

within Dominican art — such as a general rejection of narrative painting cycles — but also singular cases, such as the Florentine convent of Santa Maria Novella, which she argues was atypical both in its ability to attract elite patronage and in its arrangement of liturgical space.

In both its overriding structure and analysis of individual contexts, this book fundamentally crystallises the importance of reconstructing the medieval church interior. In a widespread rejection of the architectural unity demanded by the Dominican leadership, church design varied considerably due to the frequent repurposing of older buildings and availability of local materials. Architectural space, however, functioned similarly across the Order in terms of the location of shrines and the movement towards an increased sharing of space. In a significant contribution to this field, Cannon addresses crucial questions related to the construction and purpose of architectural screens in the Italian church interior. She reconstructs the precise liturgical functions of Dominican screens, explores their spatial and visual effects, and identifies specific occasions when laymen — and less frequently laywomen — were permitted into the *ecclesia fratrum*.

This book is highly recommended to anyone interested in medieval Italian art and architecture, or the mendicant movement more generally. With its combination of broad ideas, meticulous research and detailed analysis, *Religious Poverty, Visual Riches* is set to become the standard text on Italian Dominican art.

JOANNE ALLEN

*The Churches of Medieval Exeter*. By NICHOLAS ORME. Exeter, Impress, 2014. 210 pp., 26 b/w figs, 17 col figs. ISBN 978-1-907605-51-2. £14.99

*Of Sirens and Centaurs: Medieval Sculpture at Exeter Cathedral*. By ALEX WOODCOCK. Exeter, Impress, 2013. 146 pp., 275 figs. ISBN 978-1-907605-43-7. £9.99 (pb) (hardback also available)

Reading these two volumes back to back was a curious experience. The focus of Orme's book is the churches and chapels of medieval Exeter; that of Woodcock's, the marginal sculpture of the city's great cathedral. That institutionally and architecturally dominant foundation was thus ever-present, yet rarely discussed directly (Orme does include a summary history). Though rather different in style and subject matter, both books deepen our knowledge of medieval Exeter and contain much that will be of relevance more generally; and both are packaged and written in a manner that suggests they are intended to reach as wide an audience as can be hoped for, while also providing levels of detail and, crucially, citations to make them useful to scholars.

Nicholas Orme, of course, is a major figure in medieval history, and has made particularly significant contributions in the fields of childhood, education and the religious history of south-west England. He is one of those rare historians who can read everything from Anglo-Saxon charters to late medieval wills with apparent ease. He lays out what the documents tell us with insight, clarity and precision. *The Churches of Medieval Exeter* is the last in a series by Orme on medieval religious life in south-west England: the others are on Christianity in Cornwall (*Cornwall and the Cross* (Chichester 2007)), Christianity in Devon (*The Church in Devon 400–1560* (Exeter 2009)), and Exeter cathedral (*Exeter Cathedral: the First Thousand Years* (Exeter 2013)). It surveys all the known medieval religious foundations of the city, covering everything from wayside crosses and private chapels to parish churches and monastic houses.

The book has two parts: a historical overview, and a gazetteer. Orme outlines a story in which, by around 1220, there were some forty-three religious houses, churches and chapels in Exeter (all but two of which had been founded since *c.* 1000), with a further fourteen (plus private oratories and religious institutions such as almshouses that did not have their own chapels) appearing in the ensuing century or so. That is to say the peak period of growth is *c.* 1000–*c.* 1200. A few of these foundations had already disappeared before the Reformation. Orme's synthetic accounts of devotional activity and lay involvement in church life are particularly illuminating (it would have been useful to see a chronological chart of known obits, chantries, and so on to go alongside that on pp. 54–55 for devotional cults). His gazetteer entries on Exeter's nine religious houses, none of which (apart from the cathedral) were especially important outside the region, and of the

castle chapel, reveal aspects of medieval Exeter for which most of the standing evidence has disappeared.

As ever with Orme, apparently knotty problems are accounted for with clarity and common sense, and the underlying narrative is at once laconic and sure-footed. He unravels (as first argued in a joint article with John Blair in the 1995 *Annual Report* of the Friends of Exeter Cathedral) the problem of the early church in Exeter by suggesting the possibility of two foundations, perhaps dedicated to St Peter and St Mary respectively, with the site of the former now occupied by the cathedral and the latter, immediately to its west, the now-lost parish church of St Mary Major. Between them these two churches comprised a 'minster' and met the religious needs of Exeter; indeed, it is St Mary's that may have catered more for lay needs.

Parish life in Exeter came to be dominated by the cathedral to an unusual extent. This great collegiate foundation claimed a monopoly on burials, resulting in Exeter's distinctive landscape of small churches without churchyards; yet in 1222, in what must at the time have been a challenging intervention in the city's religious infrastructure, Bishop Simon de Apulia raised a series of them to parochial status.

Orme does not especially spend time setting such facts in the context of, for example, developments in the wider Church in this period. One effect of this is to make the broad cultural shifts that concern many historians less apparent, and the fundamental likeness of human beings in different eras more so. Just because he or she has left a smaller documentary trace, Orme seems to imply, there is no reason to treat an 8th-century Christian as fundamentally very different to a 16th-century one. So, for example, the inventories and wills that give us some idea of the richness of a late medieval parish church interior are drawn on to provide much useful information, but Orme does not present them as symptomatic of a deepened popular religious culture; he merely lays out what the documents reveal.

If I have a criticism, it is the patchiness of his interest in the architecture. For example, the fact that these buildings are largely Perpendicular in their current form is surely significant historically, suggesting as it does a widespread rebuilding in the late medieval era. Buildings given slightly more detailed treatment include St John's, Bow, St Mary Major and St Stephen's. Orme's approach does, however, include a summary of any documentary evidence for the history of a building's fabric. The cathedral aside, the result is only a small number of building dates, and I found no examples where the fabric that resulted is actually standing. This is partly because a surprisingly large number of these churches have disappeared entirely.

Alex Woodcock's work is more personal and more idiosyncratic, and thus perhaps less useful to scholars, but it contains much of interest and much to enjoy. Though it claims to be a survey of medieval sculpture in Exeter Cathedral, the focus is very much on 'incidental' or 'marginal' imagery. This is not only a side-effect of survival, and of the vast numbers of such images in the cathedral: it is also that the chapters which discuss the major imagery are more brief, a little more sketchy, and rather less engagingly written. They also tend to neglect important information, such as what is known of the statuary of the 14th-century reredos, or the fact that the sculpture of Christ in Bishop Grandisson's burial chapel in the west front iconographically repeats the painting over the effigy of Bishop Stapledon in the presbytery (and, arguably, that the Resurrection scene over the chantry chapel of precentor Sylke is partly inspired by both). Such information is important if we are to understand the Grandisson chapel Christ fully; the shift from painting to sculpture and back again is instructive in itself.

The order in which Woodcock's subjects are tackled reflects this emphasis. After two contextual opening chapters he starts his account of the carvings with exotic beasts and other animals, and only gradually moves onto major images such as those of saints and angels. In other words, this is a story told from the bottom — in this case, sometimes literally the bottom — upwards. Occasionally, his classification of images into chapters throws up oddities: the martyrdom of St Thomas is discussed under 'Legends', for example, rather than under 'Biblical Figures and Saints'. But the biggest oddity of all is the near absence (aside from some discussion in chapter 1, 'Chronologies and contexts'), of tomb sculpture, despite Exeter having one of the most interesting collections of medieval effigies in the land. Though Woodcock's book does not claim to be

complete, this feels like a major gap in what in other respects is a fine overall introduction to the surviving sculpted imagery in the cathedral. Remarkable effigies such as that said to be of Bishop Stapledon's brother Richard (d. 1320), with its accompanying figures of a horse and boy, amply deserve discussion. The medieval tomb effigy is an art form that at once commemorates the dead and holds within itself a vividly expressed promise of resurrection; it sits conceptually between the major sacred figures on altars and in windows and the grotesquerie on bosses and corbels, and is crucial to understanding both.

Less fundamentally, but also a disappointment, is the lack of any material that reflects Woodcock's own perspective as a practitioner. He is a stonemason at the cathedral as well as the holder of a doctorate on medieval architectural sculpture, and it would have been interesting to see some reflection of this in his chapter on masons, carvers and sculptors. Likewise, there is nothing on patronage: one would like to know where in a spectrum that has 'mischievous masons' at one end and 'planned iconographical programme' at the other he thinks choices about the subject matter of incidental sculpture were made.

This is a shame, as his discussion of such sculpture is otherwise full of stimulating material. This is a subject so thorny that many have lost their way in it entirely, but his account of such obscure or widely misunderstood subjects as the legends of Marcolf, the Knight of the Swan and the Pelican in her Piety is particularly good. He moves easily from such detail to clear, passionate prose on some of the underlying cultural themes that might explain the many curiosities of this strange and compelling aspect of medieval art. Here, Woodcock wants to emphasise the significance of such imagery, reminding us, for example that a corbel four feet high is comparable in scale to a medium-sized statue, and cannot simply be passed over as mere decoration. He finds the art historical origins of such marginalia in Romanesque responses to Classical models, and provides good evidence (primarily in extensive footnotes) for his approach to understanding it. Woodcock sees the monstrous and the miraculous as interrelated aspects of a world in which the divine was at once unknowable and potentially to be encountered around every corner. Fantastic creatures, for him, partly appealed because they were a bridge between the material and spiritual realms, and thus helped people draw closer to the 'utter incomprehensibility of the sacred' (p. 57). My main criticism of this analysis is that it downplays the role of such carvings as warnings against sin: surely this dimension is crucial when attempting to explain the manifest suffering of many 'green men', or why a mermaid, the top of whose pudenda are singularly well observed, hovers above the presbytery (fig 5.8).

His descriptions of foliage styles are also good, and occasionally deliver real insights, such as the 'synthesis of abstraction and realism' seen in Perpendicular foliage (p. 23). This observation adds to one's sense that the success of this final phase of medieval architecture lies partly in the resolution of contradictory concerns — plain *vs.* elaborate aesthetic modes, decorative obfuscation *vs.* structural clarity — that play such a striking role in the rapid stylistic change displayed from the Romanesque era onwards.

Both books are well illustrated, Woodcock's with colour photographs by Mark Ware which do much more than merely complement the excellent imagery already available (C. J. P. Cave, *Medieval Carvings in Exeter Cathedral* (Harmondsworth 1953); Avril K. Henry and Anna C. Hulbert, catalogue raisonné of Exeter's keystones and carvings, <http://hds.essex.ac.uk/exetercath/index.html>); Orme's with a sparingly selected but illuminating range of plans and (mostly) antiquarian images. In both, the lack of page references in the text to these images is an irritant — especially with Orme's work, in which several illustrations lie distant from the relevant discussion (for example, the printed indulgence on p. 154 relates to the Hospital of St Roche, discussed eleven pages earlier).

Indeed, the subject matter of these two books is perhaps not as contrasting as it at first seems. The red sandstone churches which interrupt Exeter's streetscape and the brightly painted creatures which inhabit its grand limestone cathedral are alike in being large in number and small in scale. They are comparative marginalia in the wider world of medieval art — yet they are also capable of revealing much about the religious life and culture of the era.

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