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Pope Alexander III (1159-81): the Art of Survival, ed. Peter D. Clarke and Anne J. Duggan (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012; pp. xx + 427).

If asked to name the outstanding popes of the central Middle Ages, most historians would plump for Gregory VII, Alexander III and Innocent III. Whilst the first and last of these have always attracted considerable interest, Alexander is easily reduced to connective tissue in the inexorable rise of the papacy. His pontificate may have been less dramatic – the Peace of Venice and the Third Lateran Council cannot really stand comparison with Canossa and 1215 – but it is arguable that it was even more important in the long run. This is not merely a consequence of the persistent image of Alexander as the first great ‘lawyer-pope’. It is worth noting that from 1177-8 (which witnessed the very end of Alexander’s long struggle with the German emperor), there was no further schism within the Church for two hundred years. Furthermore, Alexander can claim the special attention of British and American medievalists, thanks to his equivocal role in the Becket controversy. Indeed, this last point alone would be sufficient to justify such a timely addition to the literature on Alexander available in English, which has been rather scanty up until now.

This volume has been a long time in the making. It grew out of a series of sessions on Alexander at the IMC, in Leeds, in 2005. As it stands – as part of Church, Faith and Culture in the Medieval West – the book contains essays by fourteen distinguished scholars. Introductory material by the editors, Peter Clarke and Anne Duggan, provides a helpful overview of the volume’s content, and on the pontificate as a whole. The bulk of the essays focus on Alexander in relation to different geographical areas, such as the city of Rome, Lombardy, the German empire, and the kingdoms of France and England. However, the book goes well beyond this, looking at the pope’s impact on the Patrimony of St Peter (above all,

Campania and the Ciociaria), the Iberian peninsula, Byzantium, and the scene of Alexander's greatest triumph, the city of Venice. But the volume also boasts a number of studies that consider Alexander in relation to various principal themes: the 'curious case of Becket's pallium', the crusades (both in the Holy Land and elsewhere), and – most importantly – a fitting summation to the book, devoted to the pope's personal contribution to canon law. Certainly, then, the volume achieves its stated aim of getting well beyond the usual troika of basic themes.

All this is achieved through rigorous interrogation of the surviving source-material. For example, a typically detailed paper by the late Dr John Doran does much to support Boso's analysis of the immediate Roman context for the schism of 1159. Indeed, 'myth-busting' is a theme of the volume as a whole. It is emphasized, at the outset, that Alexander was not one and the same as the great canonist-theologian, Roland of Bologna – and nor was he necessarily the offending legate who asked from whom Frederick I held the empire. Likewise, in an excellent essay that stresses the differences between the pope and his Lombard allies, Edward Coleman finds space for a detailed discussion of the tales surrounding the foundation (actually the re-establishment) of the city of Alessandria. The key point is the symbolic power of the name, much like 'Stalingrad' on a later Barbarossa. Similarly, although the volume does not quite banish the prevalent view of Alexander, Duggan does much to challenge the notion that he was quite such a conscious legislator. Rather, the legal responses framed by him and his curia were of such a high standard that local prelates and canonists took the lead in translating them into law. This is one of many ways in which an ideology of *de communi consilio* built up links between the centre and periphery. The volume is at its finest when it underlines the paradox of a Church set firmly on the road to 'papal monarchy', but through collegiality, co-operation and concessions.

If there is a central weakness, then it is the need to skate about when seeking discussion of Becket – and that is, after all, what most Anglophone readers will be looking for. Furthermore, there is an occasional sense of missed opportunity. A closer analysis of *Cor nostrum*, for instance, could have produced a much more revealing insight into the pope's attitude towards the 'leper king', Baldwin IV of Jerusalem, and hence, more broadly, about crusading and the Holy Land.

The book is clearly presented and contains a full index. There are also a number of valuable appendices. For example, Nicholas Vincent's highly significant article, 'Beyond Becket', provides a very useful list of surviving papal letters addressed to Henry II.

The Church, Faith and Culture series has already supplied us with ground-breaking studies of Adrian IV and Celestine III. Now we have an up-to-date and comprehensive volume on the most important twelfth-century pope of them all. That has got to be good news.

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