

even worse, by the end of the thesis, the “Anglo-Saxon” adjective has become irreconcilably subordinated to the “England” noun. “The later verse passages,” Trilling informs us of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, “stand as memorials not to the glory of kings, but to the suffering of a nation under foreign rule ... In these poems, we are able to see the extent to which the Chronicle itself has become a document of Englishness, not only in its attempts to foster a sense of English identity, but in its desire to represent an English perspective through a period when little else survives of written English” (251).

I had thought that we were moving past the era in which the ecclesiastical history of an eighth-century Northumbrian could be used in analogue with the royal poetry of tenth-century Wessex. Conceptual terms such as “Anglo-Saxon England,” when used to describe a continuum that embraces everything from Germanic interventions into Romano-Celtic polities during the fifth-century through to the West-Saxon hegemony over its Anglice, Norse, and Briton subjects on the eve of the Norman invasion, are so intangible as to be all but useless in an historical context. More dangerous still, it implies the timeless existence of this thing called “England”—a cultural supernova that will eventually subsume into itself the light of all other stars in its immediate constellation. To talk of “Anglo-Saxon England” without considerable qualification of the term itself, is to gambol within the “manifest destiny” of nineteenth-century imperialists.

It is, perhaps, this same historical indiscipline that leads Trilling to designate medieval and classical sources as “primary sources.” There has been far too much ink spilled on this subject for any academic to maintain that Tacitus, William of Malmesbury, Layamon, Orosius, Isidore of Seville, or even Bede were “primary sources” for the majority of events that they recorded.

So the book is well argued, but argued from a conceptual bias that I find difficult to warm to. Maximalists will disagree with me and embrace this book—that is the beauty of academia. Certainly the book is well written. Certainly it deserves to be read and debated. Certainly, no one working in this field can afford to be unaware of its argument. But I find myself returning after reading to the very first page, to the very first part of the argument that started to stick into me, started to scrape at something inside me.

Trilling writes that the “Germanic lord was as anachronistic” in late Anglo-Saxon England “as he is now,” but is this really true? He may be anachronistic to some of us perhaps, behinds our parapets of words, but I cannot help but feel that the relationship between *real-politik* and the poetry of *Beowulf* might have seemed more obvious to the men who fought and fell at Maldon, and that it might seem obvious, still, to the British marines in Afghanistan today.

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**Turner, Ralph V., *Eleanor of Aquitaine***

(New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) hardback; xviii + 395 pages; RRP \$35.00; ISBN 9780300119114

Eleanor of Aquitaine’s story is the “stuff legends are made of.” She was famed for her beauty, elegance, and headstrong and spirited personality. She was a wife of two

kings, the king of France, Louis VII, and then Henry II of England, who was ten years her junior. She was mother of two kings, Richard the Lionheart and John. She acted as regent for Henry and Richard. She was a powerful lord in her own right with extensive territories. She travelled on crusades with Louis, incited rebellion with her sons against Henry, and with the rebellion's failure she was imprisoned for fifteen years. She lived a very long and full life dying at the astonishing age of eighty. She achieved the political power she craved after Henry's death. She is without doubt one of the most interesting women of the medieval period. Her story is compelling and a great many books have already been written about her.

Many of these books build an image of Eleanor that Turner calls the "black legend" in that Eleanor was presented as being involved in a series of scandals, and as being ruthless and promiscuous, and more akin to Messalina or Lucrezia Borgia than a twelfth-century queen. This legend has shadowed her story since the thirteenth century and continues on in many modern biographies. Turner re-examines the early chroniclers in a new light, many written by men of clerical orders. These were often written decades after the events, relied on gossip and rumours, and permeated with a very thirteenth-century attitude to a woman in the political arena in which they are ignored or demeaned. Turner aims to highlight her role in power politics in the society that she lived in: as French queen, governing her duchy of Aquitaine; as English queen; and as regent; her political aspiration for her sons, and her very powerful position as queen mother to Richard and John. Turner strives to overcome the "black legend" and reveals the "truthful image" of Eleanor. Through these periods Turner gives interesting vignettes of some of the important individuals of her time such as her husbands and her sons but also her grandfather, William IX, known as the Troubadour Duke, was a lusty pleasure seeker who was carefree and secular with an anti-clerical spirit.

The black legend of Eleanor became blacker through time and was built on by minstrels and chroniclers in three different areas: as a multiple adulteress; as a murderer; and as a demonic figure. Eleanor was accused of many affairs including alleged indiscretions with her uncle, Raymond, prince of Antioch, while on the Second Crusade with Louis. This story transformed into indiscretion with a Muslim prince who over time became Saladin. The legendary love affair between Henry and Rosamund Clifford captured the public's imagination, as did the alleged quest for revenge by Eleanor through the plotting of Rosamund's murder. At first Eleanor was presented as the wronged wife and Henry and his lover were condemned, but by the mid-fourteenth century Eleanor was the evil murderer of Rosamund. There were rumours that Eleanor enchanted Henry, was a demon bride and, more directly, that Gerald of Wales placed "a she-devil at the very heart of the Plantagenet dynasty" (309), while Matthew Paris claimed that she was descended from the devil. Eleanor was a vibrant, intelligent, and ambitious woman. These were three features that a woman was not meant to have in subsequent centuries after her death. It must be said not all the hatred was directed at Eleanor but at the family group; Henry II after the death of Becket was not in favour with the clerical chroniclers, nor were Richard and John particularly popular. However, the black legend was replaced by a new legend in the nineteenth century. In an era where the romantic and nationalist movement prevailed,

Eleanor's alleged indiscretions were entwined into "courtly love" and her legend became recast as the "queen of the troubadours."

Turner has an extensive knowledge of the primary and secondary sources and the book is exceptionally scholarly. It unravels the twists and turns of the courtly and political life of the twelfth century. It casts Eleanor in a new light and provides insight into her era and the changing attitudes towards her legacy. This is an important biography and as such has a wide appeal beyond scholars.

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**Wiszewski, Przemysław. *Domus Boleslai. Values and Social Identity in Dynastic Traditions of Medieval Poland (c. 966–1138)***

Translated by Paul Barford

East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450, vol. 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2010) hardback; xlv + 592 pages; RRP €180.00; ISBN 9789004181427

Przemysław Wiszewski's book was originally written in Polish and is drawn from the research for which he was awarded a Doctor of Letters degree (or *habilitacja*) from the University of Wrocław. In my opinion the original title "W poszukiwaniu tradycji dynastycznej Piastów" [*In Search of the Dynastic Tradition of the Piasts*] better reflects the aims and the outcome of Wiszewski's work. The new English title heralds the scope of Wiszewski's enterprise: values and social identity in the tradition of the Piast dynasty of Poland from the baptism of Mieszko I in 966 to the death of Bolesław III Krzywousty (the Wrymouth) in 1138. This is the work of an expert and gives an excellent outline of the sources for medieval history of the lands and peoples ruled by the warlords known to us conventionally as the Piast dynasty. Wiszewski argues convincingly that long before the inhabitants of the lands of the Western Slavs were united by the Piasts and started to call themselves Poles, their rulers participated in the development of European culture, politics, religion and writing.

Wiszewski's work is challenging not only because of the length of the work but also because it deals with subjects rarely touched upon by scholars of the European Middle Ages. A major achievement of its engagement with the leading trends in scholarship across Europe and America. Wiszewski skilfully navigates through meanders of historiographical debates and accomplishes a work which will benefit English-speaking medievalists as an example of the analysis and discourse that can be conducted across cultural and historiographical traditions.

This book is extremely ambitious. Wiszewski attempts to outline almost every single source that is at the disposal of a historian of the Piast realm before 1138. He uses the scholarship of authors including Jan Assman, Mary Carruthers, Roman Michałowski, and Gerard Labuda in order to unpack the meaning of these sources. On the basis of his analysis he "searches" for traces of "the creation of a dynastic tradition," by which I think he means collective memory established and cultivated at the court of the Piast rulers of Poland. Whilst at times Wiszewski is not convincing in his analysis of a "tradition," in particular when he seems to suggest that Piast collective memory might