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Leonie V. Hicks, *Religious Life in Normandy, 1050-1300: Space, Gender and Social Pressure*. Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, N.Y.: The Boydell Press, 2007. x + 240 pp. Maps, notes, bibliography, and index. \$80 U.S. (cl). ISBN 1-84383-329-8.

Review by Constance B. Bouchard, University of Akron.

The relationship between society and the church in medieval France has been a major topic for Anglophone scholars for over twenty-five years. Following the lead of Emily Tabuteau, a number of recent scholars have chosen Norman sources to ask questions about monasticism, saints, social structures, and the creative use of memory.[1] In this book Leonie Hicks addresses issues of religion and society through the lens of theoretical models of space and gender. The book starts with the Gregorian Reform, which she treats as fundamentally a sharp divide between church and laity, and continues through the thirteenth century, which has been much less studied than has the twelfth. Although she does not make explicit why her study stops in 1300, she includes the thirteenth century in order to make use of the lively *Registers* of Eudes Rigaud, written as he investigated the religious life at a number of houses, and in order to observe the spread and development of leper houses and the increasingly common nunneries. Three useful appendices document over one hundred and fifty male monasteries, nunneries, hospitals, and leper houses in Normandy, with accompanying maps.

The book, a revision and expansion of Dr. Hicks' doctoral dissertation, is divided into four chapters, each of which covers an aspect of contested space. First she discusses display, that is the way that a religious house's architecture, decoration, and layout were designed to convey a specific message to those outsiders who visited it. Next she describes the reception of lay people into the sacred space of the monastery or nunnery, including both those who were treated as intruders and those who were welcomed. Third, she turns to the enclosure of monks and nuns behind the walls of their houses. Finally, she looks at the ways that monks and nuns interacted with the families into which they were born. The "gender" of the book's title takes second place to "space" and primarily indicates that laywomen and nuns are given equal treatment with laymen and monks. However, the modern understanding of gender as something socially constructed, rather than biologically fixed, does seem to have influenced Dr. Hicks' vision of space, as socially constructed rather than simply defined by geography or walls.

The book is disappointing, for it is much less than it could have been. As it is a first book, Hicks' dissertation committee must take at least part of the blame for its weaknesses. Most notably, there is no central thesis or argument around which the material is structured. It is true that no one has previously used contested space as an analytic device in discussing eleventh- to thirteenth-century Norman monasticism—Barbara Rosenwein has however done so for the early Middle Ages[2]—but Hicks is never explicit at how her analysis might expand our overall understanding of the period, and never even argues that there is a gap in scholarly understanding that needs to be filled. Her main conclusions are that religious life in Normandy was marked by a "great variety of forms," and that while space could be contested, its use was generally "fluid" (pp. 153, 161).

The most novel part of the book is its treatment of hospitals and leper houses, institutions which have received very little scholarly attention. Indeed, Hicks might have done better to concentrate on these religious communities, of which there were nearly thirty in thirteenth-century Normandy. Instead, they

are given only cursory attention and in fact treated almost interchangeably with long-established Benedictine houses. The theoretical treatment of gender and space, around which the book is instead organized, remains derivative and quite superficial. That is, although Henri Lefebvre and Pierre Bourdieu are invoked in the introduction, most of the rest of the book is a series of rather undigested vignettes, based on what is found in those sources she consulted, recounted without reference to theory or even much analysis. For example, a miracle story about a pet fox who stole a picture of Christ from under a nun's mattress (pp. 137-38) raises all sorts of questions that are never addressed.

An unexplained gap in the book is the lack of any discussion of the friars, who must certainly have had an impact on the social and religious world of thirteenth-century Normandy. They do not even make a cameo appearance here, although Hicks does suggest, at the very end, that the Franciscans and Dominicans probably attracted the attention of families that had earlier patronized the Benedictines (p. 152). Such a possibility cries out for further discussion. Although one book cannot do everything, it is very odd that she should have included leper houses but not the doubtless much more influential houses of friars. (Incidentally, when discussing the Benedictines, she reads the Benedictine Rule very simplistically, assuming it meant the same thing in the twelfth century that it had in the sixth.)

Particularly surprising is Hicks' failure to look at the cartularies and charter collections of the religious houses she does examine (with very few exceptions, most notably the charters of la Trinité, Caen). Although the chronicles, letters, and miracle stories on which she relies can tell us a great deal, the story of relations between religious houses and secular society is severely restricted when she leaves out the charters in which monks and nuns and the laity appear side by side. Apparently she decided to ignore charters because she thought they would provide information only on the economic and institutional history of religious houses, rather than on people (p.153), yet most scholars—even those with little interest in church history—have found charters the best source of information on medieval people.[3] One must wonder if part of the real reason is that she found the Latin of the charters daunting, for by far the majority of her primary sources are cited in modern English translation, which is unusual in a scholarly book.

It is also unfortunate that Hicks seems unaware of much of the recent work by American scholars on the connections between French monastic houses and secular society.[4] The gap is particularly evident in her chapter on the families of monks and nuns. The bibliography also includes none of the extensive German scholarship on monasteries and their neighbors. Because she is not conversant with the current work on the relations between church and lay, she retains a rather unnuanced sense of a sharp separation between the groups, even when her own evidence indicates how much the two needed each other. Her failure to include cartularies among her sources also means that she is unable to trace the ongoing, multigenerational relations between certain secular families and "their" religious houses—such as other scholars have pointed out. Her own analysis would have been helped by comparison with what others have concluded on such topics as motivations for donations to churches, the timing of religious conversion, and the confirmations by family members. All in all, in spite of the evident thought and effort that have gone into this book, it will not long detain historians of medieval religious life.

## NOTES

[1] Emily Zack Tabuteau, *Transfers of Property in Eleventh-Century Norman Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). Felice Lifshitz, *The Norman Conquest of Pious Neustria: Historiographic Discourse and Saintly Relics, 684-1090* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute, 1995). Leah Shopkow, *History and Community: Norman Historical Writing in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1997). Cassandra Potts, *Monastic Revival and Regional Identity in Early Normandy* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1997). Samantha Kahn Herrick, *Imagining the Sacred Past: Hagiography and Power in Early Normandy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard

University Press, 2007). The Herrick volume appeared at almost the same time as Dr. Hicks' book, so it is naturally not cited, but it is a surprise to see no references to Lifshitz or Shopkow (and the Tabuteau book is in the bibliography with the wrong date).

[2] Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space: Power, Restraint, and Privileges of Immunity in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999). Hicks cites this book but gives the wrong publisher.

[3] Most notably Georges Duby, whose enormously influential work on peasants, knights, and nobles in the Mâconnais scarcely mentions the church at all but is largely based on charters from the monastery of Cluny and the cathedral of Mâcon; *La société aux XIe et XIIe siècles dans la région mâconnaise*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Jean Touzot, 1971).

[4] Penelope Johnson, *Prayer, Patronage, and Power: The Abbey of la Trinité, Vendôme, 1032-1187* (New York: New York University Press, 1981). Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Rhinoceros Bound: Cluny in the Tenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982). Eadem, *To Be the Neighbor of Saint Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny's Property, 909-1049* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989). Constance Brittain Bouchard, *Sword, Miter, and Cloister: Nobility and the Church in Burgundy, 980-1198* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987). Stephen H. White, *Custom, Kinship, and Gifts to Saints: The "Laudatio Parentum" in Western France, 1050-1150* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994). Megan McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints: Prayer for the Dead in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994). Martha G. Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity: Cistercian Culture and Ecclesiastical Reform, 1098-1180* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1996).

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