



to us humdrum. She includes in her chapter—by far the longest in the volume—an illuminating appendix that, among other things, shows side-by-side comparisons of the *capitula* written for the Acts of the Apostles in the Codex Amiatinus with those that Bede composed for the same book. Chazelle observes that when each set of *capitula* are considered in their entirety and then compared, Bede's typical *capitulum* tends to be longer, gives a clearer idea of a passage's narrative development, better captures the passage's thematic scope, and transitions more smoothly between the *capitula* that precede and follow it. More than that, when Bede's *capitula* on Acts are read in order, one clearly discerns in them a thematic unity that highlights the Church's steady growth into a unified community. By contrast, the corresponding Amiatinus *capitula* collectively leave no similar impression of unity.

Alan Thacker's piece marshals new evidence to counter the view, which Paul Meyvaert and others espoused, that Bede did not know of Cassiodorus' *Institutions*. Against Meyvaert—who noted that Bede never mentions this work, was silent about many of its recommendations, and cannot be shown definitively to have quoted from it—Thacker argues not only that Bede and his monastic community knew that work but also that their entire body of scholarship followed a program that it commends. To cite just one piece of that evidence, Thacker highlights the *Institutions*' warm commendation of sources that other Latin Fathers were less likely to use, but that Bede used eagerly and regularly. These include the writings of Josephus, Dionysius Exiguus, and Eugippus. To be sure, much of the evidence that Thacker cites is circumstantial, but where would any of us early medievalists be if forbidden to do that? Plus, the weight of Thacker's evidence, which is too various and detailed to summarize here, is impressive.

Although this volume contains much valuable research on Bede as scholar, some of its chapters left me feeling underwhelmed. A few lacked the pizzazz of either a venturesome thesis or an arresting insight. This lack did not make these chapters bad so much as just not very memorable. Like most collections of edited conference papers, this one lacks a unity that might inspire a reader to want the entire volume, as opposed to the occasional chapter in it.

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## Daniel Donoghue, James Simpson, Nicholas Watson, and Anna Wilson, eds. *The Practice and Politics of Reading, 650–1500*

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Alastair Minnis 

Yale University

Email: [alastair.minnis@yale.com](mailto:alastair.minnis@yale.com)

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This volume grew out of the conference “Reading Then, Reading Now” held at Harvard University on April 18–20, 2019. To create a coherent book, the editors explain, the scope of the project was redefined to the more specific topic of the practices and politics of pre-modern reading in Britain. However, the far-reaching Introduction conveys something of the grand ambition of the original enterprise. Particularly striking is its identification of

challenges brought by “the ubiquity of digital reading,” which, it claims, “is changing our habits of thought and feeling and cultural attitudes at individual and societal levels” (2). The “normative literacy” that nowadays we take for granted, and in theory is a mark of progress (according to the grand narrative of increased literacy being a social good), has—the editors claim—its dark side, in a time of “both institutional surveillance and social media truth-fabrication” (3). W. B. Yeats is purposefully misquoted: “the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate mendacity.” “Many of us have discovered that protocols of critical reading, nurtured so diligently, or so we thought, throughout entire educational systems, are fragile and defenseless”, the editors declare. “Apparently we must learn to read and to consider the personal, social, political, and even planetary ‘implications of literacy,’ all over again” (3). Indeed we must.

What insights can medievalists offer? For a start, the shared ground “between manuscript-reading and web-reading cultures” has placed them “at the forefront of the creation of the digital humanities” (3). Second, “Scholars of premodern reading are in a position to theorize the turn towards literary modes of adaptation, allusion, and retelling in digital literatures” (3). And third, one age of anxiety knows another: “both the heady cultural optimism that greeted the emergence of the internet and the trepidation that has increasingly qualified it themselves have equivalents in many moments across the medieval centuries” (4). Medievalists are well-placed to appreciate comparable crises today.

But, while these three factors certainly aid appreciation of the current situation, in themselves they cannot counter it. That may be achieved (one may venture to claim) through the modeling of balanced rational inquiry and analysis that should routinely take place in the classroom and in academic research. Kathryn Mogk Wagner’s statement cannot be bettered: “By teaching readers how to use texts as sources of healing, models for ethical formation, and means of social action, they help bring about the conditions under which texts actually have such powers” (156). As teachers, “we may work to establish and reestablish ties—to make texts useful for human needs and longings, to render readers malleable to texts’ formative influence, to link by link construct a coherent cultural world. It is only through this labor of reading, medieval theorists suggest, that texts can make a difference” (158). Those medieval theorists have a lot to say to us.

The twelve essays collected here are divided into two sections, “Practices of Reading” and “Politics of Reading,” which, the editors admit, are not exclusive categories, and indeed are quite porous. The first section begins with contributions from Daniel Donoghue, who brings contemporary eye-movement studies to bear on medieval manuscript culture, and Emily V. Thornbury, who with reference to the Old English *Exodus* demonstrates how ornament can perform a structurally essential role in the formation and impact of verse. Erica Weaver addresses the interpretive problems that accounts of marvels presented to monkish readers, who had to separate out the reliable from the doubtful, truth from fiction; Catherine Sanok explains how devotional texts related to the “veronica” relic promoted a direct form of religious engagement and self-reflection on the reader’s part; and Amy Appleford shows how two Middle English derivatives of the Office of the Dead enabled their vernacular readers to speak in the voice of Job, thereby achieving a denaturalized ascetic identity. Kathryn Mogk Wagner ends this first section with an examination of how the Pater Noster is treated in several literary contexts, providing an impressive account of how, in his *Purgatorio*, Dante “represents the Lord’s Prayer as a dynamic process of performance” (149).

The second section features Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe on the contrasting ideologies of reading held by King Alfred and Ælfric, Samantha Katz Seal on the stereotypical Jew as a bad “literalist” reader, and Andrew Kraebel on how the “Paues compilation” (so called after its editor) questions the distinction usually made between Middle English biblical translations and devotional texts. Andrew James Johnston explicates how, in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, the Maid of Astolat’s elaborate plan to have her deathbed letter read aloud in public does not work out. Then Kathleen Tonry describes how a fishing treatise published by Wynkyn de Worde recommends angling as the best possible sport for “gentlemen,” here

addressing merchants and the landed gentry, readers with ample wealth and leisure time, who need not fear moral censure for idleness.

Michelle De Groot ends the collection by extending the concept of “communal reading” to encompass the reception of political pageantry, comparing the 1392 pageant that welcomed Richard II to London with the 2018 state funeral of US senator John McCain. The medievalizing rhetoric of a “city on a hill,” a partially secularized New Jerusalem, featured in Joseph Lieberman’s oration. De Groot describes the entire occasion (which McCain himself had organized) as an “attempt to encourage a politically fractured community to save itself by reading together” (270). Donald Trump was not invited. To state the painfully obvious, since then the fractures have got a lot worse, and the possibility of reading together is much more remote.

Medievalist scholarship rarely, if ever, gets better than this. The sheer excellence of the research itself and the cogency of the writing, together with the formidable apparatus of scholarly citation and bibliography, stand in quiet resistance to the truth-invention and unchecked circulation of alternative facts that unrelentingly assault contemporary reading and interpretive practices.

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## **Michael W. Dunne and Simon Nolan, eds. *A Companion to Richard FitzRalph: Fourteenth-Century Scholar, Bishop, and Polemicist***

**Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition. Leiden: Brill, 2023. Pp. 496. \$188.56 (cloth).**

Graham James McAleer

Loyola University Maryland  
Email: [gmacleer@loyola.edu](mailto:gmacleer@loyola.edu)

True of all Brill’s publications, *A Companion to Richard FitzRalph* is a handsome volume. It is also large: as well as an introduction by the editors, it contains thirteen essays and runs to just shy of 500 pages. For a couple of decades now, Michael Dunne at Maynooth has been leading the charge to make FitzRalph better appreciated. Hosting conferences, guiding critical editions to print, and working to get scholars writing about the Archbishop from Dundalk, Michael Dunne has been assiduous. As well as contributing one of the essays, Dunne translated Jean-François Genest’s essay on FitzRalph and future contingents, one of the standout contributions to the volume.

FitzRalph was born circa 1300 to an Anglo-Norman family. He was not of Gaelic origin and so part of the overlord class. Fissures among the communities of the British Isles dogged his academic career and ministry. When Chancellor of Oxford (1332–34), his stewardship was marred by a dispute between the Northern and Southern students: the former felt discriminated against in the allocation of fellowships that, they contended, went principally to Southerners. This pattern persists in the United Kingdom to this day. Interestingly, it was also a significant backdrop to the anglicizing aspects of the Scottish Enlightenment: Scots after the Act of Union struggled to find prominence in London’s circles of power. In his lectures on rhetoric, Adam Smith urged his students in Edinburgh and Glasgow to adopt the