some aspects of rural (especially upland) interaction with the urban economy, and a particularly strong conviviality, expressed in the economy of ale and the tradition of praise for towns in Welsh poetry. Finally, Ralph Griffiths examines the contribution of William Rees to the study of medieval Wales, arguing for the need to remove from the justifiably long shadow of J.E. Lloyd the work of this exponent (and others) of Welsh social and economic history, notably Rees’s landmark piece on the Black Death in Wales.

In spite of this, the volume is perhaps significant, too, for what is not covered—there is nothing on women and little on key aspects of social history; gender is strikingly absent. Instead, the volume suggests that mainstream high- and late-medieval history is still focused heavily on key chronicle texts, on the male members of princely dynasties and their agreements, on kinship, urban history, law texts and church history. This volume has much to commend it and many of the excellent essays reveal the complexities of their chosen subjects, yet it indicates that much remains to be done in developing new approaches to Welsh medieval history.

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This is a book to challenge the most intrepid reader, although the rewards awaiting those with the requisite stamina are considerable. No fewer than twenty-eight authors have collaborated to produce over six hundred pages of essays. These run from extended, wide-ranging, theory-rich pieces, the work of multiple hands, to very brief, thematically highly-specialised single-author papers. Most of the contributors are young Germanophone medievalists, assembled under the auspices of a vast interdisciplinary project, funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, which examines cultural interactions within medieval Europe, and between Europeans and their neighbours. The main guiding spirit of this long-running venture has been Michael Borgolte, of Berlin’s Humboldt University. The book’s layout offers fair warning of what is to come, with essays jammed nose-to-tail in dense, unremitting succession. Rare glimpses of a white space come as a relief to brain and eye alike. In content, the contributions are diverse, spanning Europe, the Levant and north Africa, between the ninth and the sixteenth centuries. Unifying themes and questions, while unmistakably present throughout, only gradually attain full articulation: for this, the volume must be read carefully, in its entirety. Essays are marshalled into three broad sections: ‘Forms of Boundary-Making and Constructions of Identity’, ‘Difference as Cultural Practice’, and ‘Boundary-Transgression as a Creative Process’. These are in their turn sub-divided, with groups of short papers concerned, for example, with identities formed through social interactions and through the invocation to imagined pasts, or longer essays examining modes of cultural transfer or hybrid cultural formations. Not all of these papers are substantial enough to allow their authors to shed much...
light on their sometimes highly ambitious topics. Michael Brauer has the unenviable task of making sense of Alfred the Great’s Old English translation project in just seven pages. Andreas Schorr gets barely eleven pages in which to do justice to ‘Personal names and the construction of Christendom’, comparing Byzantium with the West. The volume’s underlying tendency, reflected even in the layout of the table of contents, is to submerge individual authorial voices and perspectives in the service of an agenda of themes and approaches—and also, the reader sometimes feels, interpretations—decided in advance. Thankfully, this attempt at corporate historiography makes limited headway, and the disharmonies and disjunctions between different essays, not generally highlighted by their authors but evident to the reader, constitute an additional, troublesome but enriching, internal discourse.

Taken together, these papers (like DFG Schwerpunktprogramm 1173 itself, the project to which they owe their origin) offer a distinctive and stimulating new approach to that perennial medievalist preoccupation, the formation and character of collective identities. The identities in which these essays deal are characteristically slippery: mobile, ambivalent, negotiable, socially and situationally specific, or sometimes simply confused. They constantly cross, re-cross and subvert their own prescribed boundaries, interacting with and borrowing from what lies beyond, even as they inscribe their always transitory lines in the sand. This is a vision of collective self-definition worlds away from the immobile and intractable, contending identity-blocs of modern nationalism or cultural chauvinism—as the contributors themselves repeatedly emphasise. For stasis it substitutes process, for conviction ambiguity, and for the settled core the fluid frontier. Stephanie Seidl and Julia Zimmermann thus explore the complex and contradictory meanings of ‘pagan’ in German vernacular texts from the thirteenth century. Arguing against models of religious domination propounded by Reinhart Koselleck and Jan Assmann (and the ready engagement with cultural theory is characteristic of the entire volume), they insist instead that invocations of the heathen were too various and contradictory to have served any clear hegemonic purpose. Where others have seen straightforward (and sometimes straightforwardly oppressive) cultural processes at work, the contributors seek always to find complexity. In a co-authored contribution, Marcel Müllerburg, Britta Müller-Schauenburg and Henrik Wels show how the Christian-Jewish dialogue texts of the central middle ages appear in a different, less polarising, light when it is acknowledged that their Jewish protagonists do not ultimately convert. Here, it is proposed, is an irreducibly polycultural world, whose actors subvert, exchange and transgress more often than they dominate. As such, it contrasts strongly with the bleak visions of persecution and nascent colonialism which have marked some of the more influential Anglophone accounts of the medieval ‘making’ of Europe to appear in recent times.

A difficulty with the volume is that, for all its vast scope and ambition, it is less free-standing than it appears. In fact, it is really just the most recent (although also, in the intention of its editors, the most definitive) collective statement of the astonishingly productive research team which, over recent years, Schwerpunktprogramm 1173 has nurtured. In order fully to evaluate these pieces, then, the reader ideally needs to turn also to some of the many other publications for which the editors and contributors have been collectively or individually responsible—most notably, the project’s weighty interim

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statement of its findings, *Mittelalter im Labor*, published in 2008. Without such extra homework the reader might be left wondering, for example, what precisely is the nature of those ‘cultures’ whose interaction the present volume places at its masthead. This is never made explicit. In fact, wider reading does bring greater clarity here, since the programme leaders have explained elsewhere that their ‘cultures’ are first and foremost (flexible, negotiable and interacting) communities of belief. This is important to know, as it reflects a guiding aim of *Schwerpunktprogramm* 1173 more broadly: to test out (with contemporary European agendas firmly in mind) the cohesive potentialities of a medieval Europe conceived of not as a Latin-Christian monolith but as a complex amalgam of different (primarily, Abrahamic) faiths and religious groupings. And knowing that provides a key to the present volume’s title, which encapsulates the contributors’ essentially dialectical approach to their material. Here, *Desintegration* (‘dis-integration’?) connotes something more purposeful than mere falling-apart: rather, the active, potentially violent, processes of sorting-out and dividing-up through which cultural groups define and re-define themselves. And yet, editors and contributors contend, all this takes place within larger, integrative cultural frameworks which, in paradoxical ways, are potentially strengthened as a result precisely of these movements towards greater inner differentiation (pp. 424–5). Underpinning the volume, it seems, is belief in the likely reality, not of a unitary medieval (or contemporary) Europe, but of one nevertheless possessed of a strong inherent capacity for overarching cohesion.

The high ambition of the venture from which this volume springs is therefore beyond doubt; but does it convince as an account of medieval cultural identities and their evolution? For the present reader, misgivings remain. One relates to the place of power in these cultural formations. A consequence of the laudable refusal of contributors to conceive of ‘culture’ as a mere resource of power is that the role of the latter is never clarified, and seldom explicitly discussed, but tends instead to flit, ghostlike, through some papers. ‘Cultures’, we are firmly told, are far too protean to be confined within the bounds of medieval political communities (p. 423); and yet contributors repeatedly emphasise the importance of cultural artefacts in lending reality to such communities. It is hard, from an insular perspective, to resist discerning a current of contemporary ideological wish-fulfilment behind this volume’s over-all conception. The underlying message throughout seems to be that ‘integration’ must in the long run prove more significant than its fissiparous titular counterpart. Yet that is not where the contributors’ own evidence often seems to point. Stefan Burkhardt, in a wide-ranging study of hybrid elements in rulers’ seals from the medieval Mediterranean, is one who identifies a different trend. After the mid-thirteenth century, the monarchs of Latin Europe largely ceased to look east, to Byzantium, for their seal imagery, and instead turned inward, to follow the lead of the Most Christian king of France. Indeed, late medieval Europe appears in many ways a less open, and less open-minded, place than the spacious, usually high medieval, vistas which certain essays invoke. Christian Jörg’s account of the expulsion of the Jews from fifteenth-century Augsburg is thus, instead, all about differences and barriers (and power), with little common traffic discernible across the gulf. Nevertheless, this remains a highly significant collection. The complex and dynamic models of identity applied here represent an innovative and promising means of conceptualising...
the interaction of different medieval groups and their ‘cultures’—whatever we take these to be. In its scope, industry and ambition, it has few counterparts in recent Anglophone scholarship.

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_Book Reviews_

_Studying Medieval Rulers and their Subjects: Central Europe and Beyond_, by János M. Bak, ed. Balázs Nagy and Gábor Klaniczay (Farnham: Ashgate Variorum, 2010; pp. 310. £75).

The eighteen studies by János Bak in this volume have been grouped by the editors, Balázs Nagy and Gábor Klaniczay, into four sections. The first section, focused on the historiography of political imagery and rites of rulership, includes an intriguing set of questions which Professor Bak put to his Doktorvater, Percy Ernst Schramm, together with the answers Schramm wrote in reply in July 1970. They are, Bak observes, probably Schramm’s last written words on a medieval topic. In response to the question why he had not dealt more with the contexts in which ceremonies were staged or with the attitudes of common people towards kings, Schramm cited insufficiency of evidence. Bak, while revering Schramm’s scholarly stature, signals dissent on this point in ‘Medieval symbology of the state: Percy E. Schramm’s contribution’. Another study (‘Serfs and serfdom’), directed mainly against Marxist historians, underlines the holistic nature of pre-capitalist society, from gilded elites to grass roots. Bak argues for the importance of rites, ‘the lord’s court of justice and the priest’s pulpit’, in solemnising conditions of dependency and in facilitating the expropriation of peasants’ surpluses.

The volume’s second section follows up some of the desiderata identified in the first, investigating the uses to which authority-symbols were put and their reception beyond the ruling elite. Of particular note are two studies concerning, respectively, St Stephen’s arm-reliquary (first published in Schramm’s _Festschrift_) and the various candidates in play for the role of Hungarian royal insignia (‘Holy Lance, Holy Crown, Holy Dexter’). By the late thirteenth century the ‘Holy Crown of Hungary’ enjoyed unique kudos, to the extent that a papal legate’s bid to substitute a new, canonically blessed, crown for the old one encountered widespread resistance: the ‘traditional, one may say, magical aspect of holiness’, remarks Bak, ‘won out against the learned, literate and legal position’ of the legate, necessitating retrieval of the old insignia and its use for the crowning (or rather, re-crowning) of Charles of Anjou in 1312. This crown owed the status of virtual relic to its supposed use by St Stephen, and occasional attempts were made to bolster a ruler’s legitimacy with physical relics of the first Christian king: at a festive crown-wearing, the elected Przemyslid king of Hungary, Wenceslas-Ladislas, held in his right hand the reliquary containing Stephen’s right arm. This episode in 1304 sheds light on the vicissitudes of purported authority-symbols, in that the arm-reliquary failed to gain a broad following. One of Bak’s main themes is that visual and verbal assertions of dominion contained elements of aspiration, sometimes verging on fantasy. His study ‘Lists in the service of legitimation’ shows that