

UCLA

UCLA Historical Journal

Title

Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu. By Richard Kierckhefer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. Pp. viii + 238. Introduction, notes, index.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6hn5994s>

Journal

UCLA Historical Journal, 6(0)

Author

Bentler, Timothy

Publication Date

1985

Copyright Information

Copyright 1985 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

industrial nations, or what their religious backgrounds were. Further, Jackson fails to ask whether or not the existence of ethnic communities might strengthen the desire to restrict access to jobs.

Jackson's argument achieves its power entirely from evidence that one would expect to support his assumptions, relying on aggregate census data on the one hand, and the reports of unions and employers' associations on the other. The former set of data emphasizes technological change, the latter a concern for control over the labor market. No effort is made to examine individual firms, or the religious or political antagonisms prevalent in the communities. And Jackson relies on labor histories written before the late 1960's, ignoring almost entirely a rather large body of work that has appeared since then. Despite Jackson's work, the idea that cultural processes had little or no effect on the rise of a conservative craft union movement in the United States remains an unproven assertion. But Jackson should not be held solely responsible for these oversights. Printers and carpenters have escaped examination by the "new labor historians." Perhaps future work on these groups will help us to better evaluate the conclusions that Jackson has arrived at.

Lawrence M. Lipin

University of California, Los Angeles

Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu. By RICHARD KIERCKHEFER. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. Pp. viii + 238. Introduction, notes, index.

The religious life of the fourteenth century is noted for its profusion of mystics and ascetics who practiced extreme mortifications of the flesh, self abuse, and constant penitence, receiving in return visions, divine ecstasies, and divine torments. The activities of these people are repellent and incomprehensible to most modern sensibilities; yet they were revered as saintly and heroic by most of their contemporaries. Richard Kierckhefer's book *Unquiet Souls* is an attempt to discern what in these lives was considered saintly and praiseworthy, and why these things were valued.

The people discussed in *Unquiet Souls* are referred to as "saints," but no distinction is made between those who have been canonized by the Catholic Church and those who have not. All of them were renowned for their extraordinary virtues and severe devotional practices, and all were venerated by a cult of devotees after their deaths. Included in the study are well-known characters, such as Catherine of Sienna and Peter of Luxembourg, as well as such unfamiliar figures as Christina the Astonishing and Delphina of Puimichel. The sources for this study are primarily the

records of canonization proceedings and the biographies of the saints, which were an essential tool in promoting their posthumous followings. These give the details of the saints' lives and reveal what virtues and practices were considered especially holy by the people of the fourteenth century. They also show the great hardships endured by these saints, whose lives were often not recognized as holy until after their deaths.

The saintly attributes most frequently stressed in the hagiographic literature are patience, devotion to the passion of Christ, and the gifts of rapture and revelation. Each of these is treated in a separate chapter. In another chapter the lives of three individuals are discussed in detail as representatives of the fourteenth-century saintly type: Dorothy of Montau, Peter of Luxemburg, and Clare Gambocarta. In the final chapter the author discusses another figure, the Englishwoman Margery Kempe, as the epitome of the saintly ideal of the age. These accounts, and the numerous anecdotes from the lives of many others, create a revealing composite picture of the spiritual life of the fourteenth century.

Kierckhefer accomplishes his primary goal; the religious values and attitudes of the fourteenth century are explained and defined, enabling the reader to understand the lives of these saints according to the standards of the fourteenth century. He discusses such matters as flagellation, revelation, and even levitation as they were seen by contemporaries, without imposing modern judgements upon them. Unfortunately his argument becomes weak in the end, when he tries to identify the sources of and reasons for these values. This book will prove useful and interesting for anyone studying the religious history of the fourteenth century. The growing role of the laity in the church, the changes in the religious orders, and the institutional and sacramental developments of the time are discussed along with the theological and popular concepts of sanctity. The reader will come away with an awareness of the patterns of development and change within the medieval church, but will have to look elsewhere for an explanation of why these developments occurred.

Timothy Bentler
Arizona State University

Athenian Popular Religion. By JOHN D. MIKALSON. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1983. Pp. xiv + 172. Notes, bibliography, index of citations, general index. \$16.00

Perhaps no aspect of ancient Greek religion is in such need of new investigation as that vague area known as "popular" religion. What was