leads her to group together similar stories about sibling interactions, even if they appear in literary works widely separated in terms of geography and chronology. In the process, she does not address in detail questions about whether or not the unique cultures of different parts of Europe – rural Iceland in the high Middle Ages versus late medieval urban Italy, for example – shaped the ways in which authors wrote about sibling relationships. This tendency to flatten medieval cultures into a uniform whole is evident in other ways as well. While historians have increasingly argued that primogeniture was only one of a variety of different inheritance customs practised in medieval Europe, Larrington, while acknowledging this scholarship, nevertheless assumes in most parts of her book that primogeniture was the norm and uses it as the basis for explaining many sibling relationships. Was primogeniture more common in literary sources than it was in actual practice? If so, why, and what can that tell us about medieval stories involving siblings? Unfortunately, these types of questions go largely unexplored.

Throughout this book, Larrington uses modern psychoanalytic theory and developmental psychology to explain the sibling relationships she encounters in medieval literary works. She strongly defends this methodological approach, and individual readers will need to decide for themselves whether this is convincing. Combined with her tendency to undervalue chronological and geographical differences within medieval society, the use of modern theory gave this reviewer the sense that, for Larrington, biological determinism is the strongest factor in shaping how siblings interact with one another. In other words, any medieval text can be read with the help of modern psychoanalysis and psychology to shed light on the universal nature of how all siblings relate to one another. This is certainly a thought-provoking approach to take to the sibling bond, but the book would have been stronger if this had been an argument to be proven, rather than an underlying presupposition from the outset. As it is, Larrington seems less interested here in placing medieval sources in their specific cultural contexts and in teasing out the nuances of their descriptions of sibling relationships than she is in fitting these medieval stories into categories that conform to modern theories about siblinghood.

University of Chicago

JONATHAN R. LYON


Amongst medievalists, the Song of Songs is most commonly associated with monastic contemplation and with bridal mysticism. Suzanne LaVere’s monograph,
however, draws attention to a very different approach to this biblical text: she shows that in the twelfth century and in the first half of the thirteenth, the commentaries on the Song of Songs that were produced in the cathedral schools and at the University of Paris interpret the text primarily as a celebration of the *vita activa* and as an exhortation to preach. The authors of these commentaries take a purely ecclesiological approach, showing no interest in the inherent eroticism of the Song of Songs, or in the extent to which it provides a potential model for the soul’s relationship with Christ. Instead, they see this text as being fundamentally about the need for the Church personified to rouse itself to action – and about the need for individual preachers to defend orthodox doctrines against the threat of heresy.

LeVere structures her monograph around a series of commentators who promulgate this argument with increasing forcefulness, each one expanding on the glosses of his predecessors. The discussion opens with Anselm of Laon – whose continuous commentary forms the basis for the *Glossa ordinaria* on the Song of Songs – before moving on to Peter the Chanter, Stephen Langton, and Hugh of St Cher. The two chapters devoted to Anselm and to the *Glossa ordinaria* are the most interesting, as LeVere, building particularly on the work of Mary Dove and Lesley Smith, dismisses the view that the *Glossa ordinaria* is an essentially derivative compilation of patristic material, and points to numerous ‘new’ glosses on the subject of preaching to argue for the innovative nature of the Glossed Song of Songs. LeVere also draws attention to Anselm’s interest in the role of preaching, not only in eradicating heresy, but also in bringing about the conversion of the Jews: on his reading of the Song of Songs, the figure of the sponsa will eventually encompass both Ecclesia and Synagoga. In the chapters devoted to the subsequent commentators, LeVere makes pertinent observations about changes in the layout and structure of the commentaries, showing for example that Stephen Langton produced not only a gloss on the Song of Songs, but a gloss on the *Glossa* itself. The chapter on Hugh of St Cher also shows how the focus on the necessity of preaching feeds into the Mendicant agenda; the *Postilla* compiled by Hugh and his Dominican team foregrounds the way in which the activity of preaching should be fuelled by a life of poverty and humility. The book closes with an epilogue showing how the tradition started by Anselm of Laon and promulgated so strongly by his successors suddenly loses its relevance for the Mendicant commentators in the later part of the thirteenth century and in the fourteenth century. Peter Olivi and Nicholas of Lyra show no particular inclination to link the Song of Songs with the *vita activa*, the call to preach, and the defeat of heresy. Instead, Olivi draws partly on the bridal mysticism of Bernard of Clairvaux, whilst Nicholas displays a new interest in the literal meaning of the text and in the relationship between Latin and Hebrew. Overall, LeVere has produced a careful and well-
documented study of how a particularly exegetical approach gains momentum and runs its course.

Oriel College

ANNETTE VOLFING

Oxford


The author offers two distinct, albeit overlapping, formulations of his main aims: ‘The chief purposes of the present study … will be to examine the literary dimensions of these documents, to present tenth-century Anglo-Saxon charters as works of Anglo-Latin literature, and, by examining the intellectual hinterlands of their writers, to elevate those writers from being mere anonymous draftsmen to being authors in their own right’ (p. 7); ‘above all, it is the purpose of this study to work out what [the] message [of charters] was, who [their] audience was likely to have been and why charters became so central to the exercising of royal power in the tenth century, and to locate them more firmly in the intellectual history of ninth- and tenth-century England’ (p. 27). The agenda thus defined is an ambitious one. It should be said at once that the author pursues it with considerable success.

The introduction sets the scene by contrasting the clarity of prose that one might expect in a diploma with the bombastic style of Aldhelm of Malmesbury (d. 709/10), noting how the manner of the latter first began to infect that of the former in a Mercian document of 840. Chapter 1 then explores the influence of this Mercian style on the charters of Wessex from the ninth to the tenth centuries, arguing that where Alfred the Great had used literary translations to communicate with his subjects, Edward the Elder deployed charters for the same purpose. Chapter 2 explores how Athelstan further exploited charters, the product of a royal writing office, to disseminate his power and image: while the key legal information was couched in simple prose, the formulae grew more complex, with famously extravagant royal styles such as *basileus* and *gubernator*.

Chapter 3 turns to ‘Athelstan A’, the anonymous individual who, between 928 and 934, drafted nineteen stylistically distinctive charters for that monarch. Testing and upholding the idea that these were indeed the product of a single individual, Snook offers a literary and intellectual profile of him, then develops the case – plausible on the grounds of compatibility of experience, coincidence of career dates, and prominence in the witness lists of the charters themselves – that he may have been identical with Bishop Ælfwine of Lichfield. Chapter 4