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Jeremy J. P. Goldberg, Felicity Riddy, eds. *Youth in the Middle Ages.* York: York Medieval Press, 2004. vi + 144 pp. $80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-903153-13-0.

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Childhood Development

This slim collection of eight essays examines children and childhood across parts of Western Europe from the sixth to the fourteenth century. Most of the papers were originally presented at the York Medieval Seminar series in 1995. This may account for the distinctly British flavor of the volume, with half of the essays exploring English topics and more than half of the contributors teaching at universities in the United Kingdom. Other essays consider royal teenage Vikings, child oblation in Italy, and Jewish concepts of childhood in northern Europe.

The early history of childhood and youth has benefited from an enormous amount of scholarship during the past two decades. Historians, literary scholars, art historians, demographers, and others have investigated a wide variety of sources in order to document both the theory and the reality of children in the medieval and early modern world. Medievalists in particular have reacted strongly to the work of Philippe Aries, claiming that he misinterpreted some sources and ignored others. Aries's detractors point to his naïve use of iconographic evidence and have seized upon his statement that "childhood did not exist in the Middle Ages." The interpretation offered by Aries was popular through the 1980s and is still championed by historians like James Schultz in his work on medieval Germany. On the other hand, monographs by Barbara Hanawalt and Nicholas Orme, as well as collections of essays edited by Konrad Eisenbichler and by Albrecht Classen, have criticized Aries and offer much new evidence about children and youth.[1] Indeed, this interest in the history of childhood has also produced recent studies of childhood in Anglo-Saxon England, early Christianity, medieval Islam, and even prehistoric cultures, to name just a few.[2]

Similar to many of the works noted above, *Youth in the Middle Ages* opens with an introductory essay that criticizes Aries and then attempts to move the discussion beyond simple disparagement of one scholar. Here the authors analyze a 1399 sermon delivered by Archbishop Arundel of Canterbury on the occasion of the abdication of England's boy-king Richard II. They point out how the concept or definition of childhood was frequently more complex, and more important, than actual chronological age. This theme is picked up by Edward James in the volume's first essay, which explores the difficulty of using classical terms like infancy, boyhood, and adolescence in early medieval Europe. James's work is grounded in a close study of the work of Gregory of Tours, but he includes material from hagiographies, miracle stories, and even Dante Alighieri to show how "youth" was a slippery concept.

Rosalynn Voaden's contribution returns to the figure of Richard II by comparing two chronicles of the late fourteenth century with a contemporaneous dream-vision text entitled *Pearl.* All three of the documents wrestle with the question of how individuals and society in medieval Europe should respond when a child assumes authority that normally belongs only to adults. In considering both literary and historical texts as well as the broader historical context, Voaden promotes the

goal of interdisciplinary study championed by the publisher in an opening note (p. ii). Literary analysis is also the method offered by Helen Cooper of the University of Oxford to examine a series of romance narratives about heroes and heroines leaving home. She observes that these adolescents are given advice, sometimes at considerable length, by parents or mentors. Yet this advice is often contradictory or even distinctly unhelpful, and thus hardly a model for parents seeking an exemplum. She concludes that the underlying message may be that children who wish to transition to adulthood must find their own way.

Children leaving home is the central theme of P. J. P. Goldberg's essay too, although he uses depositions from ecclesiastical courts to track actual migration patterns of youth rather than Chaucerian pilgrims. His quantitative sources indicate that most migrants were either teenagers and young adults who went comparatively short distances (i.e., eight to twelve miles) prior to marrying and settling down, or landless migrant day laborers who never achieved social adulthood. Interestingly, Goldberg finds few substantial differences between male and female migratory patterns. Kim Phillip's article uses gender as a category of analysis in considering the depiction of saintly virgins in print and in paint. Drawing upon sermons, saints' lives, and altar paintings in fifteenth-century East Anglia, Phillips adapts the concept of "parasexuality" to explain the apparent contradiction between images of beautiful virgin martyrs and repeated warnings from the pulpit about the dangers of pride and vanity. She is particularly interested in the question of how young female virgins would have responded to these competing influences. Phillips's use of art historical and literary approaches is effective, but in the end it seems that we can only speculate about the young women's response to these competing forces.

Simha Goldin illuminates the Jewish conception of childhood in late medieval northern France and Germany, using contemporary chronicles and exegetical texts to show that the child was at the heart of the Jewish family. Indeed, it is astonishing to read how often Jewish tradition promoted the well-being of a child. From strict requirements about breast-feeding and wet nurses to lavish descriptions of parental affection, these sources clearly demonstrate that childhood was a distinctive and highly valued phase of life. Religious tradition also constitutes the central component of Frances Andrews's essay about the Humiliati in late medieval Italy. She examines a small group of six adults and seventeen children who entered Humiliati communities and who wished to observe a religious life while remaining together. This was a revolutionary concept: adults did not need to choose between a religious vocation and parenthood, while children could freely choose whether to remain or to leave the community as they grew up. As Andrews admits, the sources are far from conclusive and so we are left with a number of questions and uncertainties.

The final essay in the collection, by Judith Jesch, is an analysis of three Viking kings of the eleventh century renowned for achieving power at very young ages. She highlights the tension inherent in contemporary skaldic narratives that demanded both youthful vigor and experienced wisdom. Ultimately the Viking model of warrior kingship would give way to a "medieval" model prevalent on the European continent, but these three real-life leaders help us to understand how Vikings viewed royal children.

Notes

[1]. James A. Schultz, *The Knowledge of Childhood in the German Middle Ages, 1100-1350* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995); Barbara Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); Konrad Eisenbichler, ed., *The Premodern Teenager: Youth and Society, 1150-1650* (Toronto: Center for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2002); and Albrecht Classen, ed., *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2005).

[2]. Sally Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1999); Avner Giladi, *Child of Islam: Concepts of Childhood in Medieval Muslim Society* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1992); Odd Magne Bakke, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005); and Joanna Sofaer Deverenski, ed.,* Children and Material Culture_ (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

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