

Charlotte A. Stanford, *Commemorating the dead in late medieval Strasbourg. The Cathedral's Book of Donors and its use (1320-1521)*, Church, Faith and Culture in the Medieval West (Farnham, Ashgate, 2011), 348 pp., 37 b/w illustrations. ISBN 978-1-4094-0136-0. Price £70.00 (cloth).

This meticulous study by Charlotte Stanford of the so-called Book of Donors from Strasbourg Cathedral is a welcome addition to the literature on medieval *memoria*. The manuscript is still preserved in the municipal archives of Strasbourg (AMS OND 1), but the text has never yet been edited or published in full. It is known among scholars by the modern title used in this study: according to a (post-medieval) note on the first folio, *In hoc libro continentur nomina omnium benefactorum operis b[eate] Marie Arg[entinensis]*. The benefactors thus explicitly contributed towards the fabric of the cathedral building.

The tradition of obituary lists dates back to at least the eighth century. They tend to be utilitarian documents and generally lack in illuminations, although they may contain coloured initials and rubrics. No wonder to find the author admitting in the opening sentence of her Preface, 'The medieval obituary at first seems a dry document'. However, the material discussed here is fascinating and it is presented with admirable clarity. Stanford uses a large number of tables to analyse the entries in detail, *e.g.* according to the type and value of the listed gifts and the donors' status, gender and occupations. She also provides not only an architectural overview of the cathedral but also a brief social and economic history of the city that help contextualise the manuscript and its contents.

The Book of Donors is unusually full, containing 6,954 entries with 7,803 identifiable donors responsible for 8,622 gifts. It was in use over a period of barely two centuries from around 1318 until 1521; earlier entries dating back to 1261 were copied from an earlier daybook. Building work at the cathedral was temporarily halted in 1521; the Reformation reached Strasbourg in 1524. The manuscript follows the standard calendar format with a pair of lined pages for each day on which gifts were listed chronologically. Initial entries are usually brief and some pages are less than half full or even empty. As Stanford explains in her first chapter, it was the later period that saw the longest entries describing both the donations themselves and the donors' requests in detail, and lists of prominent donors were added in the fifteenth century, but it was also in this century that donations decreased dramatically.

It is quite typical that individual entries cannot usually be confidently assigned to specific years and instead have to be dated according to their place on the page and the

style of hand. Basic statistics reveal 4,329 male and 3,474 female donors (Table 1.3), with entries often stating the social status or occupation for men and the marital status or family ties for women; some entries also include references to (unnamed) children. Gifts could consist of money, rents and real estate, agricultural produce (*e.g.* eggs, grain or wine), or animals ranging from capons and sheep to oxen and horses. Others donated church-related items, household goods, clothing, jewellery, and even arms and armour. More unusual gifts are one boat and one ship, while another intriguing entry describes the gift by a female donor of a *tabula depicta de puerperio* (a painting of a boy, as the author translates, or of a birth?).

Chapter two explains the architectural and liturgical context of the Book of Donors. Crucial was the Chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary, built in 1316, which contained the *fabrica* altar and also housed the Book. It was this chapel that became the focus for commemoration of the cathedral's benefactors through public recitation, singing and prayers. Meanwhile, building work continued and more gifts were needed to fund it. The most prestigious and expensive project was the reconstruction of the west front, which was never to be finished: the north tower was duly crowned with a spire, but plans to add the south spire were finally abandoned in 1490.

The third chapter discusses the social and political setting. The city of Strasbourg changed from Episcopal rule (until 1263) to patrician government, which in turn led to artisan revolts. The secular and elite *Magistrat* was also to gain influence in religious affairs and it was ultimately they who supported the Reformation preachers in the crucial period 1524-1529, but Stanford does not dwell on what happened to civic piety after the Reformation. Chapter four describes other surviving obituaries from Strasbourg Cathedral, including fragments and later copies: the oldest (lost) manuscript is dated to the early eleventh century, while the last is a slim cathedral calendar begun around 1500 with obituary entries added until 1564. The fifth chapter offers an overview of commemoration practices in other churches and religious houses in Strasbourg. The city had nine parishes and a vast number of churches, including many private chapels and over twenty monastic establishments, all with a complicated network of affiliations and benefactors. The largest parish was that of St Thomas, from which seven obituaries survive: a 'Memorial Book' and a 'Distributions Book' with five additional copies. Its parish church housed over 800 marked graves by 1502, while yet more people were buried in its large cemetery. Obituaries also survive from the smaller parish of St Aurelia and from some of the local religious houses. The book closes with a short conclusion. It

also features two lists of illustrations and tables, a bibliography and an index. Five appendices contain transcriptions of a number of Latin and German texts, including the entries for 11 April on fol. 100v as a typical sample for a single day and the extensive obituary on 1 December for one citizen (*Petrus Arge*, c.1460, fol. 335r).

In summary, this is more than simply a micro-study of one particular manuscript. Although the author admits that this is not an exhaustive study, she does much more than introduce the Book of Donors to a wider scholarly audience: with her meticulous scrutiny she provides valuable insights into the social history of medieval Strasbourg and the piety of its citizens. Moreover, it is evident from this study that there is yet much more to be discovered.

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