Periodization schemes for the Middle Ages have been among the hardiest perennials in the historian’s garden of debate. Once upon a time it was easy. Rome fell, the tapers of civilization were snuffed out, and the Middle Ages dawned. After almost a millennium of unrelieved darkness, the bright light of the Renaissance ushered in the modern world. The idea that a dark age filled the gap between the rather different glories of antiquity and modernity may still hold sway in the popular mentality, but it has long since been abandoned by scholars, by no means all of them medievalists. Alongside debates over periodization there have been struggles over the meaning of words such as renaissance, reform, renewal, and revolution.

The old and relatively simple view has not been replaced by an equally straightforward one. In the last generation or two, scholars have come to speak of “Late Antiquity,” by which they mean a period running from at least 300 to 700, and sometimes from 180 to 900, that was itself distinctive and dynamic. With the emergence of Late Antiquity it became impossible to speak of an abrupt and catastrophic end to classical civilization or of the sudden appearance of the medieval world. The period running from about 1300 to 1550 has also proved problematic. In one view this is the Renaissance, the “rebirth” and assimilation of classical antiquity that put medieval backwardness to flight and inaugurated the modern world. On another reckoning, this is the late, or declining, Middle Ages, a period marked by war, plague, famine, and the dissolution of medieval social,
religious, and institutional structures. Modernity had to wait until the Reformation sundered Christendom, exploration and discovery opened the globe to European exploitation, and the scientific revolution shattered a long-cherished worldview.

All this chipping away at the beginning and end of the Middle Ages need not have disturbed the received view of the medieval period as dark and backward, superstitious and violent. In 1927 Charles Homer Haskins, professor of medieval history at Harvard University, published a book that has come to be almost iconic: *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*. Haskins’s preface began thus:

The title of this book will appear to many to contain a flagrant contradiction. A renaissance in the twelfth century! Do not the Middle Ages, that epoch of ignorance, stagnation, and gloom, stand in the sharpest contrast to the light and progress and freedom of the Italian Renaissance which followed? How could there be a renaissance in the Middle Ages, when men had no eye for the joy and beauty and knowledge of this passing world, their gaze ever fixed on the terrors of the world to come?

After a brief historical introduction, Haskins devoted eleven chapters of modest length to “Intellectual Centers,” “Books and Libraries,” “The Revival of the Latin Classics,” “The Latin Language,” “Latin Poetry,” “The Revival of Jurisprudence,” “Historical Writing,” “The Translations from Greek and Arabic,” “The Revival of Science,” “The Revival of Philosophy,” and “The Beginnings of Universities.” A few years later three scholars, G. Paré, A. Brunet, and P. Tremblay published a work also entitled *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, but much narrower than Haskins’s book in so far as it focused exclusively on schools and instruction.¹ By 1940, the eminent Renaissance historian Wallace K. Ferguson could speak of the “Revolt of the Medievalists.”² Haskins’s bold claim, however much it came to be modified in precise details, had won a durable place.³ Haskins himself was modern, secular, and progressive. He very much wanted the Middle Ages to be understood in those terms. Over time, Haskins’s personal stance has held up less well than his conviction that important and original things happened in the twelfth century.

The great art historian Erwin Panofsky did not deny that the twelfth century was creative and dynamic, but he thought it inappropriate to apply the label “Renaissance” almost indiscriminately across the historical landscape.⁴ By the time he was writing, there were Northumbrian, Carolingian,
and Ottonian Renaissances to be reckoned with. Panofsky urged that the word Renaissance be reserved for the Italian world of the fourteenth and later centuries and that the new coinage Renascence be applied to other periods of cultural efflorescence. Panofsky also believed that participants in medieval Renascences believed themselves to be in continuity with the ancient world whereas the Italians of Petrarch's and later generations looked back “as from a fixed point in time”; they believed themselves to be different. Panofsky's interpretation has interesting and important implications for an understanding of Haskins. Was the Renaissance really different and, if so, were the achievements of the twelfth century ephemeral? Or did Renaissance writers merely assert that they were different and, if so, what might this imply about their debts to the twelfth century?

Between Ferguson's day and our own, countless arguments ranging from the arid to the erudite have been lavished on the meaning of the term renaissance. This is not the place for even a short summary of all the possible views. It is not difficult to agree with Richard Southern who once said of “Renaissance” that it is “a mere term of convenience which can mean almost anything we choose to make it mean. . . . It achieves . . . the sort of sublime meaninglessness which is required in words of high but uncertain import.” Despairing, perhaps, of finding a commonly accepted definition of renaissance or an agreed-upon list of phenomena that could be subsumed under that word, some scholars have looked for other words. Giles Constable spoke of The Reformation of the Twelfth Century, and some years before that Brenda Bolton entitled a book that focused on the twelfth century The Medieval Reformation. These scholars were not being clever or contrarian. Both in fact were trying to capture the deeply religious aspects of twelfth-century life and thought that were all but ignored by Haskins. Bob Moore took a different tack when he called the twelfth century The First European Revolution. This, again, was not academic gamesmanship. Moore’s attention was caught by social, economic, and institutional forces that neither Haskins nor Constable nor Bolton had in their sights. Quite recently, Thomas Bisson published a massive book with the engaging title The Crisis of the Twelfth Century. If there was something mildly teleological in Haskins’s attempt to trace modern ideas of progress and originality back to the twelfth century, Bisson argues that “modern” government, or its faint beginnings, arose as a response to the lawlessness and violence of twelfth-century Europe. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable entitled a famous book, about which more will be said below, Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century. The volume contains revised essays of papers presented at a 1977 conference at Harvard
commemorating the achievement of Haskins. That Renaissance should appear in its title seems perfectly understandable. But the editors intend their title to “promise not only a fresh survey of the terrain which Haskins charted but also an inquiry which goes beyond the limits he set for himself.”

If there is as yet no consensus about how to label this period, neither is there certainty about the chronology of the period in question—those periodization questions again! For Haskins the twelfth century lasted from about 1050 to 1250. Benson and Constable say that “for the movement as a whole we must really go back fifty years or more and forward almost as far.” Nevertheless, their volume explicitly concentrates on the years from the 1060s to the 1160s. Robert Swanson accepts Haskins’s framework. In an elegant and influential book, Southern argued that the Middle Ages were “made” between 972, when Gerbert d’Aurillac began teaching logic at Reims, and 1204, when Constantinople fell to crusaders. Moore’s Revolution lasted from ca. 970 to 1215. The New Cambridge Medieval History dedicated two stout volumes to the twelfth century, encompassing the years 1024 to 1198. Ernst Robert Curtius argued that “medieval thought and expression become creative only around 1050,” which puts him in good company but he also believed that the Middle Ages, having entered upon a “wonderful climate of spring,” lasted until the Industrial Revolution. No one else’s twelfth century lasted seven hundred years. Curtius notwithstanding, Karl Leyser, in his inaugural lecture as Chichele Professor of Medieval History at the University of Oxford (1984), spoke about “The Ascent of Latin Europe.” But the world he saw ascending was the early eleventh century, and Leyser associated its ascent with an air of distinctiveness that he perceived in a number of historical writers. One wonders what Panofsky would have thought of this. Clearly, the twelfth century as a historical phenomenon has always meant something more and different than the twelfth century as a calendrical one. Current trends in scholarship, and the essays in this volume, tend to attach more and more of the eleventh century to the twelfth in an attempt to capture a reasonably coherent period.

Although some phenomena from this “long” twelfth century definitely persisted into the thirteenth century, the years after 1200 do seem to have had a rhythm all their own. But how long was the “twelfth century”? Some would argue that the Carolingian period constituted the first Europe after the late antique world had finally spent its energy. By about 900, dynastic squabbling, institutional fragility, and foreign attacks by Vikings, Magyars, and Muslims brought the Carolingian era to a close, and
in the tenth and eleventh centuries a new Europe began slowly to constitute itself.²⁰ The twelfth century represented the culmination of this long-term process. Central to that culmination, in this view, was a gradual superseding of Carolingian ways in social organization, government, education, intellectual life, and the arts. While no one would say that the long twelfth century began in the ninth, some would argue that one fruitful way of understanding the twelfth century is to imagine it as poised in a kind of dialectical relationship with the ninth. To mention a few examples among many possible ones: affective rather than prescriptive spirituality; dialectical rather than exegetical theology; juridical rather than moral/ethical political thought. For others the Carolingian world brought Late Antiquity to a close, and the tenth century witnessed Europe in Its Infancy²¹ and The Making of the Middle Ages.²² The twelfth century saw the maturation of trends that reached back only a century or a century and a half. Southern and his student Moore began their stories in about 970 whereas Haskins, Benson, Constable, and Swanson—to mention only a few prominent figures—hold to about 1050.

A few pages above, the chapters in Haskins’s Renaissance of the Twelfth Century were listed. Benson and Constable’s Renaissance and Renewal intended to “commemorate” Haskins’s contribution. It would be tedious to list its twenty-six chapter titles. It suffices to repeat that the book sought to review Haskins’s findings and also to add perspectives on religion, the arts, and vernacular culture. Specifically, Benson and Constable characterized their “conceptual framework for advance reflection on the twelfth-century renaissance” under these headings: (1) the defining characteristics of the renaissance; (2) the problem of classicism; (3) the sources of the renaissance; (4) religious elements in the renaissance; (5) social, economic, and institutional setting; and (6) the chronological and regional framework. How does the present volume compare? Taking up first what Benson and Constable sought to add to Haskins, this volume also treats religion in detail and from a variety of points of view. It was intended that the conference from which this volume takes its rise would include discussion of the arts, but for various reasons that proved impossible. Benson and Constable’s book does not contain any single essay devoted to vernacular literature but has two that address some vernacular texts and authors. Likewise, this book has no essay exclusively devoted to the vernacular but instead contains many that pick up on the themes and contributions of the vernacular. Taking up Benson and Constable’s “conceptual framework,” some overlaps and divergences are apparent. Many of the essays in this book self-consciously place themselves within one or the other
The problem of classicism comes up often in this book but perhaps less explicitly than in its predecessor. Sources appear again and again in the pages that follow. Sometimes they are remote and ancient, sometimes nearer and Carolingian, sometimes absolutely contemporary and really a matter of mobile influences. In general, this book agrees with Benson and Constable in declining to follow Haskins’s stress on outside, especially Arabic and Greek, influences. Religious issues, as already noted, recur repeatedly in Benson and Constable and also here. Benson and Constable actually devoted relatively little attention to the economy and institutions and only one or two essays to society. Institutions appear in many of the essays that follow, but none is exclusively devoted to them. The economy appears from time to time but, again, does not receive separate treatment. Social issues, however, are at the heart of several of the following essays and make an appearance in many of them. One essay after another in this book tackles chronological and geographical issues. On the whole, this book is broader in both respects than Benson and Constable.

The present collection of essays does not in any way intend to supplant either Haskins or Benson and Constable. The former is a classic and the latter is assuming that status. The aim here, as had been the case with Benson and Constable, is to resume the conversation. Not surprisingly, therefore, there is a great deal of overlap among the three books. But there are differences too. Just as Benson and Constable’s book reflected changes in scholarly interests and perspectives a half-century after Haskins, so too this book reveals some of the shifts in the more than thirty years since the Harvard conference. Benson and Constable did not dedicate chapters to particular countries and solicited no coverage at all of Iberia and Scandinavia. Except for an essay on Toulouse, their book had no coverage of cities. Jews found no place in Renaissance and Renewal. Neither did women nor peasants. All of these topics find ample coverage here. Religion in Benson and Constable amounted to ideas of reform, liturgy, and theology. This book addresses these topics more or less explicitly but adds devotion.

But what happened? How is it that this long twelfth century possesses both intrinsic interest and inner coherence? “It seems clear,” say Johann P. Arnason and Björn Wittrock, “that the early centuries of the second millennium C.E. constitute a major formative phase within some parts of Eurasia.”23 In their impressive collection of expert essays ranging in coverage from the British Isles to China, Arnason and Wittrock signal
some of the major changes. Each of the essays in *Eurasian Transformations*, like many of them in the present volume, as well as in Benson and Constable’s *Renaissance and Renewal*, explores relationships between long-term processes and formative phases. Arnason and Wittrock draw parallels between the years from about 1000 to 1300 and the “Axial Period” (the middle centuries of the last millennium B.C.E.) and the full emergence of modernity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries C.E. In their individual contributions to the volume, Arnason and Wittrock specify some of the kinds of changes they have in mind. First, they identify state formation, which can mean the emergence of new states, the consolidation of incipient ones, or the transformation of older ones. Within states, various forms of “elite contestation” reveal shifts in both the personnel and attitudes of governing classes. Simultaneously, there arose new combinations of relationships between sacred and secular authorities. Second, the period witnessed the rise of more or less autonomous urban communities. These communities were enabled by dramatic agricultural growth and spawned commercial enterprise. Third, there was intellectual innovation evidenced in particular by the emergence of the *studium* alongside the *regnum* and *sacerdotium*. This change entailed the development of new kinds of institutions for the training of secular and religious elites. Fourth, and with particular respect to the European zone of Eurasia, there was the “Europeanization” of Europe.

Arnason’s and Wittrock’s general essays constitute both syntheses of current scholarship and summations of the more focused essays in their volume. Accordingly, much that they say will already be familiar to students of medieval European history. For example, it was Robert Bartlett’s *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change* that gave wide currency to the idea of “the Europeanization of Europe.” Whereas earlier scholars, including Haskins, tended to focus on northern France, Bartlett, and now many others, have instead interpreted a dynamic and expanding Europe as more cosmopolitan than had been the case in earlier centuries. The specifically intellectual dimensions of this “Europeanization” were limned by Richard Southern in his last and perhaps greatest works, the two volumes of his *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*. Whereas Southern tended to focus on intellectual life and the structures that sustained it, Bartlett was more alert to the dissemination of the economic, social, institutional, and political features of the post-Carolingian world. The consolidation of effective states in Ireland and Scotland, the continuing *Reconquista* in Iberia and in southern Italy and Sicily, and above all the appearance of new states in Scandinavia and
in a thick band of Slavic realms running from the Baltic to the Balkans constitute one of the greatest achievements of the period. Ireland and Scotland had long been Christianized, and Iberia and Italy had historical roots reaching back into Roman times, so it was really in the North and East that something new appeared on the scene.

In his contribution to the Arnason and Wittrock volume, Gábor Klaniczay says that the meeting of the German emperor Otto III and the Polish ruler Bolesław Chrobry at Gniezno in 1000 “could be considered as the representative event announcing that a new, extended Europe had been born.”27 There is a serenity in Klaniczay’s interpretation that belies long-standing tensions over the shape of Europe. The German lands, those territories lying between the Rhine and the Elbe to the northeast and the Carpathians to the southeast, had been wrenched into Europe by the Carolingians. That is clear. But, leaving Scandinavia aside for the moment, what is to be made of the new states running from Poland to Hungary? From Oskar Halecki28 to Jenő Szűcs,29 scholars have refined their understanding of “East Central Europe” and have claimed a place for that region within the confines of Europe as both a geographical and historical phenomenon. The bases on which that zone can be called European have been more controversial. Christianity and Latin culture along with the deliberate and incidental influences of Germany have been seen as key Europeanizing dynamics. This is reasonably uncontroversial at the most general level. Clear too is the critical role of Christianization in state formation. At this point, it is possible to say that the dynamics that functioned in Scandinavia are just like those in evidence in East Central Europe, although the British Isles influenced the northern realms in ways that they did not impact the eastern ones. What is controversial, from Arctic regions to the Mediterranean, is the relative degree of emphasis to be accorded to conscious borrowing from the West, forcible imposition by the West, locally inspired adaptations, and deeply planted local traditions.30 Quite simply, the “Europeanization” of Europe made many regions more like one another, and doubtless more mutually intelligible, but it did not thereby make them all the same.

To these areas of consensus one more may be added, identity, albeit it is not one that any of the previously discussed works drew into sharp focus. Haskins’s view of the Middle Ages as progressive and even in some ways modern drew in its wake the idea that they were really just like us. In the 1960s and 1970s, on the contrary, medievalists in many disciplines began to stress the utter difference between the Middle Ages and the modern world and between medieval and modern people. Alterity—strictly
speaking, “otherness”—became the cry. Historians began to draw on anthropological arguments, in particular, to explore identity as a way of understanding how people saw themselves, how they saw others, and how others saw them. In varying degrees, scholars believe that identity is constructed; that is, identity is not ethnic, sexual, or in any other way primordial. Where the long twelfth century is concerned, identity matters because Europeans became more conscious of what made themselves distinctive and what made others different. They also began to gain awareness of all the ways in which they themselves, as Europeans, differed from one another—Europe’s “Europeanization” notwithstanding.

Consensus therefore reigns in a number of areas of historical interpretation pertaining to the long twelfth century. Europe was expanding geographically. Its population was growing as perhaps never before. The pace of economic life was quickening in all its aspects. It is amusing to think that greed took a place next to pride in the strictures of contemporary moralists. New schools formed and scholars traveled farther to attend them. The curriculum changed as new subjects such as law or old subjects such as dialectic achieved prominence. The church was continually reformed and continually revised its relations to the secular world around it. And yet, amid all that was new and bright and promising, there were disturbing elements as well. The eleventh century experienced more famines than any other century on record. Crusaders on the march visited unspeakable barbarities on Jewish communities. Lords’ attempts to aggrandize their landholdings often came at the cost of the brutal subjection and suppression of peasants. The new intellectual currents of the age struck some as laudable but others as vain and even blasphemous. Finally, it is well to bear in mind Giles Constable’s sage observation that “the difficulty of understanding the real nature of the movement is increased . . . by the reformers’ attachment to the old ways.” Many voices proclaimed the dawn of a new age, and Haskins listened closely to them, but others denied or regretted novelty, and their voices must be heard too.

This book bears the title *European Transformations*. By now the meaning of the word European should be clear. Transformation calls for a few comments. It is the word used recently by Arnason and Wittrock. It was the word used by the European Science Foundation’s massive, five-year-long (1993–1997) investigation of “The Transformation of the
Roman World.” The word connotes change without denying continuity. The word suggests that there were significant differences between conditions existing at both ends of a span of time without pointing to a place, time, event, or cause that somehow effected that difference. The word avoids all the historiographical baggage carried by “renaissance” and perhaps by “reform” as well (although it might be legitimately argued that it brings along its own baggage).

Some comments on the ways in which the essays in this book perceive, describe, and analyze transformation may serve to conclude these introductory remarks. John Van Engen’s essay sets the tone for the volume. After offering some reflections on the differing ways in which scholars in many fields have viewed the twelfth century, he turns to writers of that era. He notes that William of Malmesbury, for example, complained that he and his contemporaries got too little credit for their achievements, while Hildegard of Bingen complained that she lived in “womanish times” that desperately needed reform. Some people embraced change and others resisted it. Lawyers said that reason and (new?) written law should trump custom, while some theologians were anxious that custom prevail over novelty. New books sometimes posed challenges, but equally or even more challenging were novel readings of old books. Custom and innovation, reform as a return to the old or as an implementation of the new, were all hallmarks of the period.

The next several essays in the book treat discrete geographical regions. The authors take a variety of quite different vantage points on what was and was not transformed in the twelfth century. In the past, scholars might well have put their emphasis on the growth of central governments. That topic, admittedly an interesting and important one, is rarely front and center in these essays. The authors included in this volume offer multiple perspectives on both specific historical issues and on themes and issues that although applied here to one place might just as well be applied to other places.

John Gillingham argues that no part of Europe was more fundamentally transformed than England. The reader may decide whether Sverre Hakon Bagge or Piotr Gorecki would agree with him! Gillingham builds up his case by looking closely at one of England’s greatest historical writers, William of Malmesbury (ca. 1095–ca. 1142). In William’s pages one can perceive the growth of learning, the proliferation of schools, the internationalizing of culture (in particular the importation of much that was French), the increasing prominence of towns, and the reform of religious institutions. Dominique Barthélemy looks at chivalry, the most
French of medieval cultural phenomena—albeit one that was gradually “Europeanized”—and asks why the Germanic warrior ethos of the secular elite was transformed. He looks for an answer in the acute challenge to the old order posed by the new world of towns and townsmen. Whereas Gillingham and Barthélemy explore different kinds of transformations within England and France, Adam Kosto asks slightly different questions about Iberia. He observes that for generations Iberia, when it has not been neglected, has been viewed under two optics: the 
*Reconquista*, the centuries’ long war waged by Christian powers against Muslim ones, and 
*convivencia*, the complex pattern of relationships between Christian and Muslim, and to a lesser extent Jewish, populations. Now, Kosto asks, what if one looks at political development without the 
*Reconquista* and cultural development without the old tropes of enlightened Muslims and backward Christians. In fact, Iberia’s forms of political fragmentation and localism are not unlike those evident elsewhere in contemporary Europe, and the peninsula’s Christian culture was vibrant and flourishing, different from Muslim culture to be sure but not necessarily inferior.

The increasing importance of the papacy in the twelfth century has long been a commonplace of scholarship. Italy and Germany were the lands most deeply influenced by the surging papal government. In looking at Italy, Maureen Miller takes an unusual tack. She focuses on the rise of the communes with their precocious and distinctive institutional features, and points out that the popes played a key role in the political development of the Italian cities. This important transformation has not always been acknowledged by earlier historians who tended to emphasize church-state battles. Hanna Vollrath investigates three decisive encounters between popes and German rulers: in Sutri in 1046, in Canossa in 1077, and in Rome in 1111. Instead of narrating the familiar series of crises that make up the Investiture Contest, she observes that vastly greater “intelligence” was at the disposal of the contending parties in 1111 than had been the case in 1046. She attributes this important transformation to the quickening pace of cultural life in Europe’s dawning twelfth century. Vollrath’s argument invites reflection on the role of communication in political developments throughout the period and all across Europe.

Sverre Bagge and Piotr Gorecki write about Scandinavia and Slavic Europe (especially Poland), respectively. Each historian stresses the “Europeanizing” forces of state formation and Christianization. Both scholars are attentive to issues of local traditions, outside intervention, and deliberate borrowing. Gillingham’s arguments notwithstanding, it is probably the
case that Europe’s greatest transformations took place in the vast stretch of lands running from the Arctic Circle to the northern Balkans.

The next essays turn to the material and human settings within which twelfth-century developments played out. David Nicholas tackles the immense subject of urban development across the whole of Europe. In his exposition, readers will encounter transformations in four related aspects of urban life: existing cities expanded; new towns were founded; urbanization shifted from seigneurial to economic practices; and, the government and laws under which townfolk lived underwent revolutionary change. Paul Freedman discusses Europe’s peasants, the overwhelming majority of the population. Like Van Engen and Kosto, Freeman begins with some historiographical reflections, in his case focusing on the peasantry, serfdom, and the seigneurial regime. He notes the shifting interests of historians and the extreme difficulty of finding acceptable definitions that work effectively across space and time. Freedman identifies dramatic transformations but also shows how hard it is to generalize about them.

Olivia Remie Constable and Anna Sapir Abulafia take up questions of identity. For Constable, Pope Innocent III’s prohibition on the export of iron and timber, essentially war materials, to the Muslim world opens up perspectives on heightened anxieties about the markers of Muslim and Christian identity. After a century or more of increasing contacts in the Mediterranean world between Christians and Muslims and of growing trade, products could signify concerns about personal and religious identity, sexuality, improper mixing, and ultimate loyalties. People began to notice and talk about dress and beards. Sharpened perceptions led to stereotyping as never before. Abulafia offers some explanations for how the old tradition that Jews were to be tolerated as long as they were subservient began to change and weaken. The Jewish population was rising, and with the growth of towns there were more and larger Jewish communities. Jewish scholars were gaining prominence just as Christian schools were expanding in number and size. The groundwork was laid for bitter contests over the meaning of scriptures shared by Jews and Christians. Pope Innocent III tried to restore protection of the Jews even as he and his contemporaries tried to understand what Jewish subservience meant in practice. Violence against individual Jews and Jewish communities became more common. Again, markers of identity were growing in significance.

At the point where the volume shifts to consider the cultural realm more directly stands the essay of Anders Winroth on law. He too perceives sharp transformation. To take one example, in the early twelfth century the influence of Roman law was virtually nonexistent, whereas by centu-
ry’s end it was pervasive. This change involved the acquisition of books and the evolution of schools. Alongside the recovery of Roman law, and amid calls for ecclesiastical reform, the canon law of the church was collected, systematized, taught, and studied as never before. That broad phenomenon is interesting in itself, but it also manifests itself in specific ways. For example, the canonists developed doctrines on the rights of litigants that eventually found their way into almost all western legal systems.

Barbara Newman’s discussion of the forms of literacy in which women participated reveals in a general way the expanded character of cultural life in the twelfth century. Whereas scholars long concentrated on Heloise, Hildegarde, and the shadowy Marie de France, now they pursue inquiries that include these women alongside others. Some attention has shifted to women readers with the important discovery that anchoresses were in many ways ideal readers. The currents of ecclesiastical reform that have usually been interpreted as damaging to women have come to be seen, on the contrary, as fostering new kinds of relationships between men and women. Not least among these relationships is a rich participation by women in forms of discourse formerly the preserve of men. In the German Empire women retained their Latin culture longer than elsewhere, and their writings form a key constituent of Richard Southern’s “monastic humanism.”

Newman’s literate women and schools lead on to John Marenbon’s account of theology and philosophy. He notes critical transformations in the twelfth century. Monastic theology, deeply scriptural and exegetical, was largely replaced by the commentary tradition. The profusion of competing schools in the early twelfth century gave way to the highly organized university. And the twelfth-century emphasis on logic and Aristotle’s treatises on logic ceded to a much broader interest in Aristotle’s works. Brigitte Bedos-Rezak combs the writings of twelfth-century masters for a new theme. She says that masters assigned matter a role in cognition, that is, the material world was asked to yield meaning that could mediate between the terrestrial and the divine. At the same time, means of representation changed and spread—such things as seals, badges, and heraldic emblems. Some writers compared the creation of man with seal impressions and thereby procured a new way to talk about transcendence and immanence, the metaphysical and the physical. Rachel Fulton Brown interrogates twelfth-century masters too, to see what they can tell us about devotion, a subject usually lost somewhere between theology and liturgy. In a way, identity was involved: theology was seen as rational, systematic, and masculine, whereas devotion was alleged to be affective, imagistic, and
feminine. God could be intellectualized and remote or intimate and proximate. Just as seal metaphors could help to explain creation and incarnation, so also, Fulton Brown argues, Trinitarian reflections could open perspectives on the same difficult topics. Dogma was a spur to devotion, not somehow a commentary on it. The Trinity was as much an object of love and worship as of logic and explication.

Finally, Stephen Jaeger takes a look at one of the period’s great thinkers and schoolmen, John of Salisbury. Jaeger’s essay bookends the volume along with Van Engen’s. The latter sees the Janus-like dimensions of the twelfth century, and the former thinks that a long eleventh century might be helpful in explaining some figures, not least John of Salisbury. Because John wrote beautiful Latin and was widely read in the classics, he has been claimed as a “renaissance” figure. Yet to read his work is to see how he swam against the tide. He was a product of several of the twelfth century’s most important transformations yet he questioned or rejected many of them.

Notes

3. In his 1979 presidential address to the American Historical Association, William J. Bousma was at some pains to defend the proposition that the Renaissance was a distinct historical period and a decided improvement over what had gone before: “The Renaissance and the Drama of Western History,” American Historical Review 84 (1979), pp. 1–15 and www.historians.org/info/aha_History/wjbouwsma.htm. One might compare the AHR Forum “The Persistence of the Renaissance,” American Historical Review 103 (1998), pp. 50–124, with contributions by Paula Findlen, Kenneth Gouwens, William J. Bouwsma, Anthony Grafton, and Randolf Starn.
4. Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art (Stockholm, 1960), esp. ch. 2.
5. For a recent attempt see Leidulf Melve, “‘The Revolt of the Medievalists’: Directions in Recent Research on the Twelfth-Century Renaissance,” JMH 32 (2006), 231–52.

© 2012 University of Notre Dame
22. Richard Southern, n. 15 above.

© 2012 University of Notre Dame


34. Reformation, p. 35.