

no monastery at Exeter Cathedral (p. 151); England's former monks did not 'all lose their livelihoods' (p. 197): as many as two-thirds received lifetime pensions, the last of which was still being claimed in the reign of King James. None the less, she has succeeded in assembling a rich and regionally widespread menu of readings in the legend of England's monasteries which, as Aston first signalled as far back as 1973, was every bit as vigorous as their living tradition.

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The heresy of the Brothers. A heterodox community in sixteenth-century Italy. By Matteo Al Kalak. (Europa Sacra, 28.) Pp. 224 incl. 20 colour and black-and-white ills, 1 map and 3 tables. Turnhout: Brepols, 2022. €75.978 2 503 59329 6
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Matteo Al Kalak publishes a new and revised English edition of a book he wrote in Italian a decade ago concerning the philo-Protestant heresy that spread in the city of Modena in the middle of the sixteenth century. This new edition benefits from the progress that the scholarship has made in the intervening time, and indeed – rather than being a simple translation – much of this book is completely new.

Modena, a key city in the early modern Po valley and a coveted bishopric within the duchy of the Este family, was a lively cultural centre in the sixteenth century. In the 1520s and 1530s, intellectuals like Ludovico Castelvetro opened its *Accademia* to Erasmian thought and ideals of religious reforms. And it is from within that religiously tolerant *milieu* that Al Kalak's protagonists emerge: his work focuses its attention on the later period, i.e. on the decades from the establishment of the Roman Inquisition (in 1542) to the apex of the anti-heretical repressions of Pius v in the late 1560s. This community of dissenters – who addressed each other as 'Brothers' – progressively deepened in its religious radicalism, moving away from its earlier Erasmian understandings, and closer to a clear Calvinist set of beliefs.

The 'Brothers' organised a system of mutual help, in which the community – mostly composed of artisans, tradesmen and ordinary workers (and not a few women) – assisted the poorest and looked after each other. Many had embraced several tropes of Zwinglian theology: for example, a radical view of the priesthood of all believers and, most important, a purely commemorative function of the Lord's Supper. As with the rest of the Italian Reformation, in the 1550s and 1560s some realised that a world of individualised dissent was to be short-lived, and saw in Calvinist ecclesiology the only hope of opposition to repression, adopting a political theology that could encompass theories of both exile and resistance. Others among the 'Brothers', mostly influenced by the radical thinker Camillo Renato, progressed even further in their religious journey, linking themselves to the world of radical Anabaptism, and – most important – anti-Trinitarianism. To many scholars these two might appear as very separate worlds, socially, culturally and devotionally: but it was indeed in north-east Italy in the middle of the sixteenth century that the two started to intertwine, not least thanks to a radicalisation of Juan de Valdés's spiritualism, the real glue of the Italian Reformation.

Modena's 'Brothers' employed in their preaching and devotion some of the key texts of the Italian Reformation: not only scriptural translations in the vernacular, but also Erasmus' *Enchiridion*, and the always popular *Il beneficio di Cristo*. Most

significantly, Modena was the destination of *Il sommario della sacra scrittura*, a Protestant text which originated in the Low Countries. Books often arrived in Modena from Venice and contributed to a life of dissent, but also to the cultural vitality of the city, despite the increasing successes of Catholic censorship.

Heresy in the city of Modena has been the subject of many studies: works by Cesare Bianco, Albano Biondi, Sergio Pagano, Susanna Peyronel and Adriano Prosperi are just some worth mentioning. Al Kalak's book builds on that body of research, but strengthens our understanding, thanks to his close archival analysis. In particular, sources from the local office of the Roman Inquisition enable the author to contribute a wealth of new detail on dissenting figures, seen of course *via* the lens of the Counter-Reformation's repressive apparatus. Al Kalak's attention to archival detail is second to none. Compared to the previous edition, the book offers a deeper interlinking between the dissenting community and the diocesan bishops, in particular Egidio Foscarari and Giovanni Morone, both of whom had been protagonists of religious heterodoxy in their own right. The recent monumental biography of Morone by Massimo Firpo and Germano Maifreda (Turin 2019) – the culmination of many studies by Firpo of a cardinal who had been one of the key protagonists of Italian religious reform – sets the wider field of interpretation within which Al Kalak's picture furthers our understanding of Modena's religious life. This is no small achievement, given the impalpable and fissiparous nature of Italian Protestant dissent in the sixteenth century.

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Johann Wier. Debating the devil and witches in early modern Europe. By Michaela Valente. (Renaissance History, Art and Culture.) Pp. 263. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022. €106. 978 94 6298 872 9

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This book describes the fascinating Johannes Wier and his views on witchcraft. Wier was born in Grave, the Netherlands, in 1515, the son of a hop merchant, and died in 1578 in Tecklenburg, Germany. At around the age of fourteen he became a pupil of Agrippa von Nettesheim in Antwerp, Renaissance scholar and friend of Erasmus. In 1534 Wier went to Paris to study medicine. As a physician, he came into contact with a large number of people affected by witchcraft. In 1551 he became the personal physician of Duke Wilhelm IV of Gulik in Kleve. At this court a tolerant Erasmian spirit prevailed. Wier advocated a rational approach to medicine, based on facts, purged of all unscientific practices. While preparing a medical work providing guidelines to purge medicine of many unscientific practices, he decided to focus on witchcraft. His book, *De praestigiis daemnonum et incantationibus ac veneficiis* (On the deceptions of the devil and on enchantments and poisons) (Basel 1563) combined the latest scholarly results in philosophy, medicine and law, and received wide circulation. This book – chosen by Sigmund Freud as one of the ten books a person should read – is at the centre of Michaela Valente's great book. The first chapter gives a very insightful overview of the historiography of Wier and the witch-hunts, after which follows a