accessible. This up-to-date and generously illustrated book certainly sheds more light on these crucial early Première Renaissance monuments. The period of French art history, into which these chapels fall, is not well known outside France, and is still, pace Anthony Blunt, generally poorly understood. Crépin-Leblond, the guiding spirit behind this initiative, was, in the final analysis, reluctant to claim that in any way there was an ‘Amboisian’ style. This is sensible, given the differences in the protagonists’ vocational backgrounds. In spite of the depredations of the French Revolution, however, it is still possible to affirm that four clerical members of the older generation of the d’Amboise family were probably responsible for creating the most important episcopal chapels of their time.


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A distinctive element of medieval Flemish/Low Countries Christianity is the Beguines, communities of lay women who sought to serve God without retiring from the world. In 1998 thirteen Flemish Béguinages were added to the UNESCO World Heritage List. Their serenity has made them well known and they are often characterized as devotional enclaves surrounded by contrasting modern city life. The Béguinage generally comprises a central church with an open square, set within a network of streets of uniform, often whitewashed dwellings. Their long histories often mean that their original medieval church interiors also display baroque exuberance, following extensions and renovations during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. For many visitors, entering a Béguinage provides a profound sense of time stopping still. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth: the UNESCO recognition coincided with the closure of the last active Béguinage, in Ghent, and even before that new uses have had to be found for the Béguinage houses. These have so far included convents, student housing, hospitality businesses and publishing companies, with some of the churches still in use for worship.

Amongst the protected Flemish Béguinages, Sint-Truiden (or, in French, Saint-Trond), in Limburg, Belgium, remains an outstanding example, and is the subject of this comprehensive new monograph, for which the English translation of the title is: ‘Living in Purity’. The St Agnes Béguinage at St Truiden: the court, the church, the wall paintings. Although the emplacement of St Truiden does not survive, a significant proportion of the surrounding urban environment (now blended with a twentieth-century housing estate) does. In date it is substantially seventeenth and eighteenth century but notably with two houses retaining late sixteenth-/early seventeenth-century elements. The most significant survival, however, is the church and in particular its unique and impressive range of medieval wall paintings, which were uncovered in 1860. It is thanks to their presence that the church was rescued from destruction in the late nineteenth century and again in the 1970s.

The paintings survive in three areas: the choir, and the eastern and western parts of the nave, built respectively around 1258–65, 1295–1310/1313–60 and 1489–1511. The subject matter of the paintings includes thirteenth-century consecration crosses, early fourteenth-century apostles, the life of Mary and many early sixteenth-century images of saints. Other saints and scenes from the Passion of Christ, the Seven Works of Mercy and rosary images were added in the second half of the sixteenth century at the west end of the nave. At the time of the 1860 discovery an early fourteenth-century Last Judgement on the chancel arch was recorded, but this has since disappeared.

Both editors of the volume contribute chapters: Bergmans one on the wall paintings and Coomans two – on the church’s complex building history and on the turbulent history of the Béguinage since the departure of the Beguines. Coomans is also noticeably responsible for the drawings and photographs of this lavishly illustrated and beautifully produced book. Other chapters are provided by Mireille Madou, on the costumes depicted in the wall paintings, and Marjan Buyle, on the conservation and restoration history of the wall paintings. Leon Smets gives dramatic accounts of the completely dismantled and partly restored
imported images is the large oak altarpiece carved with the Crucifixion, flanked by the Carrying of the Cross and the Pieta and with further scenes on the predella below. The narratives are presented as a series of dramatic tableaux garnished by filigree-like frames and canopies. It is not of English origin, nor did it find its way to Pocklington until around the middle of the sixteenth century; however, it represents a kind of altarpiece which, together with numerous devotional images, was either imported into England from the Netherlands or made here by immigrant craftsmen from this region before the Reformation. Sadly, these have left few traces other than in documentary sources, but there is compensation for this dearth in the large quantity of wooden religious sculptures that came to England during the nineteenth century.

Anyone visiting for the first time the medieval parish church of All Saints at Pocklington, East Yorkshire, is in for a surprise. The most dominant (and distinguished) of its contents is the large oak altarpiece carved with the Crucifixion, flanked by the Carrying of the Cross and the Pieta and with further scenes on the predella below. The narratives are presented as a series of dramatic tableaux garnished by filigree-like frames and canopies. It is not of English origin, nor did it find its way to Pocklington until around the middle of the sixteenth century; however, it represents a kind of altarpiece which, together with numerous devotional images, was either imported into England from the Netherlands or made here by immigrant craftsmen from this region before the Reformation. Sadly, these have left few traces other than in documentary sources, but there is compensation for this dearth in the large quantity of wooden religious sculptures that came to England during the nineteenth century. These are the principal subject of this book, which has its origin in the author’s 1988 doctoral thesis. That it has not been rushed into print, and the author has had time to reflect and benefit both from new discoveries and recent work in the field, is unusual given today’s pressure to publish dissertations immediately. Its size and presentation — indeed its very publication — are testament yet again to the debt owed by medievalists of all hues to Shaun Tyas.

The book consists of a catalogue prefaced by three chapters. The first of these surveys the materials, techniques, organization of workshops, quality-control systems (where known) and principal centres of production in what is loosely the Low Countries. As the author points out, how this area is defined presents a host of problems. Not only are the modern political configurations very different from those of the fifteenth and first half of the sixteenth centuries, even in the latter period they were frequently changing. Woods’s spread is geographically wide and extends into the Lower Rhine and Picardy. The major centres were the Brabant cities of Brussels, Antwerp and Mechelen, particularly for carved altarpieces like that at Pocklington. The author is, however, careful to point out that the picture may be distorted by accident of survival and loss both of works of art and of documentation, and she is at pains to cite cities such as Bruges, Leuven and Tournai. The written sources for the organization and regulation of the craft have largely come down to us only from the late fifteenth century onwards and we should be wary about assuming that the same structures were in place earlier. The author is au fait with the most recent researches in this field and the chapter is a very useful and succinct account of late Gothic sculpture in the region.

Some discussion of the rationale behind the chronological span of the study might have been enlightening, although the terminus ante of c 1550 is covered obliquely in the Preface. A map showing the main centres of carving activity would have been even more helpful. If the first chapter is largely a work of synthesis (and none the worse for that), the other two are the products of the author’s own researches. The second is concerned with the evidence for Netherlandish sculpture in late medieval England, a field that hitherto has attracted less attention than those of tapestries, stained glass and manuscript illumination. Sadly, this is almost entirely restricted to documentary records, notably from shipping manifests. Notwithstanding the chapter title, its scope extends beyond imported works to include the output of Netherlandish craftsmen resident in England. Again, this is largely predicated on written sources, which are very thoroughly surveyed. One difficulty with the documentation is the looseness of the label ‘Dutch’ or ‘Deutsch’: it does not necessarily denote someone of

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