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Steven Vanderputten, *Imagining Religious Leadership in the Middle Ages: Richard of Saint-Vanne and the Politics of Reform*. Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 2015. xiii + 244 pp. Illustrations, map, appendices, and index. \$49.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 0978-0-8014-5377-9.

Review by Elizabeth Dachowski, Tennessee State University.

Modern scholarship generally treats the tenth and eleventh centuries as a watershed in the development of western European monasticism. Before the tenth century, although the Benedictine rule was widely admired, most monastic houses generally had their own rules that reflected the preoccupations of their founders and other local influences. By the early tenth century, according to the standard narrative, a desire for a more “pure” Benedictine rule led to the founding of Cluny, which became a reforming center influencing monasteries throughout much of western Europe. According to this narrative, the Cluniac reform movement led to the reform (or outright replacement) of existing monastic communities and the foundation of new communities adhering more strictly to the Benedictine rule. Thus, in the course of a century, Cluniac monasticism became the dominant form of monastic observance in Europe, and Cluniac houses cooperated with and supported each other (although not the formal network of mother houses and priories established by the Cistercians in the eleventh century). Meanwhile, a similar reforming impetus centered on Gorze created a second group of reformed monasteries. Eventually, so the story goes, a blending of the monastic observances at Cluny and Gorze informed a Lotharingian wave of reform. More recent historians have modified this narrative at several key points. Most agree, for example, that the “system” (p. 37) of Cluniac houses was more diverse and less united than previously argued and that the abuses that the reformers sought to correct were not nearly so profound as the primary sources suggest. Likewise, monastic historians now see the reform movement of the tenth century as less centralized than the systems that eventually developed in the eleventh century. Nevertheless, the Cluny-Gorze-Lotharingia model continues to be the starting point for most research.

Steven Vanderputten’s study of Richard of Saint-Vanne calls into question the nature of the Lotharingian reforms. This study grew out of his earlier work on monastic reform in medieval Flanders.[1] There he argued that this approach glosses over the very real differences in objectives of tenth-century and eleventh-century monastic reformers as well as giving an overly homogeneous picture of the monastic world, a simplistic focus on “flash points” in monastic reform, and a false impression of the formation of monastic networks (rather than a series of individual reforms). Vanderputten’s focus on the career of Richard of Saint-Vanne, one of the most active of the Lotharingian reformers, allows him to examine the presuppositions of monastic historiography while untangling the seemingly contradictory contemporary accounts of Richard’s life and significance. His overall conclusion is that Richard’s career makes more sense when considered as a form of religious or spiritual virtuosity (a concept Vanderputten borrows from Max Weber) rather than a focused attempt at spreading monastic reform as normally understood (pp. 9-10).

After laying out his methodology and the rationale for his study in his preface, Vanderputten uses his introduction to give a brief overview of the scholarship of monastic reform and his interpretive approach

to the subject. Historiographically, he notes that modern treatments of Richard's life and career suffer from a nineteenth-century nationalist foundation that still underpins much research into monastic reform, as well as specific applications of this paradigm which distort our understanding of Richard's career. Vanderputten sees these nationalist tendencies as merely an extension at several centuries' remove of the reshaping of Richard's life to suit immediate political ends that began almost immediately after his death. The result is a seeming contradiction between those accounts (both modern and medieval) that present Richard as a cloistered champion of monastic *devotio* and those that present him as a monastic apostle who functioned very much in the world. A better way to understand Richard, according to Vanderputten, is to view him as a Weberian religious virtuoso, someone whose higher level of religious capacity necessarily gives him a place in the religious leadership of society. Vanderputten's analysis leads him to conclude that "in Richard's mind, there was no contradiction between being an ascetic virtuoso and a conformist church leader; in fact, these two qualities were mutually reinforcing" (p. 12).

The first chapter of his study, "Imagining Richard in Medieval and Modern Historiography," traces representations of Richard of Vannes from his earliest historians (writing within living memory) to modern scholars. Richard's earliest historians were caught up in local political efforts and so portrayed him in a way that supported those immediate concerns. In the next generation (in the twelfth century) writers were more concerned with putting his work in the context of broader reform programs. (It was at this point that he came to be depicted as someone who reformed or regularized a large number of houses.) Early modern monastic reformers, however, were less interested in his work and slow to adopt the language of sainthood when describing him. Modern historiography of Richard reflects a nineteenth-century nationalist viewpoint, as scholars anachronistically sought evidence for national institutions and a monastic order in the Holy Roman Empire similar to the supposed Cluniac order in France.

Chapter two, "Ecclesiastical Office, Religious Virtuosity and the Apostolic Imperative," examines Richard's development over the course of his career as he came to define himself as a religious leader rather than as a monk or even an abbot. Vanderputten points significantly to Richard's education at Reims along with several other leading thinkers of his day, all of whom "appear to have supported an ascetic understanding of religious experience and behavior, but rejected a life of complete withdrawal, preferring instead to actively intervene in the promotion of, and facilitate the creation of, cenobitism as an organized, harnessed form of ascetic contemplation" (p. 45). Vanderputten uses Richard's *Life of Roding*, a monk who founded one of the monasteries headed by Richard, as a way to gain insight into Richard's ideas about monastic leadership. In this work he finds parallels with Richard's life, including his frequent journeys and routine absence from the cloister. By the time of Richard's profession as a monk of Saint-Vannes, Vanderputten believes that Richard did not "conceive of himself in the first place as a monk or an abbot, but as a man destined by his performance of ascetic virtues and his education to fulfill a leadership role" (p. 51).

In the next chapter, "Imagining Saint-Vanne," Vanderputten points out the lack of evidence for Richard as a reformer of Saint-Vanne. None of the contemporary documents describe spiritual disarray before his coming, nor do they suggest that he made substantive changes to the way of life during his abbacy. His main actions at Saint-Vanne were his energetic building up of the monastery's physical plant and his concerted effort to strengthen his relationship with the monastery's secular donors to the exclusion of episcopal influence. His most notable spiritual accomplishment as abbot was his ministry outside of the monastery to "a much wider audience of ecclesiastics and laypeople, most notably pilgrims, wealthy patrons, and those who considered themselves part of the burgeoning suburban community around the monastery of Saint-Vanne" (p. 90). Despite Richard's attempts, near the end of his life, to ensure that his program did not die with him, the bishop of Verdun used Richard's funeral to reclaim episcopal authority and prestige both within the monastery and in the city as a whole. Richard had spent much of his life crafting an image of himself and his mission. With his death the Bishop Haimo of Verdun was

merely the first of many who re-interpreted Richard's life to suit more current religious and political concerns.

Chapter four, "Founder and Head of Many Monasteries," addresses Richard's role in governing monasteries beyond his main house of Saint-Vanne in Verdun. Vanderputten here underscores the role of secular politics in Richard's acquisition of abbacies (just over a dozen in the course of his career). These reflected his closeness to the lords of Verdun-Ardenne at the time of his appointment at Saint-Vanne (a relationship that he did not have with their successors) and his growing intimacy with the emperor's supporters in the region. His governance of these monasteries (with the exception of his original house of Saint-Vanne and the nearby abbey of Vaslogium/Beaulieu) tended to be hands off with the daily operations carried out by priors or co-abbots. His role was for the most part one of setting an example through his own life and leadership and nurturing leadership qualities in his surrogates. Again, Vanderputten stresses that Richard's "reforming" activities were less innovative than he is often given credit for. He did not take over institutions in crisis, and many of his changes were similar to what competent non-reformist abbots were doing. Based on the meagre evidence available, Richard appears to have been more interested in "the fulfillment of a service to lay and ecclesiastical lords and as part of his mission to promote a specific view on cenobitic asceticism and on monastic government" (p. 137).

Vanderputten's final chapter, "Converting the World," focuses on Richard's emphasis on the conversion of the laity, which he effected through encouraging young men to convert without fully giving up their worldly responsibilities, encouraging charitable activity from those who remained in the world, and "promotion of Christian practices and attitudes among the general lay population" including participation in pilgrimage and the sacraments (p. 145). In Richard's sermons he motivated his lay listeners by invoking fear of punishment after death and fear of the impending Last Judgment. His involvement in the world, for which he and his protégés received a certain amount of criticism, extended to the realm of diplomacy and even the battlefield, but not, apparently, to the Peace of God movement.

Vanderputten rounds out his study with a brief conclusion reiterating his view of Richard as a self-aware religious virtuoso and pointing out the problems inherent in trying to fit Richard's career into the mold of monastic reformer. He also includes several helpful appendices, including a chronology of Richard's life, a transcription and translation of his *Life of Roding*, an essay on "Monastic Reading at Saint-Vanne," and tables outlining Richard's abbacies, priors, and successors.

Overall, this is a welcome addition to scholarship on monasticism in the central Middle Ages. Vanderputten's evidence is impressive in the number and variety of sources (cartularies, polyptics, hagiographies, letters, etc.) and the variety of analytical approaches (political, religious, prosopographical, and sociological). This work has the added value of crossing national and regional lines, including as it does consideration of both imperial and French medieval politics and monasteries located in modern France, Germany, and Belgium. The real strength of the work, however, is Vanderputten's challenge to historians to rethink our conception of the tenth and eleventh centuries as a period homogeneous monastic religious reform. Although this work centers only on the career of a single Lotharingian religious leader, the questions Vanderputten raises about the suitability of the reform model in monastic history can be applied to a much wider field.

#### NOTE

[1] Steven Vanderputten, *Monastic Reform as Process: Realities and Representations in Medieval Flanders, 900-1100* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 2013).

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