

possibility of an exploration of the significance of the internal ordering of churches and its meaning. The links between the great rebuilding of churches in the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries offered opportunities for the raising up and reordering of the areas around communion tables that reflected a changing view of the sacraments and a new experience of worship by real people.

There is a tendency here to produce over-generalisation complete with even more sweeping footnotes. For example the statement on p. 4 that ‘Early Christianity disdained entanglement in earthly living circumstances’ is justified by a footnote that refers to Peter Browne’s (*sic*) 792-page *Through the eye of a needle* without any further guidance as to where one might find enlightenment. Again, on p. 65, ‘Curating memories involved a complex collaboration with ordinary Irish people and their store of vernacular knowledge’ is justified by recourse to the *Annals of the Four Masters* and Bernadette Cunningham’s study of that text of 2010 (without page reference) yet the point of Cunningham’s book is that these annals were constructed within an elite literate culture, not a popular one. On other occasions one cries out for even basic guidance. For instance, on p. 116 there is a lyrical passage on pre-Famine Ireland that states that ‘The Irish popular mind cherished a clear vision of an ideal order based on egalitarianism, human decency and Christian charity, immersed in supportive networks of mutual dependence and reciprocity.’ Yet from where this insight is derived is not revealed nor is there any discussion of that highly problematic concept, the ‘popular mind’.

There is no doubt that this book is the product of a great deal of reading and thought and it brings an interesting and unique perspective to the problem of studying religion in Ireland. It suffers, however, from a lack of clarity as to its audience. On the one hand, it would appear to be offered to a scholarly readership as a new approach yet it also feels the need to explain terms such as syncretism and transubstantiation in footnotes that suggest that the author had a more general readership in mind. If the latter is the case then it needs a *caveat emptor* to warn the inexperienced. The book tries to cover a huge span using partial evidence that reveals one aspect of the picture of developments. This situation is compounded by a reluctance to engage in a dialogue with the existing literature on the subject. There is no doubt that there is much of interest in this book that will be quarried by specialists into the future but the whole is somewhat less than the sum of its parts.

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RAYMOND GILLESPIE

Jonas of Bobbio and the legacy of Columbanus. By Alexander O’Hara. (Oxford Studies in Late Antiquity.) Pp. xvi + 322 incl. 2 figs, 10 tables and 2 maps. Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. £55. 978 0 19 085800 1
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The Irish monk Columbanus is a well-known figure. In the year 2015, to commemorate the 1400th anniversary of his death, three conferences were devoted to this wandering monk: in his homeland (Bangor), in France at his foundation in

Luxeuil and in Bobbio in northern Italy, another important monastery founded by him. Columbanus was a productive author and we have access to an interesting *corpus* of texts, consisting of letters, poetry, sermons, monastic rules and a penitential, attributed to him. Yet, it is sound to state that we owe most of our knowledge of Columbanus, and of his fame, to the biography that Jonas of Bobbio devoted to him and his disciples. Albrecht Diem has argued that Jonas, in describing Columbanus and his foundations, reinterpreted the ideas of Columbanus and that Columbanian monasticism was as much the creation of his biographer as of the founder himself. The publication of a study that is devoted to Jonas is therefore more than welcome. The author, who together with Ian Wood has prepared a translation of Jonas's hagiographical works, is well-equipped for this task.

Jonas decided to write the *Life of Columbanus and his disciples* in two books, a hagiographical innovation, which has raised questions about the unity of the work. O'Hara argues for its unity, following Clare Stancliffe. The work was immensely popular: in an appendix O'Hara lists 187 extant medieval manuscript witnesses, ranging from the ninth to the sixteenth century. Jonas is mostly known for his work on Columbanus, but he also composed two other saints' *Lives*, one of Abbot John of Réomé and the other of Vedast, the first bishop of Arras. Recently a monastic rule has been attributed to him by Albrecht Diem, an attribution accepted by the author of this study.

The first chapter, by way of introduction, discusses the historiography on Jonas, which mainly focuses on the *Life of Columbanus*. It summarises a number of important studies, but this does not lead to a clear thesis for the book as a whole. The conclusion of this discussion is merely that it gives 'sense of the multiplicity of interpretations from which Jonas and his hagiography have been approached' (p. 25). After this discussion, the three *Vita* composed by Jonas are introduced. It is a bit strange that the *Regula cuiusdam ad virgines*, accepted by O'Hara as a genuine work by the author, is not also introduced here.

The next two chapters deal with Columbanus and his legacy. The author discusses Columbanus through his own writings and, by comparing these with Jonas's image of Columbanian life and monasticism, demonstrates how Jonas avoided discussing difficult issues or how he gave them a specific twist. The introduction of a 'draconian', 'autocratic' form of monasticism, with its peculiar Irish customs pertaining to the date of Easter and tonsure, led to problems with bishops in Gaul and after the saint's death to divisions among his monastic followers. Whereas two rebellions in Luxeuil are discussed, such contentious issues are mostly ignored in Jonas's account which emphasises continuity and an unbroken tradition based on Columbanus' monastic ideals, even though there are strong indications for 'conflicting visions of community' resulting in 'new rules'.

In the next chapter the little that is known about Jonas's life is recounted: his family background, his rather elusive ethnic identity and his position in the monastery of Bobbio which he probably entered in 616. Late in the 630s he travelled to Flanders to assist Amandus in his missionary work in these regions. It was there that he probably became abbot of the monastery of Marchiennes, as the author maintains, in agreement with a proposal put forward by Jean Mabillon. This was a double monastery, which may explain the attention devoted in the *Vita*

Columbani to the female monastery of Faremoutiers. Perhaps it was at Marchiennes that Jonas spent his last days.

Jonas's hagiographical production is then examined by looking at its sources, language and style, leading up to the conclusion that these texts were intended for an elite audience, ecclesiastical and lay. The main source for Jonas's saints' *Lives*, however, is the Bible, which is discussed in the following chapter. From the fact that we find no allegorical readings of biblical texts, O'Hara infers that Jonas preferred a historical reading of the Bible to an allegorical one. He goes on to connect this with the Antiochene school of exegesis, which he, rather surprisingly, calls 'more rational and scientific'. Whether this less allegorical interpretation of the Bible is indicative of an Irish education, as this study claims, seems dubious with regard to the problems involved in localising anonymous early medieval exegetical texts.

The miracles in Jonas's historiographical works are then scrutinised. First it can be concluded that the three works demonstrate the same tendencies. All three of them are mainly concerned with miracles performed by living saints; relics and posthumous miracles are mostly absent. The miracles, moreover, seem less concerned with healing and helping, and are mostly expressions of the power of the saint.

The last chapter is devoted to the pivotal role that Columbanus (and Jonas) played in the history of monasticism. O'Hara here follows the seminal interpretation of Albrecht Diem that Columbanus was the last of the 'holy men' and that Jonas transformed his legacy into a form of institutionalised sanctity.

This is a welcome contribution to the history of monasticism, hagiography and culture in the early Middle Ages. Unfortunately, however, the focus on Jonas does not really work. Throughout the book he remains in the shadow of Columbanus. As a result, the book is also somewhat disjointed. The author is certainly an expert in the field and throughout the book demonstrates detailed knowledge of Columbanus and his world but the considerable quantity of interesting observations do not add up to a coherent view of Jonas as a historical figure. That is even more unfortunate if, as Albrecht Diem maintains (and O'Hara seems to accept), Jonas was in fact the real founder of Columbanian monasticism.

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ROB MEENS

The lands of Saint Ambrose. Monks and society in early medieval Milan. By Ross Balzaretti.

(Studies in the Early Middle Ages, 44.) Pp. xviii + 643 incl. 18 figs, 13 maps and 28 tables. Turnhout: Brepols, 2019. €125. 978 2 503 50977 8; 1377 8099 JEH (71) 2020; doi:10.1017/S0022046920000111

This book, long-expected and long in the making, has been very much worth waiting for. Since the early 1990s Ross Balzaretti has produced a steady flow of writings on early medieval Italy, on north-Italian legal and social arrangements, on the cult of St Ambrose at Milan and its hinterland, and on the regional economies of the northern parts of the peninsula. Combining close-to-the-ground archival researches with a rigorously theorised commitment to gender studies, Balzaretti has acquired both a profound sense of the humanity of the early medieval