

And two nuns of Barking composed their own saints' lives: one, who remains anonymous, produced the first vernacular translation, in Anglo-Norman, of Ælred of Rievaulx's life of Edward the Confessor; and the other, Clemence, translated the life of St. Catherine of Alexandria, again into Anglo-Norman. An Anglo-Norman collection of Marian miracles, *Le Gracial*, was compiled by one Adgar, possibly for the Barking nuns (he himself may have been a chaplain at the abbey), and there is every reason to believe that the abbey possessed an extensive library. It certainly had a librarian (*libraria*) to look after its books. Two other important texts associated with the abbey are the *Ordinale and Customary* of 1404 and the fascinating "Charge to the Barking Cellaress," written sometime after 1453. There are other manuscripts associated with the house, not all of which are discussed in detail in this book.

The literary culture of this remarkable abbey is the subject of this admirable collection of essays. To gain a glimpse of the whole one need only read the excellent introduction by Donna A. Bussell with Jennifer N. Brown (pp. 1–30) and the perceptive afterword by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (pp. 283–96). The collection is divided (like Gaul) into three parts: the first concerns the abbey in its Anglo-Saxon context, the second in its Anglo-Norman context, and the third in the later Middle Ages. In part I we find four chapters that present a detailed consideration of various aspects of Goscelin's lives of abbesses Ethelburga, Hildelith, and Wulfhild. Chapter 4 ends with mention of Clemence of Barking and thus leads us into part II of the volume, which contains five chapters dealing with the anonymous nun's translation of the life of Edward the Confessor, Clemence's own life of Catherine of Alexandria, and the *Gracial* of Adgar. Guerne's life of Becket is considered on pages 189–91. The third section of the book is concerned with the "Charge to the Barking Cellaress" (a most interesting chapter by Alexandra Barratt) and certain aspects of the *Ordinale and Customary*—more specifically, the performance of Easter plays at Barking and monastic liturgy "as the site of creative engagement" (p. 267) at the abbey. The volume concludes with a comprehensive bibliography (pp. 297–324) and an index (pp. 325–34) that, although serviceable, is not as detailed as one might like and could be better arranged.

But there is not one of the chapters in this collection that does not have its own reward, and not one that does not present a thorough scholarly analysis of its particular subject. For anyone interested in what Wogan-Browne calls "the historiography of female community" (p. 283), nuns' libraries and literacy, and Barking abbey itself, this first-class collection of essays is essential reading.

Memorial University of Newfoundland

DAVID N. BELL

Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic. By Ryan Szpiech. [The Middle Ages Series.] (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2012. Pp. xiv, 311. \$59.95. ISBN 978-0-8122-4471-7.)

This wide-ranging, erudite study brings a welcome new perspective to the subject of medieval interfaith polemics. Focusing on literary rather than purely religious or historical approaches to source texts, Ryan Szpiech's goal is to show how conversion

stories functioned to convey faith claims in the later Middle Ages. From the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, he argues, religious polemics were increasingly characterized by appeals to new types of *auctoritas*: not only “rational” discourse (as has long been recognized) but also converts’ specific claims to the “authenticity” of personal experience and expertise. Although his emphasis is mainly on Christian polemics of the Western Mediterranean, Jewish and Muslim conversion stories are also included for comparative purposes—in the process reminding us that *all* conversion accounts need to be read first and foremost as literary text, and not merely as “factual” expressions of spiritual (auto)biography.

After a survey of previous scholarship on the subtle topic of “conversion,” a first chapter examines how Pauline and Augustinian conversion paradigms were adapted and transformed in the later Middle Ages. Fifteenth-century writings of ex-Muslim Juan Andrés and ex-Jew Pablo de Santa María are presented as examples of how such updated paradigms served to further Christian theological attacks on Islam and Judaism. Chapter 2 goes back several centuries to map changes in Christian notions of textual “authority” through a long series of (mostly anti-Jewish) texts; twelfth-century conversion narratives by Herman of Cologne and Petrus Alfonsi here take center stage. Shifting focus, chapter 3 turns to Jewish conversion narratives and argues that these were actually quite rare. No significant polemical genre emerged to highlight outsiders’ adoption of Judaism, and exceptions such as the Genizah story of Obadiah *ha-Ger* may result from Christian influence. Analysis of rhetorical strategies used by well-known thirteenth-century Christian polemicists such as Ramon Martí and Ramon Llull come next, followed by a chapter on the fascinating case of fourteenth-century proselyte Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid. Abner/Alfonso is in some ways the star of the book, and Szpiech considers his ambiguously Christian yet still pro-Talmudic texts to be not only the culmination but also a conclusion and a collapse of their genre, “a turning point in the process of rethinking the nature of authority through narration that began two centuries earlier” (p. 145). A chapter on Muslim conversion stories rounds out the book with authors such as former Jew Samaw’al al-Maghribī and ex-Franciscan Anselm Turmeda (‘Abd Allāh), confirming Szpiech’s thesis that conversion rhetoric had a distinct and vital role to play in the texts of medieval Christianity above all.

There is much to be debated in this multifaceted study, and the book raises as many questions as it answers. One may ask, for example, whether the categories of *Christian*, *Muslim*, and *Jewish* do not overly simplify or even essentialize the works and authors treated therein. Conversion is, after all, an inherently unstable process, and texts can take on considerably different functions in the hands of different readers in different times and places. The fact that so little attention is devoted to important problems of textual production, distribution, intended audience, and audience reception also needs to be considered. *Conversion and Narrative* is a dense and by no means an easy read; each chapter swarms with both complex theoretical discussion and a plethora of specific examples, some of which will be unfamiliar to most readers. Jewish and Islamic sources in particular cry out for further treatment, as the author acknowledges (p. 225). Still, Szpiech’s impressive analytical and linguistic skills have allowed him to pro-

duce a work of singular value, which will undoubtedly open up new lines of research for the future.

St. Thomas University
Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada

ROBIN VOSE

Églises en dialogue: Arméniens et Byzantins dans la seconde moitié du XII^e siècle. By Isabelle Augé. [Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Vol. 633; Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Subsidia. Tomus 124.] (Leuven: Peeters. 2011. Pp. xxx, 317. €75,00 paperback. ISBN 978-90-429-2357-7.)

This publication is a revised version of Isabelle Augé's dissertation, "Les discussions religieuses arméno-grecques au temps des catholiques Pahlawouni," presented in 2008 at the Université Paul Valéry-Montpellier III and directed by Gérard Dédéyan. The volume constitutes a thorough study of nineteen letters in Armenian pertaining to the dialogue on reconciliation between the Armenian and Byzantine Churches, initiated in 1165 by Nersēs IV Klayec'i (nicknamed Šnorhali, the "Gracious") during the Catholicosate of his elder brother Grigor III (in office 1113–66), whom he succeeded as Catholicos (in office 1166–73). The sustained efforts for reconciliation continued under Nersēs's successor, his nephew Grigor IV Tłay (the "Youth," in office 1173–93) and grandnephew Nersēs of Lambron (Archbishop of Tarsus, 1175–98). Eleven of these letters were to/from the Emperor Manuel I Komnenos (reigned 1143–80) and four to/from Michael III of Anchialus, patriarch of Constantinople (in office 1170–77). The preface by Jean-Pierre Mahé sets the larger historical context of the correspondence (pp. v–viii).

The study is divided into two major parts. The first part delineates the historical, dogmatic, and liturgical divide between the two churches that necessitated Šnorhali's initiative (pp. 1–90). The second part consists of a finely annotated translation of the letters (pp. 91–243). The first ten letters are those of Šnorhali to the Byzantine authorities and their responses; the eleventh is his letter to the bishops and theologians of the Armenian Church. The remaining eight letters pertain to his successor, Grigor IV. Letters no. 12 to no. 17 are written to or are from the Byzantine authorities, letter no. 18 is from the Armenian bishops and theologians to Grigor IV, and letter no. 19 is his response to them. For all but one of these letters, Augé follows the text of the 1871 Jerusalem edition of Šnorhali's *Encyclicals*. For the exceptional fifteenth letter, from Grigor IV to Manuel I, she follows the text published by Aršak Ter Mik'clean (*Ararat*, 26 [1893], 25–48).

The volume has three lengthy appendices (pp. 245–303), composed of an annotated translation of Nersēs of Lambron's assessment of the issues at stake, the demands and counter-demands made by both sides (*cf.* the table provided on p. 78); his 1197 dialogue with George II Xiphilinus, patriarch of Constantinople (in office 1191–98); and a well-outlined biography of Šnorhali. One wonders why the first and second appendices were not combined to make a third part of the study, so as to show