

Reviews

Bainbridge, Virginia R. *Gilds in the Medieval Countryside: Social and Religious Change in Cambridgeshire c.1350–1558*. Studies in the History of Medieval Religion, 10. Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 1996. 177 pp.

Virginia Bainbridge's *Gilds in the Medieval Countryside: Social and Religious Change in Cambridgeshire c. 1350–1558* is the latest and tenth volume in Boydell Press' *Studies in the History of Medieval Religion* series, edited by Christopher Harper-Bill. The series has addressed questions both large (e.g. *A Brotherhood of Canons Serving God: English Secular Cathedrals in the Later Middle Ages*, by David Levine) and more modest (e.g. *William Waynflete: Bishop and Educationalist*, by Virginia Davis) on the topic of the history of medieval religious experience. Bainbridge's book examines rural religious gilds and their function within medieval English society. The better-known urban religious gilds—fraternities, confraternities, *zunfte*, *ghilde*, or *arte*, depending on the language and region—have been more extensively researched. The country gilds, however, have been less well studied and Bainbridge sets out to remedy this lacuna in the scholarship.

Her task is not an easy one. The history of gild scholarship itself in the modern era is long and complicated. In her first chapter, "Ideology and Historiography: Modern Images of Medieval Gilds", Bainbridge describes how previous research approaches have affected perceptions of these religious organizations, both for good and ill. Her own viewpoint, in turn, has been influenced by the recent research of Susan Reynolds.¹ In addition, the gild records, or rather lack of records, pose other hazards. The records for rural gilds are fragmented and few; and the destruction of gild associations and their records in the early English Protestant period was often determined and complete. The paucity of records compels Bainbridge to examine a broad range of material in an attempt to fill in the gaps in a picture left incomplete by the loss of so many documents. She examines, for example, tax records, wills, bequest documents, and inventories, each affording a glimpse of some gild activity or property, along with the more usual gild statutes and records, where available. The result is pleasing in several ways. Dr. Bainbridge has presented an image of a world in transition: some people rejected new religiosities in the post-Henrican Reformation era, while others embraced the opportunity to benefit from the shifts in power and wealth. The rural gilds reflect these dichotomies in the social fabric; in some areas gilds and their properties were protected locally, usually by going underground, and in others they were quickly disbanded and their properties seized. Perhaps the most

1 In particular Reynolds' book *Kingdoms and communities in Western Europe, 900–1300* (Oxford, 1984).

interesting element of Bainbridge's findings is the institutional, social, and economic alterations caused by the destruction of medieval religious guilds. She argues that the Reformation did not, as some suggest, wipe out or immediately and successfully suppress all English Catholic lay organizations, their places of worship, and their members. The change was more gradual, the decay slower and more complicated, tied to new economic interactions, administrative changes, and social realities initially ushered in by the dissolution of the monasteries. The image that Dr. Bainbridge presents is that of a religious society in transition and transformation with vestiges of the old clinging to the new, where English medieval Catholic devotional practices, charitable duties, and funerary activities undertaken by rural gild organizations, like their urban counterparts, were gradually abolished and replaced by new puritan ideologies.

Dr. Bainbridge's book will be a welcome addition to the study of religious guilds in England. My only complaint, and it is a small one, is that title somewhat misrepresents the book's contents. The main title, and this may be the publisher's and not the author's fault, is too broad. As is often the case, the subtitle is more useful: this is primarily a book about social and religious change in Cambridgeshire c.1350–1558 and less about guilds in the medieval countryside generally. I would be pleased to see another series on this latter topic and several books examining rural guilds, if the records survive, in other areas of Europe.

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Casagrande, Giovanna. *Religiosità penitenziale e città al tempo dei comuni*. Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1995. 508 pp.

In this impressive work, Giovanna Casagrande maps the itinerary of the lay penitential movement from the eleventh century to the fifteenth. This includes the study of individual recluses of the eleventh century, who sought an alternative to both the secular life of the laity on the one hand and the religious orders on the other, through the tertiary movement associated with the mendicants, to the more explicitly lay confraternities of penitents. In many respects this is the history of how many lay people found a place for themselves in a Church that was increasingly defined in theological terms by a sharp distinction between laity and clergy.

In particular, Casagrande's work highlights the achievements of women penitents whose activities as recluses or as members of communities provided an alternative to either marriage or full membership in a religious order. The recluses of the eleventh and twelfth centuries who attempted to live according to the evangelical counsels largely removed themselves from the authority of fathers, husbands, or religious superiors. The movement to establish lay branches of the Franciscan movement was initially welcomed by such individuals in the thirteenth and fourteenth century as a means to express desires that were consonant with the spirituality and apostolate of Francis of Assisi. Nevertheless, the increasing institutionalization of the Third Orders, both communal groups and those who lived at home, transformed the groups into quasi-religious orders, congregations of nuns and brothers. The