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Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis, *The Care of Nuns: The Ministries of Benedictine Women in England during the Central Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). xx + 366 pp. ISBN 9780190851286. £64.00

The Care of Nuns: The Ministries of Benedictine Women in England During the Central Middle Ages, by Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis, is impressive. Focusing on *cura monialium* (the care of nuns), this study corrects the prevailing view that, as a result of the Danish invasions in the eighth and ninth centuries, as well as attempts to revive monasticism in England according to the Benedictine Rule in the tenth, many of the ministerial roles that nuns once performed were gradually restricted to ordained men. Bugyis makes the case for a different, but rather more compelling history. Through close paleographical, codicological and textual analysis of a wide range of sources, she argues persuasively that many of the liturgical and pastoral ministries carried out by nuns in the early Middle Ages – including liturgically reading the gospels, hearing confessions, and offering intercessory prayers for others – actually persisted into the Central Middle Ages. Placing the experience of these women front and centre at every turn, Bugyis uncovers new (and reappraises existing) evidence in order to frame Benedictine women as primary agents of their spiritual and material care, in spite of the increasingly prescriptive and regulatory nature of literature that sought to define their role.

Clearly organised around different kinds of ministries, one of the many highlights of *The Care of Nuns* is the care it applies to its source material. For example, in Chapter 3, a surviving gospel book from the community of nuns at Barking Abbey (Oxford, Bodl., MS Bodley 155) is treated to a fairly exhaustive analysis which takes account of literary, paleographical and material features, from corrections and additions – all of which are helpfully itemized in an appendix – to wax stains. Bugyis uses these traces to argue for the liturgical use of the manuscript by the Barking nuns, a finding which suggests that nuns were in fact proclaiming the gospel well into the Central Middle Ages. Whilst this manuscript receives the most sustained attention, Bugyis turns the same careful eye to all of her sources, which are various, including but not limited to saints' lives, mortuary rolls, charters, letters, psalters, calendars and liturgical books.

There are of course limitations to this study, about which Bugyis is very clear. Most notably, much of the evidence that survives pertains to the wealthier and more privileged abbeys, such as Barking and Godstow, which means that uncovering the histories of less powerful institutions is challenging. For example, in Chapter 4, which deals with confession, Bugyis admits that the socioeconomic status of the women at the elite houses discussed means they are in a much stronger position to resist attempts at regulatory reform. Whilst Bugyis therefore cautions, in some instances, against making too many generalisations beyond the walls of such abbeys, she does gather enough convincing analysis throughout her study to justify a revision of scholarly assumptions about the ministries of nuns after the tenth century. She also draws attention to a number of different avenues (for example, research into medieval nuns' practice of penance beyond the temporal and geographical scope of her study) that future scholars might and should pursue – ways in which further *tesseræ* could be collected and added to the compelling mosaic her monograph has begun to piece back

together. It will be exciting to see what new findings *The Care of Nuns* has paved the way for.

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