Bookshelf

Literacy is something of a vogue subject among medieval historians, and not before time. Several books from a single publisher address the problem. Bernard Bischoff's *Latin palaeography* (Cambridge University Press, £12.95) is a well-known classic. The translation by Dáibhí O Cróinín and David Ganz is not always very felicitous and one or two errors have crept in. This is a very literal translation that sounds at times like the pastiche German of British war films. On the other hand, this edition has the inestimable advantage of carrying illustrations; the Spartan original failed badly on this score (it would be equally absurd to publish a book on Gothic cathedrals with only skimpy line drawings). Whether the blurb is justified in saying that the book "provides an unrivalled introduction to the nature of medieval Latin culture" is surely more dubious. Excessive claims should not be made even for books that are excellent in their own field.

In *The Carolingians and the written word* (Cambridge University Press, £9.95) Rosamond McKitterick aims to fill a major void in the study of literacy, arguing that literacy was much more widespread in eighth and ninth century Europe than is generally assumed. This interesting and controversial work looks at the economic and legal dimensions of the problem as well as more familiar questions such as who owned the surviving books. It will undoubtedly stimulate much lively debate. There is, perhaps surprisingly in a book partly on books, no conventional bibliography, but there is a lengthy index of known MSS. The same author has edited a parallel collection of studies under the title *The uses of literacy in mediaeval Europe* (Cambridge University Press, £35.00). Here authors such as Roger Collins address directly the problem of lay literacy (this time in Visigothic Spain), though Collins has to admit that for this part of the world the evidence is sparse indeed. Close to Dr McKitterick's theme is also the study of Janet Nelson on literacy and Carolingian government. But the geographical range is much wider, with studies by S. C. Reif on literacy in the medieval Jewish world and by Margaret Mullett on literacy in Byzantium. A valuable study by John Mitchell looks (literally – the article is well illustrated) at the inscriptions of the monastery of San Vincenzo al Volturno in southern Italy. However, the main emphasis is on Gaul, England and Ireland, with Islam excluded and northern Italy unrepresented. Yet the lacunae are surely a reminder that this research is at an early stage, and further collections of this type would be a good idea. A minor quibble is the spelling of *medieval*, where CUP appears to have departed from its well-entrenched practice, which reflects the eventual disappearance of the æ ligature in medieval texts. In an age of computerised library catalogues, we could hope for a fuller degree of standardisation. Once again, the lack of a bibliography is regrettable (ISBN 0 521 34409 3).

David Dumville has put together an impressive collection of his articles under the title *Histories and pseudo-histories in the insular Middle Ages* (Aldershot, Variorum, £42.00). After an introduction, consisting of a com-

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to be stretched quite thinly, though few would dispute the centrality of Jerusalem themes in the mosaic designs of the Cappella Palatina. This is thus a stimulating and lively rather than entirely convincing book, which places the debate about the nature of the Norman monarchy in a new context.

The Arabic role in medieval literary history by Maria Rosa Menocal (University of Pennsylvania Press) has just appeared in paperback. This is a puzzling book, written under the influence of the deeply flawed work of Edward Said; however much the author insists on her theme that Arabic influences have been underestimated, her argument appears to depend on repeating the point rather than on offering direct proof. It would, for instance, be a major achievement to show that the Scuola Siciliana of Frederick II was influenced by the poetry of the Arabs. But the author cannot show this. Vague parallels and remote possible influences do not add up to a serious demonstration of anything. Indeed, Professor Menocal is herself forced to admit that Arabic influence on the troubadour lyrics is only one of many possible influences, and not the dominant one. The book consists of an agreeable stream of hot air.

God and man in medieval Spain (Aris and Phillips, £15.00) consists of ten essays in honour of the Oxford historian J. R. L. Highfield, mostly written by his former pupils or colleagues. The editors are Derek Lomax and David Mackenzie. Highfield's signal success in inspiring major research on medieval Spain is outlined in the foreword and in the bibliography of his own writings. Among highlights of this widely ranging volume are essays by Roger Collins, Angus Mackay and John Edwards. The volume ranges from Catalonia (Peter Rycraft), through Aragon (Alan Forey, Anthony Luttrell) and Catile (Peter Linehan) to al-Andalus (Derek Lomax).

Peregrinos, Monges e Guerreiros. Feudo-clericalismo e religiosidade em Castela medieval (Editoria Hucitec, Sao Paulo) is an essay in "História total" by Hilário Franco Júnior, bringing together the history of the southward extension of Castile and the role of the Church in knitting together Castilian society. It is a wide-ranging book that lays particular emphasis on the importance of the pilgrimages to Compostela. The author has read widely in the literature on non-Iberian history, and the book displays strongly the influence of modern French historiography. It is thus a thoughtful, well-annotated book and it is a stimulating introduction not merely to medieval Castile, but to the approaches being adopted by Brazilian medieval historians.

Alan Ryder's, *Alfonso the Magnanimous* (Clarendon Press, £45.00) will establish itself as the standard biography of this ambitious and grandiose ruler of Aragon, Naples, Sicily and a good many other kingdoms. It is a sober narrative account that is based on a close reading of the archives of Barcelona, Naples, Sicily and elsewhere. Above all, it shows a remarkable familiarity with both the Spanish and the Italian ends of Alfonso's career; since most previous historians of the reign were either Spaniards or Italians, not surprisingly the result tended to be unbalanced. At such a steep