

TWELFTH-CENTURY ENGLISH ARCHIDIACONAL AND VICE-ARCHIDIACONAL ACTA, edited by B. R. KEMP, Canterbury and York Society, Volume 92, Boydell Press, 2001, lv + 263 pp (hardback £30.00/ \$50.00) ISBN 0-907239-62-5

Sir Frank Stenton's call for the publication of the documents of the post-Conquest English bishops, issued almost seventy-five years ago, is today being wonderfully answered by the series sponsored by the British Academy, *English Episcopal Acta*. This volume applies the same methods of that project to the bishops' subordinates, England's archdeacons. It contains 307 documents printed in Latin, virtually all of which come from the second half of the century. Among them, the diocese of Lincoln claims an outsized share; indeed more than half. Some dioceses are not represented at all (e.g. Chichester and Hereford), and others (e.g. Canterbury and Winchester) have very few. The volume excludes letters and other unofficial writings by archdeacons; it includes only documents in which they were exercising authority by virtue of their office. Today's archdeacons (and others) will no doubt learn from seeing what their predecessors did; they will certainly find much to admire in the uniformly high standard of editing that marks the volume.

What were the official duties of archdeacons in the twelfth century? To judge by the contents of this volume, they spent a very large proportion of their official energies superintending the process of appropriation of parish churches to monastic houses. The process required more than the piety of a church's patron and a grant from him. It required provision for future division of tithes and other parochial revenue. It could require the agreement of the 'sitting' parson. And it required settlement of outstanding claims to the benefice and its appurtenances. These *acta* contain the terms. They also contain much besides. The vitality and continued participation of the laity in synods and chapters during this period is well illustrated by many of these documents (e.g. No. 303). Attempts to assimilate technical terms of Roman law into practice appear (e.g. No. 79). Illustrations of the impossibility of applying the church's prohibitions against simony to transactions involving benefices turn up repeatedly (e.g. No. 45). The utility of annual pensions in facilitating the compromise of litigation is a constant theme (e.g. No. 260). There are interesting references to the participation of women in the life of the twelfth century church: as in joining their husbands in taking vows of chastity (No. 239); escaping from monastic life after fifteen years as a nun (No. 139); and leaving land to one archdeacon of Oxford (No. 169) in the capacity of his *amica* (here translated as 'leman' or 'lover').

The editor's Introduction contains a discussion of many of the duties of archdeacons, particularly the role they played in settling disputes and presiding over clerical assemblies. It also discusses the diplomatic of the *acta*, the contemporary use of seals, the households of archdeacons, and the existence of vice-archdeacons. There is a good index. While the volume was in the press, an additional *actum* came to light. There may be others. Even if there are, however, this will undoubtedly remain the standard work on the subject.

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