

those women involved with priests was *meretrix*, or whore, but there was no corollary term for the priest himself. Karras here uses the example of the Protestant Katharine Zell, who married a priest, and also delves into primary Parisian sources. The concluding chapter, 'On the margins of marriage', examines church court records from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Paris. She argues that 'the margin of marriage was a gray and ambiguous area, not only because there might be some confusion as to which legal category people fit, but also because that confusion might be deliberate' (p. 178). Karras delineates the methods by which medieval marriage might be understood. The Church argued that private promises of marriage followed by sexual intercourse constituted a 'clandestine marriage', which was then expected to be pronounced in public. She observes that in a period where divorce was impossible, 'fines for concubinage and clandestine marriage as well as for maintaining sometimes reflected failed marriages' (p. 206). Including the Roman and the Reformation in its sweep, *Unmarriages* reveals an ambiguous and messy world in which women and men formed partnerships and raised children outside the conventions of marriage. Karras offers a welcome contribution to the historicization of marriage.

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KATHARINE JAGER

Anne Simon, *The Cult of Saint Katherine of Alexandria in Late-Medieval Nuremberg: Saint and the City* (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012). xiv + 321 pp. ISBN 978-1-4094-2071-2. £75.00.

At the core of Anne Simon's study is an extended close reading of the life of St Katherine in the German legendary *Der Heiligen Leben*, using the version of the text as published in Nuremberg by Johann Sensenschmidt in July 1475 (GW M11410). The text is situated within a broader assembly of literary, artistic, and sculptural parallels from late medieval Nuremberg, following the kind of approach pioneered with regard to the German-speaking territories by Jeffrey F. Hamburger. Particular attention is given to the narrative cycle of Katherine's life as it is represented in some of the magnificent stained glass windows in the city's churches, the gifts of wealthy patrons from amongst the Nuremberg patriciate. Although the focus, as the subtitle suggests, is primarily on the operation of the cult of St Katherine within the specific context of the city of Nuremberg, the most striking contribution to that context is made by Simon's considerable knowledge of travel literature. This enables her to demonstrate just how familiar the places associated with Katherine in the eastern Mediterranean were to the social elite, and how their experience abroad on pilgrimage and in foreign trade could be linked to their experience in the city. It is equally striking that the literary parallels on which Simon draws in her analysis of Katherine's life are taken from the German courtly romances of the *Blütezeit*. But the anachronism is worthwhile, because the wide frame of reference allows for the sustained treatment of Katherine as a literary figure, and in the provocative conclusion

that results, namely that ‘saints are capricious über-egos that must be wooed and won’ (p. 202), we gain a sense of the intense personal relationship between saints and the devout, quite different from the rather conservative treatment of hagiographic texts more normally encountered in the scholarship.

The driving argument that runs through the work is the demonstration of a close relationship between the narrative of Katherine’s life and the ‘sacred geography’ of events within it, the dense concentration of representations of that life in statuary, stained glass, and artworks within the city of Nuremberg, and the physical geography of the actual city, such that by a series of what Simon terms ‘recursive reflections’ these could become mapped onto and merge indivisibly into one other. These are connections, however, that are made by assertion and not by argument. There is much creative use of language and many metaphors, but very little direct evidence. The relationship between saint and city posited here is speculative, expressed almost entirely in the conditional, and on the whole unconvincing. The footnotes, which occupy between a third and a half of the total length of the book, are absolutely packed with extraneous facts, but for all that detail institutions that are central to the study, notably the Dominican nunnery of St. Katharina, remain curiously opaque. The image of late medieval Nuremberg, one of the most dynamic and vital cities in the world at the time, is surprisingly static. Was the cult of Katherine in the city different in 1520 from the shape it had had in 1350? Was the experience of devotion to Katherine different for a nun in St. Katharina – especially after the imposition of the strict enclosure by the introduction of the Observant reform in 1428 – from that for a wealthy merchant and city councillor, even if he was her uncle? The answer to this kind of question is surely yes, unless evidence or reason should dictate otherwise, and yet these are questions which go unasked.

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STEPHEN MOSSMAN

Lynn Staley, *The Island Garden: England’s Language of Nation from Gildas to Marvell* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012). x + 345 pp. ISBN 0-268-04140-7. \$39.00.

Lynn Staley’s book is an ambitious, impressive study of the language of nationhood in England from Gildas to the Early Modern period, focusing on the trope of the ‘island garden’ and its uses as a tool for negotiating and contesting identity. It builds on and makes a significant contribution to the substantial body of scholarship on England’s pre-modern discourses of nationhood which has developed over the last ten or twenty years, and offers many directions for further investigation. It also leaves a few compelling silences.

Chapter 1 explores the language of place used by medieval historians, identifying two underpinning visions of history which underpin these representations: the Bedan concept of history as providential process, opposed to Gildas’s model of history (later associated, for example, with Geoffrey of