

for long or on unknown roads. For those few who did make considerable pilgrimages, Salter laments that “cult centres were less concerned with recording information regarding journeys than might be expected” (130), and seeks information from secondary source material. It is a pity that Salter did not choose one of the Thomas Becket collections to analyze, as they contain more of the kind of information that she was keen to explore.

In the final chapter, Salter addresses cure-seekers’ experiences at their destinations, with much of her discussion focused on the question of lay access to shrines. There is good scrutiny here of how the location of these shrines could move, as in the case of William of Norwich’s cult, and how some saints had more than one cult center, as was the case in Æbbe’s cult. But the question of how or whether monks restricted access to their shrines is the one that most intrigues Salter. Here again, her selected texts do not provide much information, and she needs to reach into other texts and later centuries to make her points. What her cure-seekers did at the shrines, something that her hagiographers described much more fully, is the subject of the last, sadly short, section of the chapter. Salter’s efforts in this book make it clear that there is more for us to understand about how medieval people sought cures from the saints. It is a pity that these efforts were not directed toward the range of texts that would have most forwarded her analysis.

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VALERIE SMITH. *Rational Dissenters in Late Eighteenth-Century England: “An Ardent Desire of Truth.”* Studies in Modern British Religious History 42. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2021. Pp. 368. \$99.00 (cloth).
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Valerie Smith’s *Rational Dissenters in Late Eighteenth-Century England: “An Ardent Desire of Truth”* is an important study. Historians have recognized the role of Rational Dissenters in late eighteenth-century English politics and religion and, though they were small in number, the significance of their contribution to reform. But Rational Dissent has proved difficult to define, both in terms of what Rational Dissent was, and who Rational Dissenters were. Smith’s book is the first detailed study of Rational Dissent and, in particular, its supporters. She focuses principally on England and the period 1770 to 1800, with a final chapter covering developments in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

There are two major parts to the book. First, Smith’s examination of the writings of Rational Dissenters and their opponents. Second, her identification of those who supported Rational Dissent. She points out that previous studies have rarely looked beyond Richard Price and Joseph Priestley; colossi of late eighteenth-century thought, but hardly representative of Rational Dissent generally. Her work is the first attempt to identify those who supported Rational Dissent, its institutions, and who subscribed to its publications. Smith sees the focus on the theology of Rational Dissent as the key to her book. She argues that Rational Dissent has been studied in terms of its politics, but that it was the theology of Rational Dissenters, grounded in scripture, which underpinned their political ideas and their involvement in the various campaigns for reform. After quoting John Disney on the sufficiency of scripture and the importance of private judgment, she examines in chapter 3 a wide range of writings by Rational Dissenters and their opponents to determine the core beliefs that Arians and Socinians (or Unitarians) shared and their differences with orthodox writers as a result of their

rejection of the Trinity, original sin, atonement, hell, and miracles. She further develops this argument in chapters 5 and 6, identifying the ways in which these views determined ideas about the monarchy, the constitution, toleration, and liberty.

Yet Smith also identifies a paradox. In the introduction she makes clear that Rational Dissent “was unified less by a single set of doctrines than by a commitment to the right of private judgement in matters of religious faith and a rejection of all religious tests based on human formulations” (5). Indeed, in chapter 4 she stresses the diversity of opinion that existed within Rational Dissent. Nevertheless, Rational Dissent has commonly been identified by historians as doctrinally heterodox. Smith follows this interpretation with her focus on the development of Arianism and Socinianism, though in fact her evidence points to a broader interpretation of Rational Dissent. Other studies suggest that before the end of the eighteenth century, Rational Dissent sheltered a wide variety of opinions, both orthodox and heterodox, united not by doctrine but the right of private judgment. In the final decades, the earlier Arian form of anti-Trinitarian speculation was being replaced by a more open and aggressive Unitarianism, which, with its insistence on the humanity of Christ, was much more offensive. For many Rational Dissenters, being orthodox in the fundamental principles of religion was ultimately more important than preserving a non-subscribing tradition. Smith’s identification of the 1790s as a turning point in the evolution of Rational Dissent substantiates this interpretation. In an earlier chapter, she establishes the hostility toward Rational Dissent and its beliefs, which helped to give them a collective identity. From her use of the digital resources of Eighteenth Century Collections Online to search for key words and phrases, she is able demonstrate a rise in attacks in the 1780s and 1790s. Attacks on not being Christian were particularly damaging. The results are analyzed and listed in appendix 1, “The Nature of Attacks on Arians and Socinians.” She argues convincingly that Rational Dissent replaced popery in being perceived as the most dangerous threat to Christianity.

She finds references to Arians and Arianism declining rapidly by the second decade of the nineteenth century. With the coverage of Eighteenth Century Collections Online ending in 1800, she relies on the *Monthly Repository*, which, as the leading Unitarian journal, is not the best source for the absence of references to Arianism. Nonetheless, in general terms she is right. She argues (much as R. K. Webb did previously) that Arianism failed due to a lack of leadership, and that Unitarians were better organized and better led. Can it really be so simple? Some discussion of the Irish situation would have been helpful, where Arianism, not Unitarianism, prevailed. Nevertheless, her study goes a long way in enabling the reader to understand how Unitarianism emerged in the early nineteenth century—a historical problem that has confounded historians generally.

At the heart of her work in identifying those who supported Rational Dissent lies a database of 444 names drawn from a wide range of sources, both familiar and unfamiliar: church records, diaries, letters, wills, newspapers, and subscription and membership lists. Even this list does not do full justice either to the breadth of her range of sources or the ingenuity she employs. She has made excellent use of the many electronic resources now available. Her work on chapel libraries and book clubs, their catalogues and borrowers’ records enables her to get below the elites and conclude that the Unitarian message appealed to at least the skilled shopkeeper. She describes the geographical distribution of Rational Dissent. Besides London, she points to the significance of Manchester, the North and West Midlands and the South-West. Her identification of the number and importance of the women who supported Rational Dissent involves much more than writing them back into history. To give one example, her identification of Jane Toulmin, wife of the Unitarian minister at Taunton, as a publisher raises the question whether the assumption that she gave up her bookshop because of her husband’s reputation rather than her own is correct. The generous inclusion of three appendices and seventeen tables provides the evidence supporting her identification of Rational Dissenters.

Sadly, Valerie Smith died before the final text was submitted. Her former supervisor, Grayson Ditchfield, and her brother, David Hopkins, were responsible for bringing *Rational Dissenters* to press. They have served both her and her readers well.

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With *The Miraculous and the Writing of Crusade Narrative*, Beth C. Spacey takes on one of the most familiar tropes of crusading rhetoric—crusade as miracle—and addresses a surprising and significant gap in crusade scholarship to date, offering the first sustained study of the miraculous as it appears in Latin narratives of the crusades between 1096 and 1204. In her exploration of divine agency and miraculous motifs, she adopts a pluralist approach to crusading that includes materials focused on Iberia and the Balkans alongside those relating to the Levant.

The six chapters of *The Miraculous and the Writing of Crusade Narrative* are organized within three parts, each of which pairs what Spacey labels “theoretical dichotomies” (10): miracles and marvels, visions and dreams, signs and augury. In the first chapter, “Divine Agency,” Spacey shows how the miraculous is very much present in the writing of crusade failure. Preachers appear as conduits of the divine, and miracles demonstrate God’s involvement in crusading: the miraculous could show the sanctity of specific individuals or groups while also being part of authorial attempts to establish authority. The narrative traditions about miraculous battlefield interventions by celestial knights are seen to demonstrate the continued association between crusading and divine agency. In contrast, in failed expeditions, the idea of crusade as miracle is downplayed, as Spacey explores in chapter 2, so that emphasis could be placed on preaching and campaigning rather than outcomes. Divine agency here, it seems, could be punitive in nature and used to signal blame. Yet in relation to the Conquest of Lisbon in 1147, the *De expugnatione lyxbonensi* harnesses divine agency to legitimize the Lisbon campaign and prove its status as a crusade. The second part of this chapter concerns the translation of relics from Constantinople following the Fourth Crusade and once again focuses on the legitimizing potential of the miraculous.

In the first chapter of part two, Spacey explores the “plasticity of dream theory” (74) in crusade accounts, covering issues of erudition and learning, dream types and the interpretation of dreams. She adroitly demonstrates how the muddy relationship between dreams and visions in broader medieval dream theory plays out in crusade sources, touching on terminological distinctions and the relationship between sight and sanctity. This discussion of theoretical authorities and the ambiguities of visionary experiences allows her to revisit well-known examples, such as the visions of the Holy Lance at Antioch experienced by Peter Bartholomew and Stephen of Valence during the First Crusade, and situate them alongside wider motifs such as the “reluctant visionary” (80). The consciousness of the visionary is seen to be key when establishing the authenticity of visions and their revelatory potential. In chapter 4, Spacey explores how visions can operate within justificatory narrative agendas. Showing how visions can prove martyrdom, convey divine mercy, authenticate relics, and convey criticism, she moves between Marian visions such as that in Roger of Howden’s *Gesta Regis and Chronica*, martyrdom accounts found in the *Itinerarium peregrinorum*, relic translations