

Esther Dehoux, Caroline Galland, Catherine Vincent (dir.), Des usages de la grâce. Pratiques des indulgences du Moyen Âge à l'époque contemporaine, Villeneuve-d'Ascq (Presses universitaires du Septentrion) 2021, 490 p., tab. (Histoire et civilisations), ISBN 978-2-7574-3291-4, EUR 32,00.

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Indulgences have undergone a revival in the last decade for 2017 saw the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's »Ninety-five Theses« on indulgences, which was commemorated by numerous academic conferences and publications. The volume »Des usages de la grâce« is one such, emanating from three research meetings held from 2016 to 2018, in response to »a new epistemology of religious history redefined as a social history of religious cultures« (p. 12). It might also be seen as a response to Robert Swanson's work, both his study of medieval English pardons, and his edited volume on European indulgences. Swanson's collection lacked essays on France, an omission which the editors of »Des usages de la grâce« seek to correct with a publication that focuses mostly on French practices, but which also includes wider European examples.

The editors aim to provide a study of the relationship between indulgence theory and practice, over time, from the 11th to the 21st centuries. This is not a work of synthesis but is described as a collective work of case studies, designed to stimulate further reflections. There is little on doctrine, the focus is on the practicalities of pardons: who could grant and disseminate indulgences? How could they be gained? What purpose did they serve? The volume is lengthy, with an introduction, prologue, epilogue, and a further twenty-five short essays. There are too many individual pieces for details, so a flavor of the volume is given here.

The introduction provides an overview of the volume, with a definition of »indulgences«, an outline of how and where they were acquired, and a survey of their historiography. It is followed by a »Prologue« by Yves Krumenacker on the »Ninety-five Theses«. Krumenacker argues that despite its importance in Protestant historiography, the indulgences controversy was of short duration and limited doctrinal importance, for there was no call for a break with Rome, or even an end to pardons, simply moderation in preaching and distribution. But the ultimate result was, of course, secession, and for this reason indulgences were seen as the catalyst for Reformation.

The volume is divided into three parts. »Part I« is on the granting and preaching of indulgences, and the agents involved in their



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creation and dissemination. This is subdivided into three sections: the Papacy, bishops, and preachers. For the Papacy, there are essays on the role of Jerusalem in the origins and evolution of medieval indulgences (M. Rahjohnson); on the changing beneficiaries of indulgences recorded in the registers of the Apostolic Chancery 1216–1378 (A. Le Roux); and on debates on the validity of papal indulgences in the 16th century (B. Schmitz). On bishops, V. Tabbagh examines the attitude of medieval French bishops to papal indulgences and reserved cases; V. Beaulande-Barraud then discusses indulgences and reserved cases in France in the 13th to the 15th centuries; and F. Meyer scrutinises the pedagogy of indulgences of the 17th-century French bishop Jean-Pierre Camus. All three studies demonstrate episcopal concerns to preserve their jurisdictions over pardons, rather than engage in theological debate. For preachers, S. Simiz examines 16th-century controls of indulgence preaching after 1517, and a case study of the sermons of Canon Meurier of Reims. There are also essays on indulgences under Louis XIV and XV, through an examination of a 1775 Parisian calendar of indulgences (I. Brian); and a study of indulgences on internet sites (D. Douyère). Douyère demonstrates that French language YouTube preaching has small audiences, focuses on rescuing indulgences from Reformation criticisms, and opportunities to gain pardons this way are rare.

»Part II« is concerned with how and where indulgences were obtained. The first section is on modalities of communication, with a case study of an indulgence calendar from the 15th-century English Bridgettine convent of Syon House (B. Angeles); an examination of indulgences acquired by confraternities in the Toulouse region in the 17th and 18th centuries (E. Martinazzo); and the communication of indulgences within the Franciscan order since the 17th century, through the Order of the Annunciade and the secular Third Order (P. Moracchini). The second section is on physical items that carried pardons. C. Vincent examines indulgenced prayers in books of hours, specifically the c. 300 books in the BNF catalogued by the Abbé Leroquais, around one fifth of which recorded indulgences; and the relationship between relics and pardons in 17th- and 18th-century France is studied by N. Guyard, who argues that pre-Reformation indulgences were often gained by devotion to relics or visits to sanctuaries, but in the 17th century pardons were more likely linked to a feast of the saint present in their relics. As new saints' relics were obtained, largely from Roman catacombs, indulgences tied them into local liturgical calendars by offering pardons on the days of their translation. The third section examines specific times and places where indulgences could be acquired, particularly sanctuaries. There are two case studies, of late 15th-century Rome (C. Dehoux and A. Lantoine) and 19th-century Notre-Dame-de-la-Font-Sainte in the Cantal hills (P. Martin). Across time, pardons provided a means of orienting visitors' piety through directing where they should visit and what they should pray, and they attached localities more closely to Rome, from whence they came.



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»Part III« is devoted to political and economic roles of indulgences. Economic functions are represented with case studies of the friars of Central Europe 1220–1520 (M.-M. de Cevins); the role of indulgences in fund-raising for the reconstruction of the bell tower of Sainte-Geneviève of Paris after a fire in 1483 (É. Hamon); and the use of pardons in the building of the basilica-cathedral of Notre-Dame-de-la-Treille in Lille, commenced in 1854 and finished in the 1990s (F. Vienne). Pardon politics are examined through their role in the foundation legends of shrines, where they validated origin traditions when these were based on myth, such as Santiago de Compostela (N. Balzamo). C. Gallant looks at debates around pardons in Assemblies of Clergy in France in the 17th and 18th centuries and finds that their main concern was to reinforce episcopal authority over pardons. O. Rota explores indulgences in English Catholicism in the 19th and 20th centuries, and F. Gugelot discusses the Roman jubilee held in the archdiocese of Paris in 1951, and its relationship to peace, Communism and post-war reconciliation. An epilogue is provided by G. Cachet, on Vatican II and indulgences. Paul VI withdrew the discussion of indulgences from the council and commissioned Cardinal Journet to reform pardons – producing »Indulgentiarum doctrina« in January 1967. By this time, however, indulgences were in decline, along with traditional beliefs about afterlife. Yet jubilee years remain popular, as understandings of the mechanisms of salvation shift.

The strengths of the volume lie in its study of indulgences across time, up to the present day. The essays are well-written case studies based on new archival research. Each one includes a list of primary sources used, and there is an overall bibliography of secondary sources cited. As for limitations, there are three. There was no discussion of indulgenced objects, particularly rosaries and medals. There was no global perspective, from the empires of the Catholic European states or the modern world. There was no overall concluding synthesis of themes such as a growing emphasis on place and time, papal authority and standardization. But this is a rich and varied collection, which should be read by any historian interested in the relationship between theory and practice in religious life.

Mittelalter – Moyen Âge (500–1500)

DOI:
[10.11588/frrec.2024.1.103051](https://doi.org/10.11588/frrec.2024.1.103051)

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