

Gesine Jordan, »Nichts als Nahrung und Kleidung«. Laien und Kleriker als Wohngäste bei den Mönchen von St. Gallen und Redon (8. und 9. Jahrhundert), Berlin (Akademie Verlag) 2007, 310 S., ISBN 978-3-05-004338-8, EUR 64,80.

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These days, it need hardly be explained to historians of the early middle ages how important monasteries were in this period. This is not only because they were among the most important social, political and intellectual powerhouses of the age, but also because it is from these institutions that the lion's share of our sources on the early history of Western Europe has been transferred to us. Hence, the study of monastic culture is no longer the prerogative of historians of religion, but has taken an increasingly important place in research into many other aspects of early medieval history.

Gesine Jordan's book adds to this steadily increasing library of detailed, socio-historical studies in monastic history by closely analysing the situation under which laymen and priests could live among the monks without having taken monastic vows. According to Jordan, this aspect of the interaction between laity and monastic communities seems to have been taken for granted ever since the work done on the subject by scholars such as Hermann Bikel and Michael Borgolte, who stated that in most instances, this option was chosen by people as a means of securing their pensions. Through her study, which focuses solely on the communities of Sankt-Gallen and Redon instead of trying to generalize by using as much source material as is available, Jordan shows that there was more to this phenomenon than clever priests and laymen growing old in relative prosperity. Additionally, because of the comparative methods she has employed, and because of her focus on the donors rather than on the communities, she has uncovered some interesting things that merit further research. Of course, this focus on the donors does pose the problem that most, if not all, of the extant source material has been produced within a monastic context. Therefore, it might be hard to fathom the true motivations of those who gave land; after all, one only has the word of the recipients for it, and these can be notoriously repetitive and formulaic, especially when one has to work with later copies. As she explains in her methodological introduction, Jordan's contention is that the cartularies of Redon and Sankt-Gallen were faithful copies, if not originals. Coupled with the French sociologist Mauss' interpretation of the gift as a »total social phenomenon«, which she uses here, this allows her to avoid the major pitfalls connected with her use of these tenacious sources – the true motivations of the donors were equally vital for the recipients, and thus recorded. Still, especially when she makes use of the narrative sources from the two communities, a little more acknowledgment of the fact that these were indeed written for exclusive use within the monasteries might have put some of her statements in perspective. For example, in her treatment of Ratuili, prime benefactor of Redon, she uses the *Gesta Sanctorum Rotonensium* to corroborate statements found in the Redon Cartulary concerning the circumstances of his donations, without taking into full account that in the narrative, Ratuili truly has

become a monk who has to return *ad saeculum* instead of *ad propriam suam*, whereas the charters, with a more ambiguous *locum animam meam salvandi*-formula, leave the question of his conversion open to interpretation. Similarly, while Jordan does make an interesting and convincing case for the rehabilitation of Ekkehard's *Casus Sancti Galli* as a historiographic work in her treatment of Salomo III, she underappreciates the function of the work as an exhortation for the monks to remain within their cloister, whether spiritually or physically, a function she does refer to earlier in her book.

As far as the treatment of the actual question of lay people living among monks is concerned, however, Jordan's study is as thorough and precise as can be desired, even if she based her selection of charters on the works of scholars whom she also criticises. After the introduction, both monasteries are first treated separately, each in their own context, in order to find out why individuals would opt to trade their possessions for a life in the monastery, without being a monk. For Sankt-Gallen, this leads to the interesting conclusion that the majority of these people actually took this step out of their own volition, and not as a way to secure their old age. Members of noble families, even those rich in land and in heirs, chose to go this way to secure ties with the monastery for them and their family – both to their own and the community's advantage. Others, such as the deacon Adalhelm, chose this way to temporarily »opt out« when things got hairy at the court. Most important, however, seems to have been the spiritual association obtained through such a deal. Where giving land could make one a neighbour, living among the monks made one a houseguest of the saint. These same conclusions also follow from the analysis of the situation in Brittany. Again, nobles tied their families into the monastic framework to ensure their spiritual well-being and continued remembrance. Again, questions of poverty seem only to have entered the equation very rarely.

The true value of Jordan's work, however, lies in the last chapter, where the findings of both studies are compared. Taking a page from the comparative methods of Marc Bloch, she convincingly argues that precisely because these two monasteries were so far apart and still seemingly so similar that generalizations could be made from her preliminary conclusions, new information can come to light when these two micro-perspectives are put next to each other. For example, the prominent position of priests in early medieval Brittany is once more emphasised, seeing as most »guests« of Redon turn out to be clerics instead of the nobles whom we find in Alemannia. Whether this can be attributed to the Celtic influences still present in the region is still open to debate, but it is clear that, from this point of view, priests have had a more decisive influence on the early development of Redon than on Sankt-Gallen, which could account for other differences between the two as well. Also, this research has shed an interesting light on the position of women in different regions. In Sankt-Gallen, a separate cell was set up for women who wished to go the same path as their male counterparts. In Redon, on the other hand, no woman is recorded to have made such a deal. This also is something that still needs to be studied more in-depth. It also shows the merits of the comparative method instead of trying to paint a general picture from the scant source material still left, which is indeed one of the stronger points of this book.

It is the conclusion of this book that marks it as particularly interesting, not only because it opens up

perspectives on new topics of research, but also for the fact that it lifts Jordan's work above a mere critique of old names and older interpretations. Written in a clear, pleasantly readable style, her book shows that there still is plenty of life in the study of medieval monastic cultures and its interaction with the surrounding region. Precisely because of their function as preservers of the social memory and the religious identity of a given region, people from all strata of society wished to associate themselves with these communities. Gesine Jordan's »Nichts als Nahrung und Kleidung« sheds light on a hitherto underappreciated way this sort of association could take place. Doing so, she has not only added to the importance of Redon and Sankt-Gallen for their respective regions in the eighth and ninth centuries, but also provided us with yet another way of studying the relationship between monasteries and laymen in the early middle ages – making these communities all the more important in our days as well.