

**Nixon, Virginia, *Mary's Mother: St. Anne in Late Medieval Europe*. University Park, PA, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004, 216 pp., 40 illus., \$35.00 U.S. cloth**

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Nixon, Virginia, *Mary's Mother: St. Anne in Late Medieval Europe*. University Park, PA, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004, 216 pp., 40 illus., \$35.00 U.S. cloth.

St Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary, is an apocryphal figure. She makes no appearance in the New Testament, nor does she emerge in the earliest Christian sources. She appears for the first time in the mid-second-century *Protevangelion of James*. Although the *vita* of Anne was developed throughout the Middle Ages, she became very popular only in the late medieval period. Cults of St Anne existed across Europe, but were especially strong in England and Germany. Although a large number of Germanic St Anne images exist in North American museums, the subject of St Anne remains relatively understudied outside of Germany. Virginia Nixon's recent book explores the reasons why Anne became so popular, in particular between 1480 and 1530, the ways in which she was used and understood in Northern Europe in the Late Middle Ages, especially in the Germanic regions, and how this was reflected in the imagery produced in support of her cult.

In the last two decades, there has been an increase in attention to the cult of St Anne in the Late Middle Ages, particularly in art history, but also in other disciplines. In 1990, a session at the Kalamazoo International Congress on Medieval Studies was devoted to the subject of St Anne in the Late Middle Ages. The papers, edited by Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn, were subsequently published as *Interpreting Cultural Symbols: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Society* (London, 1993). The contributors build upon recent work in women's, cultural, and gender studies and show how St Anne functioned in a variety of contexts in different and complex ways. This interdisciplinary collection brings together art history, folklore, literary studies, and social history.

Angelika Dörfler-Dierken is among the European scholars who have recently turned their attention to the cult of the mother of Mary. She has written extensively on the confraternities devoted to the saint.<sup>1</sup> European studies have tended towards systematic analyses of groups of images and texts rather than addressing more theoretical questions generated by interdisciplinary studies, as has been the case in North America and in Nixon's work.

In addition to recent attention paid to devotion to St Anne in particular, there has also been an increased interest in devotional practices of the laity and in the importance of women, both lay and religious, as patrons and consumers of art in the late medieval period. Attention to these topics has expanded since the appearance in 1982 of Susan Groag Bell's groundbreaking work on women as patrons and arbiters of lay piety in the Late Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Hamburger's work on patronage

within the context of female monasticism demonstrates that nuns took an active role in the production of imagery for their own use.<sup>3</sup> Kathryn Smith's recent book examines the role of three English laywomen in the production of books of hours for their own use, and how these books reflected their ancestry, confirmed their sense of social identity, and expressed their devotional interests.<sup>4</sup>

It is to this record of recent work on the devotion to Saint Anne and devotional practices of the laity and of the religious elite in the Late Middle Ages that the work of Virginia Nixon should be added. Nixon is careful to show that St Anne was a saint of interest to both women and men. The clerical elite was primarily responsible for fostering the cult for the purpose of channelling lay devotion, but certainly the largest audience for the cult of St Anne consisted of laywomen.

Nixon's book is divided into an introduction and nine chapters. The introduction reveals the author's interest in the Germanic material that has received comparatively little attention in North American scholarship, and it demonstrates her concern with an examination of what images of St Anne meant to their late medieval patrons and users, especially between 1480 and 1530. Chapter one lays the foundation for her study by examining the emergence of the cult of the saint in the second century and its subsequent growth and transformation until the Late Middle Ages. In this part of her book, she discusses the creation and development of the figure of Anne, who was modelled after the Old Testament figure of Hannah. She lays out the development of the idea of the Immaculate Conception in the High Middle Ages, an idea that was still under debate for centuries to come, and she disputes the contention that the *Anna Selb-Dritt*, or Anne with the Virgin and Child, was intended to give it form. One of the reasons for this is that in certain regions, such as England, where the concept of the Immaculate Conception was more clearly worked out by theologians, imagery of the *Anna Selb-Dritt* appears to have been much less popular than it was in Germany. The concept of the *Trinubium*, in which Anne married twice more and had further children after the death of Joachim, is also discussed. As Nixon points out, those described in the Bible as Jesus's brothers were argued by the proponents of the doctrine of this idea to be his cousins, the grandchildren of Anne by her two later marriages; this protected the argument that Mary remained ever a virgin. The development of particular typologies of images of St Anne such as the *Anna Selb-Dritt* and the Holy Kinship occurred in the Late Middle Ages and became especially popular in the Germanic areas. This chapter successfully provides a background for the development of the cult in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, although it does not seem that much is offered here that was not already presented in the

introduction to the *Interpreting Cultural Symbols* volume mentioned above.

The cult of St Anne grew radically during the late fifteenth century, as described in chapter two. Here, Nixon examines the ways in which a few particular individuals, who were of different social strata and of different genders, fostered the cult of St Anne in distinct ways. In chapter three, Nixon argues that the cult of St Anne became particularly popular at this time because of a heightened concern, in both religious and lay spheres and in a variety of classes, with the hope for salvation. Anne was an intercessory saint of greater interest than almost all others because she was more closely related to both Mary and Christ. Chapter four examines how these concerns for salvation were expressed in images of St Anne. Nixon argues that the lack of eye contact between the figures in fifteenth-century images manifests a looking forward to future events rather than a concern with the present, and that the imagery thus indicates salvific concerns. Anne's connection with the concern with salvation had not earlier been so solidly drawn and thus is not a factor in images from earlier periods. Chapter five shows how the promoters of the cult of St Anne endeavoured to channel and control lay piety, especially that of middle-class women. Chapter six examines the economic as opposed to strictly ideological reasons that lay behind the particular attention to the cult of St Anne in Annaberg and Augsburg, despite the fact that there were competing cults in those towns. The Carmelite Brotherhood in Augsburg promoted the cult of St Anne in order to encourage greater devotion from the laity and to raise money for a new church. In Annaberg too, the cult was fostered for mainly economic reasons, to draw pilgrims and funds to the Annakirche. The function of images of St Anne in devotion is examined in chapter seven, while chapter eight examines the decline of the power and popularity of St Anne with the rise of Humanism and the Reformation. At this time, the *Trinubium* was rejected in favour of the celebration of the more nuclear Holy Family, likely because this was more in keeping with contemporary family structures. Emphasis passed from Anne's role as generator of Christ, by way of her daughter Mary, to her role as human grandmother. Chapter nine examines different types of images of Saint Anne that existed in the Germanic lands in the Late Middle Ages. In her discussion of various typologies of images, Nixon shows that the *Anna Selb-Dritt* was depicted in particular ways in different regions of Europe. For example, images of St Anne holding the Virgin on one arm and Christ on the other were most popular in Southern Germany, while in the Rhineland it was most common for Anne to hold both diminutive figures on the same arm. The volume ends with some suggestions for further research.

Nixon writes in a style that is clear and to the point. She

does not include excessive detail and her citations are sparing. This is occasionally frustrating, however, as the reader might wish to follow up on statements made or examples of imagery given, only to discover that no notes are provided. On page 123, for example, she writes, "Sometimes the two other husbands of Anne are labeled incorrectly when they appear in paintings." But no examples of images are provided to give evidence of this. She writes also on page 123, "At the same time, their [the husbands of Anne] passive demeanors might also have been seen as bespeaking calmness and self-control, a serious issue at this time when court records show that clerics and civic officials were concerned to restrain husbands from beating their wives." But no documents are cited to give evidence for these concerns about domestic violence that are mentioned in her text.

Nixon's book distinguishes carefully between different parts of Germany and the surrounding regions in a discussion of iconographic developments that occur at different moments. But for the non-specialist of the geography of these regions in the Late Middle Ages, maps would have been a very helpful addition to her book. Her distinctions between developments that occurred in the Rhineland as opposed to Swabia or Saxony would be more readily understandable to the reader and would be more easily contextualized as a result.

Although Nixon's book is focused on St Anne, her discussion of devotion to the saint would have been more satisfying had she situated this devotion within a broader context of late medieval devotional practices in general. What precisely were the ways in which devotion to Anne was distinguished from that of other saints? Did images play a larger role in her cult than in others, and to what extent? In chapter five, Nixon does set the confraternities devoted to St Anne against those focused around the Rosary and the Seven Sorrows. Additional discussion of other practices would have been appreciated.

The separation of her studies of images from the contexts in which they were used was also somewhat dissatisfying. For example, it is unclear why chapter three, entitled "Saint Anne and Concepts of Salvation in Late Medieval Germany," was presented as a discrete unit, separate from the subsequent chapter, "Salvational Themes in the Imagery of Saint Anne." These two chapters, if woven together, could perhaps more powerfully show the ways in which pictorial traditions were related to, and departed from, textual traditions.

Despite these criticisms, this book is clearly written, enjoyable to read, and is very informative. Nixon delved into primary sources, some previously unpublished, in order to shed light upon the importance of the cult of St Anne to late medieval Christians, especially in the Germanic areas of Europe, and the function of images in that practice. This study is definitely recommended to anyone interested in the ways in which St

Anne was used and understood in Germany and surrounding areas in the Late Middle Ages.

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#### Notes

1 Angelika Dörfler-Dierken, *Die Verehrung der heiligen Anna in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 1992), and *Vorreformatrische Bruderschaften der heiligen Anna* (Heidelberg, 1992).

2 Susan Groag Bell, "Medieval Woman Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture," *Signs* 7 (1982), 742–68; reprinted in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, eds Mary Erler and Maryane Kowaleski (Athens, Georgia and London, 1988).

3 Jeffrey Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley, 1997), and *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York, 1998).

4 Kathryn A. Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion in Fourteenth-Century England: Three Women and their Books of Hours* (Toronto, 2004).

Madeleine Landry et Robert Derome, *L'Art sacré en Amérique française. Le trésor de la Côte-de-Beaupré*. Sillery (Québec), Les éditions du Septentrion, 2005, 208 p., illustré, 59.95\$.

Il faut souligner la qualité exemplaire de cette publication, ce qui est un événement rare en ce qui concerne l'art ancien au Québec et que l'on doit essentiellement à la passion de Madeleine Landry pour l'art religieux de la Côte-de-Beaupré. Spécialiste de l'histoire de la médecine, elle s'est tournée depuis les années 2000 vers l'art des débuts de la colonie française pour produire avec Robert Derome, professeur d'histoire de l'art à l'Université du Québec à Montréal, un ouvrage accessible à tous pourvu d'un excellent appareil scientifique (notes de bas de pages, bibliographie) et illustré de très nombreuses photographies en couleurs de qualité exceptionnelle. Pour la mise en page, les auteurs se sont même adjoints les services d'une graphiste, Louise Méthé.

Le titre principal (*L'Art sacré en Amérique française*) mis en évidence peut être trompeur si l'on ne lit pas le sous-titre. L'ouvrage « a pour but de retracer le trésor d'art religieux amassé sur la Côte-de-Beaupré au cours des siècles et aujourd'hui dispersé » (p. 13). Il vise quatre églises établies sous le régime français et le point de rupture de la recherche sur les œuvres est fixé à 1865 (p. 14). Pour situer le lecteur, on nous présente (p. 16) une carte des paroisses qui n'est pas identifiée comme détail d'une carte beaucoup plus vaste généralement datée des environs de 1750 et non pas de 1700.

Le livre est doté d'une préface de l'historien Jacques Mathieu de l'Université Laval, préface que l'on aurait souhaitée plus élaborée concernant le diocèse de Québec, la fondation des paroisses et le rôle des fabriques afin de mieux comprendre leur importance et leur organisation. Par ailleurs, en ce qui concerne le passage que l'on y trouve sur l'art religieux, il aurait mieux valu en laisser le contenu aux deux auteurs. On peut y lire, par exemple, que « les artisans et les artistes qui ont réalisé ces œuvres ont été pour la majorité formés en France, notamment

après des membres des grandes académies » (p. 10), ce qui ne s'avère qu'exceptionnel.

En fait, l'Avant-propos des auteurs, remarquablement clair, concis et précis, fait une mise en place historique et nous présente le concept et le plan du livre. On nous signale (p. 17) la présence de « textes détachés sur fond gris » ajoutant divers éléments explicatifs au texte principal tels que « Classicisme en France et en Nouvelle-France » (p. 35), « L'École des arts et métiers de Saint-Joachim : un mythe » (p. 51) ou « L'art des Jésuites » (p. 100–01). Ces textes pertinents n'apparaissent malheureusement pas à la table des matières (p. 203), pas plus que la section sur le Centre de conservation du Québec (p. 184–85) qui aurait pu être plus développée en ce qui concerne les questions de dorure et polychromie de l'époque.

Le livre se divise en cinq chapitres qui abordent la configuration des églises, les décors intérieurs, les tabernacles, les tableaux et l'orfèvrerie. Ces divisions permettent de présenter et de rassembler les principales œuvres d'art qui ont survécu en ce qui concerne chacune des quatre églises étudiées. La recherche concernant ces œuvres, dont beaucoup ont été dispersées, n'était pas facile à faire et représente un travail méticuleux tant au niveau des sources que des illustrations, qui permet de faire des rapprochements et de poser des hypothèses comme dans le cas des deux statues attribuées à Charles Vézina qui proviendraient de Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré (p. 78).

Le chapitre qui concerne l'orfèvrerie (« La Côte d'or... de Beaupré », un titre un peu alambiqué puisque l'orfèvrerie mentionnée est en argent...), a été rédigé par Robert Derome dont c'est la spécialité et il constitue en soi une introduction à l'orfèvrerie religieuse au Québec et à son évolution. Il couvre de façon précise et succincte tant l'identification des œuvres françaises que le métier d'orfèvre et présente des tableaux sur la conservation des objets, leur chronologie et leur typologie.

La division du livre adoptée par les auteurs leur permettait de regrouper architecture, sculpture, peinture, orfèvrerie en passant d'une église à l'autre. Cette division correspond au mode traditionnel d'approche de l'art ancien du Québec et non pas à