9. The name Arthur does not mean “bear-man” (pp. 130, 238), as thought possible. It is “unquestionably derived from Artorius” and is thus from Latin, as stated by K. H. Jackson, “The Arthur of History,” in Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages, edited by R. S. Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 1–11.

10. Arthur’s four battles on the Douglas in the region of Linnuis are, as often, put in “Lincolnshire” (p. 189; cf. p. 192), which yet has no River Douglas. Emend “Linnuis” to Old Welsh Cluduis, “the people of the Clyde, Strathclyders” and meaning appears, for there is a River Douglas near Lanark, Scotland. Arthur will have been a North Briton. This Welsh form Cludwys “people of the Clyde” is discussed in Ifor Williams, Armes Prydein (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1972), p. 22.

11. The author is “very satisfied” that Arthur’s battle of urbs Legionis was at Chester (p. 203). We are not. Arthur never fought so far south. The conflict was very likely at Karig Lion (on Scotland’s Antonine Wall), a Welsh scribe having confused the form with Cair Legion or Chester, far better known to him. On the West Lothian fortlet, see W. J. Watson, The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1926), pp. 383–4.

12. The conflict at “Badon” in 493 is (routinely) located at Bath, its “Germanic name” being seen as no “barrier” (p. 214). It is a barrier. Again, there has been scribal corruption. Emend to Bradon and problems are removed, the encounter being at Braydon, Wiltshire, where the form is Celtic, as perceived by Eilert Ekwall, The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names, 4th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 62.

13. As for the comment, “I find no good reason to ignore the obvious and seek corruption, misspellings, and other twisted etymologies” (p. 214), it is the author’s reasoning that is twisted. Here relevant is A. E. Housman’s 1922 lecture “On the Application of Thought to Textual Criticism” reproduced in his Collected Poems and Selected Prose (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), pp. 325–39. Housman was a great scholar, Mr. Sullivan is not; and, despite some interesting comments in his book (as on arms and warfare), he, alas, does not have that “aptitude for thinking and willingness to think” which Housman in ending his lecture described as essential for all progress on textual criticism.

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Early medieval manuscripts give up their secrets in this excellent monograph by Carine van Rhijn, who studies the books that enabled parish priests to perform their duties in the Carolingian countryside. Recognizing that the lineaments of the pastoral project outlined in royal normative texts issued by Charlemagne and his advisors were expressive of “ideals and intentions” (5), she argues convincingly that the practical challenges of implementing this project of expanding and deepening the knowledge that Christians
required to assure their salvation fell increasingly to local priests in the Carolingian period. By the eighth century, a fundamental reorganization of the secular clergy resulted in priests being assigned to specific churches, where they lived, preached, and administered the sacraments in small communities for the rest of their lives.

Central to the duties involved in local pastoral care were books. Van Rhijn focuses on two kinds of manuscripts as sources of evidence for her study: those that provided priests with everything they needed to know to look after their lay congregations and those that contained “knowledge especially intended to educate the laity who were the receiving end of the priests’ efforts to teach and preach” (18). These priests’ manuscripts were by no means uniform in content. Rather, they were eclectic compendia of different kinds of information, from explanations of the Creed and other important aspects of Christian doctrine to rudimentary guides for interpreting the meaning of the sound of thunder. The hodge-podge character of these books suggests that Carolingian elites did not impose a uniform canon of learning on the Christian population. Rather, local priests were left to their own devices to instruct their congregations with the information that they deemed most beneficial to their salvation.

Van Rhijn’s book comprises seven chapters divided into three parts. Chapter 1 provides a useful introduction to the historiographical debates surrounding the terms “renaissance,” “reformation,” and “correctio” as they apply to the Carolingian age, all of which prove to be too problematic to adopt as a way to understand the proliferation of manuscripts for priests in this period. Chapter 2 introduces readers to the manuscripts themselves and the difficulty of determining their original function and use. Van Rhijn identifies books relevant to her study both by their material characteristics and by their contents. With few exceptions, most of these manuscripts were modest in size, sparse in ornamentation, and written by amateur scribes. In her discussion of their content, van Rhijn builds on and nuances the pioneering work of Susan Keefe, who wrote extensively on baptismal and creedal treatises in Carolingian manuscripts, but whose taxonomies of these kinds of manuscripts were not always helpful or precise. Van Rhijn employs the term “manuscript for priests” to embrace the full range of possibilities of how these books might look and what texts they might contain. Indeed, none of the sixty or so manuscripts considered in this monograph were the same. Three case studies provide illuminating examples of variations in their form and content (68–71), but some common characteristics emerge. While the central concern of each of these manuscripts is pastoral care, their contents varied widely and tended to be anonymous. Van Rhijn deduces from this that local priests had the autonomy to “pick, mix and add what you need” (73) to the books that informed their pastoral duties. Each manuscript thus offers a window into the kinds of information that these prelates believed to be most useful for their work.

The chapters that follow examine the richness of the pastoral resources available to Carolingian priests and provide a barometer of their concerns for their flock. The second part of the book comprises three chapters that highlight the “cornerstones” of knowledge necessary for salvation: baptism (Chapter 3), the mass (Chapter 4), and penance (Chapter 5). Each of these chapters follows a clear formula: they introduce the norms and expectations of the doctrines in question and their centrality to Christian belief, explore the ways in which this information was convened in the short anonymous Latin texts typically found in priests’ books, and provide as a case study a Carolingian manuscript
that illustrates these points. One of the many takeaways from these examples is the point
that the contents of these manuscripts provided templates for a host of different applica-
tions in the field. Preaching materials, for example, served as “the skeletal raw material
for freely improvised sermons and homilies, which could be adapted to different circum-
stances and different audiences” (142).

The final part of the book provides examples of texts that addressed problems and cir-
cumstances beyond the fundamental Christian beliefs of baptism, the mass, and penance.
Carolingian prelates also found it useful to have at hand texts that would provide them
with expertise on a wide range of topics from the moral aspects of marriage to the rules
for refereeing an ordeal to the treatment of hemorrhoids (Chapter 6). While they were
concerned about curbing the influence of heretics and pagans in their parishes, some of
these priests did not hesitate to employ prognostication tools among their parishioners,
like handbooks of brontology that offered interpretations of the meaning of the sound
of thunder based on its volume and direction and the sortes sanctorum, where a roll of
three dice yielded an answer to an important question posed to God and interpreted by
the priest (Chapter 7).

What emerges most clearly from this superb study is an interpretation of the Caro-
lingian reforms of Christian life not as a top-down process orchestrated and imposed
by the royal court, but rather a myriad of local responses to these ideals organized
and implemented by parish priests. Van Rhijn’s careful attention to the contents of
dozens of utilitarian manuscripts that served as tools on the frontlines of the Carolin-
gian pastoral project gives voice to the otherwise unknown prelates who curated these
books for use among their flocks. The texts that they chose for their work shed light on
the challenges of leading everyday Christians to salvation in the early Middle Ages.

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Flore Verdon, Le Royaume arthuri en au XIIe siècle: La quête d’une eutopie. Paris:
Classiques Garnier, 2022, 545 pp.

Enlightenment is promised by this volume’s three parts: the first on the “aspects lexicaux, historiques et symboliques” of “le royaume arthuri en”; the second on that realm’s
“fonctions narratives”; the third on its “dimension anthropologique et mythique”
(pp. 41, 42). Part one hence directs us to place-names, theories of feudalism, sacred
kingship; part two, the “polarités” of Arthur’s kingdom in twelfth-century narratives;
part three, the provision of a “discours utopique” in a quest for “bonheur humain” as
relating to (for example) “le banquet royal” or “souveraineté féminine” and so on.

So the theme, wide as Arthur’s own domains, is absorbing. Amongst its attractive
features are accounts of Arthur as “roi sacré” or his supposed grave at Glastonbury or the
garden as literary locus amoenus (pp. 151, 181, 204). But there are two problems. The
author refers almost entirely to French publications; and neglects work (even in French)
on Celtic sources for the Arthurian legend. Curiosities are the result. Here are some.