

Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion. Margaret Aston. London: The Hambledon Press, 1984. ci + 355. pp. £29.00

A little more than a decade ago, the late K.B. McFarland bemoaned the fact that many aspects of Lollardy "are irremediably hidden from us," unless "new material is found of a kind and quantity so far unsuspected." Margaret Aston, on the other hand, now offers ten perceptive essays written over the last twenty years that argue against writing prematurely the epitaph on Lollard studies. By the publication of this book at this time, Aston shows how vibrant such research can be.

Of the eight previously published articles, three could be considered classics. "Lollardy and Sedition, 1381-1431" (pub. 1960, rev. 1976), "Lollardy and the Reformation: Survival or Revival?" (pub. 1964), and "John Wycliffe's Reformation Reputation" (pub. 1965) were not only landmark studies when they were first released, but they continue to be basic reading for an understanding of the heresy. Other previously published contributions review the place of women, the role of literacy, the interpretation of Richard II, and the significance of the monastic ruins. Although much of the book has appeared elsewhere, the author has, in many cases, brought her work up-to-date with supplementary notes incorporating the more recent literature. The collected edition also has the advantage of photographic illustrations which assist the presentation.

The two essays which appear here for the first time examine the literature of devotion and the criticism of images. The later study is especially helpful in light of J.F. Davis' recent (1983) thesis that Lollardy's survival into the reformation period can be documented by the sect's heretical critique of images.

Aston sees a special significance in the Lollard iconomachy for, in spite of its various expressions, it existed from the days of Wyclif and carried on into the Reformation. This allows one not only to trace its developments, but also to see how the Reformation acknowledged and incorporated the issue into its own character. This approach is the repeated thesis of these essays.

Like almost all such collections of this type, Aston offers a patchwork which leaves many areas untouched, but the threads of continuity tie the essays together making this book a significant contribution to Lollard research. Aston does not simply argue that Lollardy survived into the reformation period, but she tries to delineate exactly how the confluent currents flowed together in the sixteenth century.

Despite McFarland's fears, Aston shows although Lollardy may have hidden aspects, but it is not so "irremediably hidden from us."

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The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow (Sepher Nopheth Suphim) by Judah Messer Leon, A Critical Edition and Translation by Isaac Rabinowitz, Cornell University Press (Ithaca and London, 1983) 603 pp. \$55.00

Published as early as 1475-76, Judah Messer Leon's Hebrew rhetorical handbook, *The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow*, is clearly one of the most notable examples of the

interaction between the Italian Renaissance and Jewish culture. Messer Leon, an accomplished physician, Aristotelian scholar, and rabbinic luminary, lived in a number of cities in north-central Italy during the second half of the fifteenth century. Having already composed Hebrew educational treatises on grammar and logic, he now introduced to his Jewish students the third part of the medieval *trivium*, the study of rhetoric, and placed it squarely at the center of his novel curriculum of Jewish studies. Messer Leon's rediscovery of rhetoric undoubtedly mirrored a similar emphasis of the new *studia humanitatis* of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Like the Italian humanists, Messer Leon was conversant with all of the major classical texts available in his day; and like them, he boldly projected through his compendium the ideal of a good and righteous man, gifted in the oratorical art, combining his knowledge, noble character and communicative skills to produce a new and effective leadership for his community.

But Messer Leon did more than incorporate the Ciceronian ideal of wisdom and eloquence into Judaism. He also tried to portray his new educational image as an intrinsic part of Jewish tradition in the first place. The ideal of the civic orator, so he claimed, was synonymous with the traditional hero of the *zaddik* (the righteous man) and the *hakham kolel* (the *homo universalis*), an image which encapsulated, no doubt, that which Messer Leon conceived of himself.

Just as he Judaized the civic orator, he similarly treated the entire field of rhetoric. For Messer Leon, the model of classical oratory initially was conceived not in Greece or Rome but in Israel itself. The entire Hebrew Bible, especially its prophetic orations, was the font and exemplar for the rhetorical art, so he claimed. It followed that Jews should appreciate and master a discipline that had been theirs in the first place. Messer Leon's idea that rhetoric had first been perfected by the Hebrews offered his contemporaries a satisfying reassurance regarding the intrinsic worth of their own cultural legacy. By thus translating newly published rhetorical works into Hebrew, by illustrating them with Biblical examples, by offering a daring hypothesis of Jewish cultural superiority and by disseminating his work in the new form of print, Messer Leon left a noticeable mark on later Jewish writers and educators; he also bequeathed one of the earliest works of modern literary criticism of the Hebrew Bible.

Besides the *editio princeps*, *The Honeycomb's Flow* previously has been printed only once, by Adolf Jellinek in Vienna in 1863. Isaac Rabinowitz's new critical edition is far superior to that of Jellinek; Rabinowitz carefully compared the earliest extant manuscript of the work copied in 1474 with the first edition and with the principal Hebrew and Latin sources available to the author. His translation is highly readable, accurate, and even useful to the advanced Hebrew reader in comprehending Messer Leon's occasionally difficult prose. The editor's introduction is an important contribution in its own right—a most thorough and masterful treatment of Messer Leon's life, literary sources, and intellectual contribution. [It is regrettable only that Robert Bonfil's equally illuminating introduction to Messer Leon's work, written as a forward to the new reprint of the first edition (Jerusalem, 1981), appeared too late to be considered in Rabinowitz's otherwise comprehensive study]. The bilingual edition published by Cornell University Press is attractively printed and elegantly produced. In every respect, this diligent effort to publish and translate this important Hebrew text is truly a labor of love. Both Hebraists and non-Hebraists alike are indebted to Professor Rabinowitz and his publisher for producing a splendid edition of this monument of Jewish and Italian Renaissance culture.

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