

**Thomas W. Barton, Susan McDonough, Sarah McDougall, and Matthew Weanovix, eds., *Boundaries in the Medieval and Wider World: Essays in Honour of Paul Freedman* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017). Print, 348pp., £90, ISBN: 9782503568454.**



*Review*

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This collection, in honour of Paul Freedman, the Chester D. Tripp Professor of History at Yale, takes a very broad approach to the central theme of boundaries in the medieval and wider world. The editors, in their introduction, cite Freedman's interdisciplinary approach to medieval studies, with a particular interest in food history, as the inspiration for the theme of boundaries. This seems, however, a tenuous link between the honouree and the premise of the volume, which provides a wealth of interesting essays, though the relevance of boundaries is not always obvious. What is clear from the introduction is the genuine affection that the editors, all of whom are former students of Freedman, hold for their mentor. In an era where academia is seemingly rife with unkind and unethical behaviours, it is heartening to read of such positive academic mentorship and friendship, which has supported the careers of ECRs in the field.

The volume is divided into five sections, with varying numbers of essays in each: Law (four essays), Religion (four essays), Peasants (two essays), Historiography (one essay), and Food, Medicine, and the Exotic (four essays). The section on peasants is a clear nod to Freedman's seminal work *Images of the Medieval Peasant* (1999), while the section on food, medicine, and the exotic reflects Freedman's later interest in medieval food history. The sections on law and religion most obviously explore the brief of boundaries, with papers concerning warfare, divorce, gendered spaces, dynastic lineage, and discipline, among other interpretations of the theme. The depth

and breadth of the volume is impressive, and the papers are frequently thought-provoking. Given the wide range of subjects, however, it would be surprising if more than a few essays were directly relevant to an individual researcher. There is not a particular focus on Catalonia, which is Freedman's geographical area of interest, though many of the essays do have some connection with the region; geographically, the volume is Euro-centric, with a single essay deviating from the western European focus to include Poland in its exploration of a Spanish-born saint. This is fairly symptomatic of medieval studies as a whole though, and the editors might be unfairly judged for not breaking the mould in this endeavour, especially given the focus of their honouree's research.

Susan McDonough's paper 'Captured at Home: Gender, Family, and the Burden of Captivity' (pp. 81-98), investigates the experience of wives and widows whose husbands were captured or killed at sea in the fourteenth century. McDonough intertwines the experience of particular women with legal history in exploration of gender hierarchy and familial experience, providing an alternative perspective to recent research on captivity. An interesting case explored in this paper is that of Caterina Sanarde, charged in 1380 in Marseille for remarrying whilst her husband was in captivity. This example shows the difficulty faced by married women who could not rely on the protection of that legal status in practical terms, and how the law villainised them for their attempts to survive.

The first paper in the 'Religion' section, Sara McDougall's 'The Monk-King and the Abbess-Countess: Dynastic Lineage in Twelfth-Century Aragon and Boulogne' (pp. 101-118), provides a fascinating analysis of the blurring of boundaries to ensure smooth dynastic transition. McDougall mentions almost as an anecdote noble monks and nuns who left their cloisters in order to marry and have children to protect their family line, and then returned to religious life. This could have made a fine essay in

its own right, but the author's focus shifts to the academically under-acknowledged flexibility and complexity of legal marriage in twelfth-century Iberia and France, which aimed to secure inheritance and maintain familial lineages, which results in a stimulating paper on how one boundary can be pushed or broken in order to maintain another boundary.

Agnieszka Rec's paper, 'The Cult of St Isidore the Labourer in Poland' (pp. 181-200), argues that St Isidore is the only peasant born saint of the medieval period, providing a notable blurring of the boundaries of religion and class. Completing the section on peasants, William Chester Jordan's somewhat fragmented essay, 'The Gleaners' (pp. 201-220), provides an overview of the practice and politics of gleaning, or the gathering of uncollected grain following harvest. In a section all of its own, Adam Franklin-Lyons' 'Mediterranean Dreams' (pp. 223-253) is a long contribution to the volume that explores the perceived unity of the Mediterranean region and its (in)applicability to the study of the medieval period. Franklin-Lyons argues that borders are narratives and calls for a focus on people rather than places in our exploration of those narratives.

Four essays on consumables conclude the volume, which is a refreshing end to a complex collection. Azéline Jaboulet-Vercherre, in 'Wine and the Drinker: a Medieval Pairing We Should Bring Back?' (pp. 275-295), notes that medieval wine connoisseurs matched wine to social occasions and the personal characteristics of the drinker, rather than the modern emphasis on pairing wines with specific foods. This essay not only provides an interesting history of the social politics of wine in the middle ages, but also brings the past into the present, asking if we should return to medieval practices of wine consumption.

The contributors to this volume have interpreted their brief in many unexpected and thought-provoking ways. The collection as a whole is wide-ranging

and, therefore, it is unlikely that every essay will be of relevance or interest to any one researcher. The beauty of that, though, is that most researchers are likely to find at least one gem in the offering.

Kirsty Bolton

University of Southampton



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