

Book Reviews

academic rationalism and mystical empiricism" (whatever that is). The Conclusion to the book, which reads like an obituary notice in a parish magazine, should be read by all who find joy in pomposity. The fact is, that were Gordon to be seriously compared with writers like Peter of Abano or Taddeo Alderotti he would appear like a parrot in a cage of singing birds.

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NICOLE GONTHIER, *Lyon et ses pauvres au moyen-âge (1350–1500)*, Lyons, Editions L'Hermès, 1978, 8vo, pp. 271, illus., F.51.00 (paperback).

This study is inspired by a desire to reveal those who have been "hidden from history" using whatever documents are available for the period. Relying heavily on wills, church archives, and fiscal documents, Gonthier has skilfully reconstructed the changing material situation of the poor, as well as the place of poverty in the medieval world-view. Gonthier's central thesis is that by the sixteenth century a new attitude towards the poor had emerged in Lyons which took a critical moral stance towards them, denigrated their usefulness and value in the social order, and portrayed them as dangerous and potentially subversive. She contrasts this with the prevailing belief of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the religious significance of poverty and the acceptance of the large numbers of "Christ's poor" who filled the city. Those with property and money were exceedingly generous in their charity, often in the form of handouts (food, clothing, money) at their funerals or on the anniversaries of their deaths.

Gonthier detected unease about the poor beginning in the fifteenth century, partly because of their association with revolt and insurrection in times of economic hardship but also because of their role in spreading epidemics. The fear of contagion, she suggests, played a significant role in the willingness of the citizens of Lyons to allow the secular town administration to take over the task of organized poor relief from small, scattered religious foundations and individual bequests. Thus, for Gonthier, secularization and centralization went hand in hand with a hardening of attitudes towards the poor, and feeling that poverty indicated failure rather than a gift from God. Thus the rich, in a period of prosperity, felt entitled to their wealth, and no longer used elaborate bequests to the poor as a route to salvation.

The strength of this book is the way in which the economic, demographic, social, and cultural aspects of poverty are woven together to form a vivid and detailed narrative. Its weakness lies in its lack of rigorous analysis and in the limitations of a local study which needs to be put in a more general context for its full significance to emerge.

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ELI SAGAN, *The lust to annihilate. A psychoanalytic study of violence in Ancient Greek culture*, New York, Psychohistory Press, 1979, 8vo, pp. viii, 231, \$12.00.

"Thus the Greeks, the most humane men of ancient times, have a trait of cruelty, a tigerish lust to annihilate . . ." said Nietzsche, correctly. "Why?" asks Sagan. A child can weather the storms of the Oedipal situation if he has received adequate love and reassurance from his parents – reassurance that vengeance, castration, annihilation is not what he need expect for his unacceptable feelings and misbehaviour. He may become a loving and humane adult, not a paranoid who sees the world as a place to kill or be killed, where human nature is competition and war is inevitable.

From such simple formulation of personality development and political philosophy Sagan proceeds to evaluate Greek culture through the Classical period. The *Iliad* exhibits a failure to work through Oedipal aggression. Homer's presentation condemns the revolt against legitimate authority and condemns the reversion to barbarism represented by cannibalism and human sacrifice, but in the process it approves the "normal" violence of the society. Yet there is a clear strain of rejection of sadistic violence in favour of love. Effectively, the ambivalence about the