

wat wel af en toe in hierdie werke gebeur. Ook lyk dit of daar soms te maklik afleidings gemaak word uit 'n enkele bron, sonder dat daar stawende getuienis bestaan. In die algemeen is daar tog werk van hoë wetenskaplike gehalte gelewer. Die boeke is tegnies goed versorg en bevat elk 'n hele aantal goed gekose fotos, wat onontbeerlik is in 'n goeie biografie.

Waar baie Afrikaners tans ernstig besin oor hul verlede en die rol van vroeër hoog geagte politieke leiers bevestigte, kan biografiese werke oor persone wat belangrike bydraes gelewer het tot die ontwikkeling van die Afrikaanse kultuur help om die positiewe elemente in die Afrikaanse verlede sterker na vore te bring. Dit is nie S.J. du Toit se vreemde politieke koersveranderinge, die minder aangename dinge in Louw se persoonlike lewe en die feit dat Leipoldt homself nie in die eerste plek as 'n Afrikaner beskou het nie, wat tans veral van belang is nie, maar hul betekenis vir die Afrikaanse kultuur (en verder ook vir die Westerse en die wêreldkultuur), en dit word in hierdie werke onder ons aandag gebring. 'n Mens kan net hoop dat hierdie boeke, ten spyte van hul omvangrykheid, wyd gelees sal word en dat dit ander sal aanspoor om verdere biografiese werke van dieselfde gehalte te lewer.

P. de Klerk

PU vir CHO

Readable work with existential relevance

R. LACEY and D. DANZIGER, *The year 1000 What Life was Like at the Turn of the First Millennium: an Englishman's World*

Abacus, London, 2000

ISBN 0 349 11278 9

Paperback, pp.230

Line drawings, Index, References and Bibliography.

Price not available.

To most South African readers a book about English daily life in the Middle Ages must epitomise almost everything they dislike most about history. On the other hand, a book that makes a teenage boy who lives

to play rugby turn off the TV must have something going for it! The book in question is Lacey and Danziger's *The year 1000*, and its immense readability teaches a lesson most South African historians urgently need to learn.

Lacey and Danziger have written their representation of medieval life around an illuminated manuscript called *The Julius Work Calendar*, which was produced by a copyist at Canterbury Cathedral round about the year 1020 AD. The calendar, which is written in Latin, was produced to help priests and monks to work out the important dates of the ecclesiastical year according to the Julian calendar. Like a modern calendar, it has a page for each month, each page illustrated with a sketch representing a typical activity of that month. Unlike most modern calendars, it also has 365 lines of rhymes. This doesn't actually sound terribly exciting, but Lacey and Danziger have used the sketches and rhymes to bring all sorts of odd and intriguing details of medieval life in a coherent whole.

In "April" (pp.51 – 64), for instance, we read about Easter, its pre-Christian origins and the celebration of the Eucharist. We read that in those days, it was usually only the priests who actually ate and drank the bread and wine - not for doctrinal reasons but because there was often not enough to go round! Food shortages (like those listed so often in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*) suggest hunger and examples of mass suicides by groups desperate to escape from the physical suffering of starvation. We read that Lent was often a time of scarcity and that fasting was the church's way of making a virtue of necessity, making it a spiritually uplifting state and a way of pressurising God to provide in the coming months. Lent brings us back to Easter again - this time as a feast day. From here, it is easy to move on to what people ate a millennium ago and to fishing as a way of earning a living. It is hard to imagine a feast without drink - mead and also ale and wine, and even harder to think of a feast without guests, which provides a chance to introduce some of the great personalities of the time.

This book offers an unbelievable amount of information about living in England at the turn of the first millennium, especially in view of the limited documentary source material available. The authors are well aware of this limitation:

"The modern chronicler of, say, sexual behaviour at the end of the second millennium already has thirty-six cartons of documents to cover the high jinks of the president of the United States alone - which is thirty or more than the storage space occupied by the modern transcripts of everything surviving in Englisc." (p.71)

In spite of this, historians have used other sources and methodologies

- especially Archaeology - to touch on such unlikely topics as: public health, hygiene, medicine and surgery, crime, marital customs, the power and status of women, mining and coinage as well as more conventional topics such as religious and philosophical ideas, monastic life and famous leaders.

The book is unashamedly popular (and very successful). It makes no claim to present us with new knowledge: instead it uses existing knowledge to answer new questions. Lacey and Danziger began their project by asking “the questions about everyday life and habits that conventional history books often ignore...” (p.203). To answer these questions, they made thorough use of the existing body of knowledge. The bibliography lists 116 secondary sources and translations of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts and the authors acknowledge the help of 54 academics and expert amateurs who provided further knowledge, insights and advice.

All this may be very interesting, but it does not answer the question: “How is a popular book on medieval cultural history relevant for contemporary South African historians? In fact, there are at least four valuable lessons that Lacey and Danziger have for many South African historians.

Firstly, *The year 1000* is structured in a specifically non-narrative way – the arrangement of the contents is emphatically non-narrative. It is neither chronological nor thematic. Instead, the authors move laterally from one topic to another related, but possibly alternatively related one. In this respect, it is rather like the celebrated television series “Connections” in which the presenter moves rapidly and playfully sideways from one historical event to another, making unconventional connections between them. Like the TV programme, the book demands our critical attention and ultimately conveys a vibrant and relevant alternative representation of the past, which some might want to call a “Postmodern” one.

Secondly, in spite of its popular intention, unconventional structure and putative postmodernism, the book is based on thorough research, carried out in academically respectable sources and using acceptable methodologies. This demonstrates beyond doubt that a popular book about the past does not have to be a thumbsuck – quite the contrary. Nor does it have to resort to the popularist technique of legitimating popular opinion by applying an academic veneer to it. Historians may, and indeed ought to, choose research topics that can speak to their own time, but academic integrity (whether “Modern” or “Postmodern”) requires that their projects should be researched and written according to methods that can be accepted in principle by the academic community.

Thirdly, the book is an object lesson in presenting research results. One of this book's more important methodological contributions is that it shows us how a subject far removed from us in cultural time-space can be integrated into our own lifeworlds and made familiar. Using a calendar and the very same months we live by is the most obvious way of connecting the middle ages with the reader's cultural world, as is the consideration of what people expected of the end of the first millennium. Archbishop Wulfstan of York's reputation and social role must become clear to anybody over forty who reads that Wulfstan was "... the Billy Graham of the year 1000, whose fire-and-brimstone sermons had folk trembling." (p.48) The point of all this is that solid research can be presented in a light-hearted way and with contemporary allusions and similes. Indeed, this kind of approach adds value to the research by making it accessible and meaningful to a larger circle of readers.

Lastly, although *The year 1000* consists largely of interesting but apparently trivial snippets of unconnected information, it is not merely an antiquarian compilation: the book has structure and purpose that gives it existential relevance. In their conclusion Lacey and Danziger declare that:

"Whether we today display more wisdom or common humanity is an open question, and as we look back to discover how people coped with the daily difficulties of existence a thousand years ago, we might also consider whether, in all our sophistication, we could meet the challenges of their world with the same fortitude, good humour, and philosophy." (p.201)

Geoff. Allen

RAU

Blik op werk van Schutte die vakman

G.J. SCHUTTE, *Het Calvinistisch Nederland; mythe en werkelijkheid*

Verloren, Hilversum, 2000

256 bladsye

ISBN 90-6550-637-3

Tien artikels en bydraes in versamelwerke deur die Nederlandse historikus Gerrit Schutte, wat ook in Suid-Afrika baie bekend is, is in hierdie boek saamgebundel ter geleentheid van sy sestigste verjaardag.