright for the Rolls Series in 1868.

In filling this analytical gap, Jean Claude Thiolier not only provides an excellent edition of the third book of the chronicle but demonstrates that the manuscript tradition of the chronicle is far richer and more complex than previously thought. In the simplest terms,