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Sacred Foundations. The religious and medieval roots of the European State. *By Anna Grzymala-Busse. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2023. 235 pp.*

Sacred foundations is a good analysis of the role the church had in shaping European states, laws, and parliaments during the medieval and early modern period.

The chapters cover the main aspects of the medieval and early modern societies, religion, laws, kings and kingdoms as well as political representations. The book opens with the 'Medieval setting' which sums up decades of medieval history and power in Europe in a space of twenty pages (p.21- p.41). Although nothing here is new for a medieval historian, these pages are very important to set the scene for the coming chapters and they are the bedrock the other chapters of the book rest upon. The 'Rivalry and fragmentation' chapter which follows is indeed dense with very interesting material. I don't necessarily agree that one of the main weapons of the catholic church was 'curses and maledictions' (p.43), but I certainly welcome the analysis that the author has carried out to link medieval and papal conflicts with territorial fragmentation. This theory is supported by detailed information listed in the book (i.e fig. 2.7 p. 63) and further analyses and data provided in the appendix (i.e section C p. 185), a pattern which is repeated also in the other chapters.

The third chapter about governing institutions, shows how much the judicial system of the European states was copied from the church system and how one of the very first courts of appeal, 'The Rota', was instituted within the church. Above all here resonates the significant statement that 'wars and schisms impoverished and weakened both the church and the secular states'; something that cannot be overlook by any medieval historian. The following 'Law and learning' is fundamentally a journey into the evolution of the legal system in Europe concluding with the shifting of justice from the hands of the church to those of lay lords and rulers. There are interesting points about the foundation of universities, the education of the clergy and the fact that the rivalry between church and state created the need for more education and laws

within the society, although it should be highlighted (mentioned in the chapter but not investigated) that the rise of some universities could be considered a ‘simple’ spin-off effect or by-products of cathedral schools.

In the section about ‘Parliaments and representation’, the author demonstrates how the church provided the ‘institutional templates and voting rules [...] and the concepts of binding representation and consent that made European parliament distinct, and how they adapted concepts used by the church, such as *plena potestas*, or the *quod omnes tangit ab omnibus approbetur*’ (p.145).

There are little mistakes, such as the repetition of the word university after Bologna at page 137, or the full stop at the end of the sentence, ‘when financial and [...]’, at page 100, which should be removed, but these are minimal errors. The real strength of the book are the vast array of sources and secondary works upon which, the volume is based and the tables, diagrams and data present in the book and in the appendix. Although at times it is difficult and also complicated to match the theories in the book with the supporting data in the appendix these methodological analyses give a scientific dimension and flavour to the historical research.

I must admit that one first quick reading of the book could suggest to a distracted reader that this book is just a survey, or a collection of information present in other books, giving credit to Eco’s theory that books are writing books (<https://www.frasicelebri.it/> access on 09-05-2023). However, a more careful reading reveals that this volume is rather a generous attempt to study how and when one of the most important institutions of the last 2000 years, the catholic church, contributed to shape today’s society.

I can suggest that in addition to what is already in the volume, I would have welcomed a chapter on the influence of the church on medieval and early modern art (i.e Envisioning the Bishop, by Danielson S- Gatti A. Ed Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2014; The Interaction of Art and Relics in Late Medieval and Early Modern Art, by Livia Stonescu Ed. Turnhout: Brepols

Publishers, 2020) and possibly one on our cultural traditions (i.e From Sun-Day to the Day of the Lord, by *Uta Heil ed. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2022*) as they are both fundamental part of our history.

To conclude, I think that the author has academically demonstrated the influence of the church over the different European Institutions and therefore my overall review of this book is positive, with one caveat: in the end I was not able to understand whether or not Anna Grzymala-Busse personally believes that the church is to be praised for the role it had in shaping the European medieval society.

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