

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Heale, Martin, ed. *The Prelate in England and Europe 1300–1560*

Jennifer Mara Desilva

Volume 38, Number 2, Spring 2015

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087525ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v38i2.25636>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Desilva, J. (2015). Review of [Heale, Martin, ed. *The Prelate in England and Europe 1300–1560*]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 38(2), 179–181. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v38i2.25636>

order to activate a social space, instead of merely mirroring or representing social events staged in that space, certainly offers ample food for future thought.

SALLY HICKSON

University of Guelph

Heale, Martin, ed.

The Prelate in England and Europe 1300–1560.

York: York Medieval Press, 2014. Pp. xiii, 321. ISBN 978-1-903153-58-1 (hardcover) \$99.

Martin Heale has assembled a useful volume of twelve essays on the acts, culture, and perception of the prelate from 1300–1560, which emerged from a conference entitled “The Prelate in Late Medieval and Reformation England” and held at the University of Liverpool in 2011. This collection explores the prelacy, which was defined traditionally as including abbots, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and (periodically) abbesses and prioresses. All twelve essays, as well as Heale’s introduction, are presented in a deep historiographical frame, grounded in contemporary sources, and often incorporate material culture in order to portray prelates as tangible figures whose actions and effects can still be witnessed within and beyond the textual record.

Both the conference and this volume examine what Heale calls “a golden age of prelacy” in Europe, a period that stretched from the early-fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth century. At the same time that prelates achieved extraordinary renown through public roles and political influence, the period witnessed an emerging critique of prelacy. In order to contextualize the common support for this critique, Heale and his contributors investigate the practice of the prelate’s dignity and the contemporary responses elicited. Focusing mainly on English prelates, with a few Continental discussions to provide some external context, this volume will benefit anyone who wants to understand the broader common practices and concerns of elite ecclesiastics in the late medieval and early modern periods.

The collection is divided into four parts, allowing readers to think clearly about the various scholarly discussions within which prelates appear. “Part I: Prelates and Power” examines the most elite prelates and their roles

in and interactions with royal service and administrative bodies. Gwilym Dodd's study of English clerical chancellors reveals the intertwining of royal and ecclesiastical offices and concerns that underwent debate but ultimately continued through the late medieval period. Benjamin Thompson explores the efforts of French abbots to repossess alien priories, which were daughter-houses of French abbeys founded after the Norman Conquest. Cédric Michon provides the first fully non-English chapter, with a discussion of patterns of experience seen in cardinals at the court of François I of France. "Part II: Patronage and Learning" uses the lens of book and print history to explore the activities of prelates in terms of influencing and reforming their communities. James G. Clark explores "the triumph of the bookish prelate" (101) through acquisitions, print commissions, and the prelates' own annotated books in the century before the Reformation. Wendy Scase charts the origin of Worcester Cathedral library and its possible connections to Carnary Library in Worcester and the Guildhall Library in London through Bishop John Carpenter. Rounding out this section is Felicity Heal's contribution, which examines episcopal use of the printing press from King Henry VII's to Queen Elizabeth I's reign.

Following this, "Part III: Identity and Display" offers a set of wide-ranging chapters that explore the material culture of prelates and the way that possessions reveal both prelatial culture and contemporary responses to this group. Christopher Woolgar investigates the purpose and extant descriptions of episcopal treasure. Elizabeth A. New compares episcopal tombs and seals in an effort to determine the root and popularity of their shared images. Michael Carter explores the art and architectural patronage of Cistercian abbots in northern England and carefully weighs discussions of utility, enthusiasm for building, and fears of squandered resources. Emilia Jamrozak's discussion of the background and responsibilities of certain Cistercian abbots in Central Europe complements Carter's vision of active and outward-facing prelates. Fittingly, "Part IV: Attitudes towards Prelacy" brings the volume to a close by looking beyond prelates to their contemporaries' judgments. Martin Heale's chapter explores late medieval accounts of abbatial splendour in an effort to separate criticism from textual guidance and describe how monks valued an appropriately magnificent display. Lastly, Anne Hudson looks closely at a series of unpublished texts from British Library MS Additional 24202 in order to chart how Lollard criticism of prelates varied, and to contextualize developments with contemporary events.

Overall, this is a welcome volume that makes an effort to consider *prelates* as a group and identify their common activities and interests. The variation in experience between abbots and cardinals makes the comparison more challenging, but clear similarities are evident in the use by all prelates of spaces, possessions, and print to create connections and build public identities. These essays offer further material to show how prelates lived and interacted locally, regionally, and internationally with other clerical and lay groups, sharing ideas, meeting goals, and contributing to society. Moreover, another theme that stretches across the volume is the growing criticism of prelates' worldliness and the expectation that they would work with the secular world, sometimes as secular governors, while yet standing apart from it. This tension appeared long before the Reformation and can safely be considered an integral part of the late medieval prelate. As Heale's introduction reveals, although etymologically the *praelatus* was one who was "advanced" or "brought forward," contemporaries continued to prize the prelate's pastoral work. Like many other active ecclesiastical groups, prelates from 1300 to 1560 existed within an elite and rewarding but demanding and critical world. This collection contextualizes that existence.

JENNIFER MARA DESILVA

Ball State University

Kallendorf, Hilaire.

Sins of the Fathers: Moral Economies in Early Modern Spain.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. Pp. xii, 446 + 15 b/w ill. ISBN 978-1-4426-4458-8 (hardcover) \$90.

Sins of the Fathers begins with the quote: "With all humility, and never forgetting that Pride is the chief Deadly Vice, I would like to suggest that this book appears on the cutting edge of a new kind of research" (ix). When I first read this sentence I felt an urge to read on and delve into the details of the new kind of research proposed by Hilaire Kallendorf. I wanted the foreword to continue with a description of the methodology used by the author—a combination of the advanced techniques of the digital humanities and a meticulous exploration of sin in a huge corpus of comedies and *autos sacramentales* of the Spanish