

PATRICK J. HORNBECK II, *A Companion to Lollardy*, with Mishtooni Bose and Fiona Somerset. (Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 67.) Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016. Pp. x, 251. \$193. ISBN: 978-90-04-30979-1.

doi: 10.1086/701394

In this new companion, Patrick Hornbeck offers a masterful synthesis of “what we know” about the lollards themselves (2) and an illuminating account of writing about lollardy from the Middle Ages to the present. One key premise of this book is that the modern study of lollardy forms part of a long tradition, extending back through the work of post-reformation writers to the accounts of medieval chroniclers. To study the lollards, Hornbeck argues, is in some ways to take up a project begun by their immediate contemporaries, and each new approach to the sources must also involve a critical engagement with the competing stories they have been used to tell. Hornbeck is conscious that the terms we use to talk about lollardy have histories of their own: the introduction tells the now-familiar story of how the terms “lollard” and “Wycliffite” have been defined, conflated, and distinguished, while the first chapter considers the implications of the terms “conventicle,” “sect,” “cluster,” and “network,” used to speak about lollard communities. Hornbeck himself uses a lower case “l” for “lollardy,” in an effort to name this phenomenon without prejudging its intellectual or theological coherence.

The order of the chapters in this book reflects another of its central claims. Drawing on the insights of practical theology, Hornbeck argues that, in many cases, lollards came to their beliefs through their religious practices, instead of adopting

practices to express their preexisting beliefs. Accordingly, the companion addresses the way lollards worshipped, prayed, and taught each other before it introduces the theological positions they held. This approach offers “a corrective to writings about lollardy that privilege the intellectual over the personal and social” (59). It also allows Hornbeck to acknowledge the diversity of lollard belief, which was shaped in part by the circumstances in which it was practiced.

Hornbeck’s first chapter begins with an account of the life and career of John Wyclif. Here, Hornbeck offers clear, concise introductions to Wyclif’s realist epistemology, his theory of *dominium*, and his account of the relationship between visible signs and invisible realities, and weighs the claims of modern scholars who have sought to place each of these at the center of his system of thought. In the later sections, he introduces important named individuals associated with lollardy, along with the terms historians have applied to them (Jeremy Catto’s “fellows and helpers” [1999], the “lollard knights” famously discussed by K. B. McFarlane [1972]), and describes the situation of lollard communities, characterized as dispersed lay groups of dissenting believers (51).

The next chapter considers lollard religious practice: it describes the preaching and reading that most concerned the medieval church authorities, and which have received much attention from modern historians, but it also seeks to uncover the spiritual ideals that informed these practices, an approach recently championed by Fiona Somerset in *Feeling Like Saints* (2014). Reading the texts he edited with Somerset and Stephen Lahey for their *Wycliffite Spirituality* collection (2013) and drawing on their coauthored introduction to that volume, Hornbeck argues that, while lollard devotional practice had much in common with mainstream Christianity, it also had certain distinctive emphases

(70), for example on continuous prayer, the imitation of Christ, and the obligations of individuals to their communities. This chapter forms a counterpart to the later chapter on lollard belief, where Hornbeck offers a conspectus of lollard thought on salvation, the sacraments, and the practices of the mainstream church. He summarizes Wyclif's positions on these questions, but also notes the variety of opinion that emerges from lollard writings, and from the evidence of trial records. Rather than defining the key tenets of lollard belief, Hornbeck once more speaks about certain distinctive emphases, on the authority of scripture, and on the resources of the vernacular, for example. These were characteristic of lollard thought, but not necessarily proof of lollard affiliation. Taken together, these chapters offer a nuanced account of lollardy as a social phenomenon, acknowledging the many and various forms it took, while also tracing important resemblances between lollards in different times and places.

Somerset's chapter in this companion attempts a survey of all the texts that were written, translated, and interpolated by lollards, providing an enormously valuable resource for scholars working in this field. Somerset distinguishes three phases in the production of lollard writings: the first characterized by large scale, collaborative projects, the second by a wide variety of independently produced writings, and the third by the adaptation and recension of these materials. This chapter seeks to extend the corpus of lollard writings in ways that might prompt a reassessment of its character, including works like the *Book to a Mother*. It also challenges scholars to look beyond the modern anthologies where we so often encounter these texts, and to consider the way they were often diffused among more mainstream writings.

Mishtooni Bose contributes a chapter on opponents of lollardy, which also synthesizes a great deal of useful material and suggests new avenues for future research. Bose presents a chronology of writing against Wyclif and the lollards that runs from Gregory XI's response to *De civili dominio* to the work of Reginald Pecock and Thomas Gascoigne. She describes the wide discursive range of anti-lollard writing, from reductive polemic to nuanced dialogue and, through a series of compelling close readings, reveals the resourceful, imaginative quality of responses by writers like Pecock and Nicholas Love. For Bose, the discursive energy and diversity of responses to lollardy should complicate our sense that intellectual debate was constrained and restricted after Wyclif (146).

In his chapter on the trials of the lollards, Hornbeck offers a detailed description of the inquisitorial process and of the documentary evidence it produced, and weighs the complex question of what the trial records might reveal about the real beliefs and priorities of heresy suspects. The final chapter considers the survival of lollard communities and the transmission of lollard texts from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. It shows once more how the history and historiography of lollardy overlap, notably in its account of John Bale and John Foxe, who were instrumental in the continued survival of lollard writings, but who also asserted links between lollardy and later Protestantism that remain the subject of debate.

This lucid and engaging book will surely become an important reference point for students of lollardy. It offers a rich history of this flourishing scholarly field, and poses some searching and productive questions about how its object of study might best be defined.

ALASTAIR BENNETT, Royal Holloway, University of London