

the stated goals and practices of the Saint Anne confraternities he criticized (43–46).

Perhaps the most interesting part of Nixon's book is a brief study (85–98) of the Saint Anne confraternity at Augsburg and at Annaberg, which, she says, "offers a capsule version of the larger schema" that she traces. She shows that the Augsburg Carmelites introduced the Saint Anne cult into the city in the 1490s as a response to financial shortages, and that the resulting confraternity was, at least for a while, a successful fundraiser for the order. In Annaberg, the same pattern took place but with greater success; here, the cult and its confraternity's activities greatly enriched not only the local churches but also the town and its founder, Duke George of Saxony.

Nixon's study is illuminating as a study of the cult of sainthood, in its economic in addition to its social and salvific aspects.

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Wilson-Allen, Anne. *Convent Chronicles. Women Writing About Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004. xviii, 345 pp., 10 ill., 1 map. ISBN 0-271-02460-7 US.\$ 55.

As Ann Winston-Allen notes in the introduction, "Aside from a few mystical works composed by female visionaries, almost all primary texts used by modern scholars to study medieval women were recorded by men." (3) In her efforts to recover women's writings from this "literary-historical obscurity" which "has led to the mistaken assumption that they left no substantial written records about themselves," (1) she has provided a useful blueprint on how to undertake such a project. Indeed, a glance at the map provided in the introduction shows the remarkable amount, geographical diffusion, and great variety of nun's writings she has examined: sister books, annals, convent chronicles, foundation narratives, letters, poems, mystical works, and devotional texts. Thus, this study makes an excellent contribution to the growing evidence that women could and did participate in the historical enterprise.

Chapter 1 provides a useful synthesis of the environment of late-medieval nunneries in German and Dutch speaking lands for the non-specialist. Chapter 2 focuses on the convent foundation narratives which depict women as front and centre in various late-medieval religious currents focussing in particular on those associated with the fifteenth-century Observant reforms. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on nuns as proponents and detractors of these reforms and both contain lively first-hand accounts of women's responses to religious change and their creative strategies for influencing the events in which they believed themselves to have a

stake. What emerges is a fresh picture of women's agency and abilities to effect social, political, and religious change.

Chapters 5 and 6 deftly handle those thorny issues which scholars of women's writing often grapple with. Chapter 5 ventures to provide a new response to that question, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" In order to answer this, Winston-Allen surveys the scribal activity associated with Observant reform and analyses women as translators, composers, and compilers of texts. She concludes, at least for religious women, there was a fifteenth-century flowering of intellectual activity. The extensive picture which Winston-Allen presents of literary cross-pollination among geographically diffuse houses is a subject highly suggestive of future research. Her description of an inter-library loan system between women's houses is particularly interesting.

Chapter 6 grapples with that difficult question of whether pre-modern women writers possessed a distinctively female voice. To do so, Winston-Allen compares parallel works written by both men and women during the fifteenth century. Winston-Allen concludes, as have previous scholars, that women's literary voices are distinct particularly in their immediacy and use of the vernacular. She departs from previous scholarship, however, by concluding that women's writing is not as inwardly focussed as has been previously asserted. In fact, many of the works she studies were composed by nuns for the consumption of a lay audience.

This highly readable study deftly handles these difficult issues and suggests numerous avenues for further research. What is most interesting, however, is how clearly the women's voices surveyed in this work echo those of contemporaneous women writers across a wide geographic area (in particular those on the Italian peninsula). Thus, perhaps one of the most important observations Winston-Allen makes is contained in the conclusion: that "more inclusive interdisciplinary studies need to be undertaken that will encompass new geographical and linguistic categories." (238).

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Wollesen, Jens T. *Hasten to my Aid and Counsel ... The Answers of the Pictures: Private Devotional Panel Painting in Italy around 1300*. Ottawa: Legas, 2005. xii, 321 pp., 96 ill. ISBN 1-894508-63-7.

From the end of the thirteenth century, private individuals increasingly commissioned small singular panels, folding diptychs, and triptychs, for the stimulation of personal religious devotion. Most likely, these precious little panels were displayed and used within the confines of a private residence or, considering their small, portable size, carried by their owner on his or her travels. Over the last decade, art historians have begun to turn their attention to these previously