

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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BETH C. SPACEY. *The Miraculous and the Writing of Crusade Narrative*. Crusading in Context. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2020. Pp. 214. \$99.00 (cloth).  
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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

recounted in Fourth Crusade sources, and Gerald of Wales' vision of Christ in his *Expugnatio Hibernica* and *De principis instructione*. She closes the chapter with the fascinating observation that there are no visions associated with crusading in Second Crusade narratives, and she uses Helmold's *Chronica slavorum* to show the contradictory uses of the miraculous within one text.

Part three begins with "Ways of Knowing," where Spacey considers "[the] tensions between [the] theologically licit and illicit" (111). Here she analyses the church's complex relationship to pre- and non-Christian traditions such as astrology and astronomy, discussing scriptural precedents for the interpretation of divine signs and communications and naturalizing explanations. "Interpretative responsibility" comes to the fore along with "interpretative exclusivity" (119), and Spacey shows how crusade narratives (such as Ralph of Caen's *Tamcredus*) often frame the act of interpretation in classicizing terms and navigate the fine line between superstition and knowledge. She closes the chapter with a discussion of superstition in relation to religious others, drawing here upon the figure of Kerbogha's mother. While the motif of a critical voice internal to the Saracen/Muslim community is undoubtedly a literary commonplace, Spacey's observations regarding references to Christian scripture are illuminating and nod to the need for further exploration of the subtle differences involved in narrative processes of othering. In the final chapter, she considers the use of signs to show divine disposition toward crusading activities. Spacey highlights that signs relating to the First Crusade were primarily astronomical in nature and, interestingly, that such positive signs are rarely applied to other crusades, emphasizing the First Crusade's elevated place within sacred time. Here she discusses the so-called Toledo Letter and 1186 planetary conjunction, showing how prophetic predictions might be adapted to contemporary circumstances and events just as the Fourth Crusade could be legitimized through the appropriation of local prophecies conveyed in columns and statues. In her conclusion she identifies two peaks in the use of the miraculous corresponding to narratives about the First and Fourth crusades—and importantly not only underlines the need for greater attention to the miraculous in crusading texts but also the "changing Latin Christian understandings of the miraculous" (155). An appendix provides an excellent overview of the main sources used.

One of the key strengths of this study is Spacey's positioning of narrative examples in relation to the wider intellectual and theoretical milieu of the period. Spacey gathers in *The Miraculous and the Writing of Crusade Narrative* a broad range of textual examples that will doubtless allow future studies to build on her discussion of "narrative agendas" (4) and "rhetorical potential" (5) of the miraculous via stylistic analyses or through further reference to audience and expectations. Spacey dismisses the thorny question of genre very quickly at the start of the book, and it does seem a little strange to see a reference to a medieval French companion used to support this decision, rather scholarship on the primarily Latin writings Spacey explores. Likewise, she rarely touches on language use and comprehension among the receivers of these works, nor does she touch on questions of manuscript numbers and circulation, despite the potential relevance of these to the concept of narrative agenda that underpins the study. More engagement with literary scholarship on narrative technique might therefore have provided further contextual framing for the works and authors in question.

Overall, however, *The Miraculous and the Writing of Crusade Narrative* draws key critical attention to the much-neglected workings of the miraculous in crusade narratives and constitutes an accessible and invaluable resource for those studying crusading literatures.

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