

Editorial

Last year was a busy one for Misericordia International and 1997 promises to be even busier.

Private subscriptions to *The Profane Arts* have remained about the same but library subscriptions have increased. Some of the most prestigious libraries are now receiving our journal. We hope to triple library subscriptions this year and ask all our subscribers to contact their professional and local libraries and urge them to make misericords and the profane arts an intriguing part of their lives. We realize that budgets are very tight but we hope for the best.

In 1996, Misericordia International was represented at the medieval congresses at Plymouth, New Hampshire; Kalamazoo, Michigan; Leeds, England; Caen in Normandie; and Tokyo, Japan. The audience in Tokyo was particularly valuable since few of the Japanese students had heard of misericords. Now they at least know what they are!

Several publications appeared in 1996 that were devoted to misericords. Christa Grossinger emphasizes the Topsy Turvy world of misericords in her book published by Harvey Miller. Misericords in Yorkshire, by Ben Chapman leaves a lot to be desired but at least there is a list and some attempt at analysis of misericords in that part of England. Ulrike Bergman has turned her thesis into a guidebook on the choir stalls of Cologne Cathedral. The tiny church of Saint-Genest in the department of the Cote d'Or in France published a little booklet, well illustrated with a satisfactory text. No year has yet passed with publication of four new books on misericords. May this be an indication of the future.

We have added a new section to *The Profane Arts* at the suggestion of Phyllis Roberts. We hope to expand the *Exemplum Corner* relating the ethical mini-dramas in sermons with illustrations in sculpture, frescoes and manuscript marginalia. Any suggestions and contributions will be appreciated.

Probably the most important event in Misericordia's life last year was the start of an organization to support and protect the choir stalls in Picardie, especially those at Saint-Martin-aux-Bois, which are in danger of utter ruin. These Picarde stalls, second in interest and beauty only to the immense set of choir stalls at the cathedral of Amiens, are in a small chapel north of Paris in the Oise Valley. The chapel is all that remains of an important abbey, destroyed during the hundred years war. The chapel stands in a wheat field and the entrance is through a farm. Some of the farm buildings are built on the foundations of the old abbey structures.

Security at the chapel is non-existent. The key is at the town cafe, the only commercial spot in the town, and anyone can request it. The door looks like it leads to a barn and only when one enters is one struck with the beauty of the interior, its long rows of windows lighting the choir. A number of pigeons, entering through broken windows, make their nests on the choir stalls. The stalls themselves have splotches of old paint, are too dry and in poor condition. Two banks of stalls are posed precariously before the windows. The local community does not have the resources necessary to start the renovation process. We hope that we can provide a spark and some seed money through our organization *Les Stalles de Picardie* and thus convince the Monument Historique to make the restoration of these stalls a priority.

The officers of the organization — Elaine C. Block, Kristiane Lemé, and Frédéric Billiet, (the latter two being Picardes) — meet regularly to plan strategy. One major meeting in January, 1997, organized with the help of Jacques Buiret, resulted in a number of new members and the election of a Board of Trustees: Jacques Buiret, Priscilla Baumann, Ariela Erez, and Bernadette O'Neil. For further information contact K. Lemé at 58 rue du 11 novembre, Condé-Folie 80890, France.

Four articles in this issue, plus an introduction, are concerned with Saint-Martin-aux-Bois and other choir stalls in Picardie. Kristiane Lemé, who wrote her thesis at the Sorbonne on choir stalls in the north of France, provides us with a background on the chapel and its stalls.

Elaine C. Block describes the iconography of the more important misericord carvings at Saint-Martin.

Pierre-Yves Le Pogam, curator at the Musée national du Moyen Age tells the history of the collection of choir stalls in the museum. Most of these come from Saint-Lucien-de-Beauvais, ruined during the reolution, saved by patrons of the arts, and purchased for the museum. They are Picardie stalls, related in style to those at Saint-Martin.

We are privileged to have an excerpt from a book, now out-of-print, on music on the choir stalls of the cathedral at Amiens, by Frédéric Billiet.

The final article related to Saint-Martin concerns a misericord at the cathedral of Laon, which has a theme similar to one at Saint-Martin.

Two general articles follow the special section. Joan Baker discusses the role of an ape in the Middle English romance *Robert of Sicily*. Naoë Yoshikawa investigates the relationship of the ancient grain goddess to the iconography of medieval bake ovens.

Our book reviewer, N. Lee Wood, is highly successful with her "other life" as writer of science fiction and thrillers. *Looking for the Mahdi* seems to be translated into another language every week. Her latest book begins at a medieval conference and follows one character who studies misericords. We will keep you posted!

The last section of *The Profane Arts* gives our readers information on exhibits, publications and colloquia. We hope that each of you will send us information on forthcoming events of interest that we can include in the fall, 1997 issue.

One final word. Misericordia International is planning its Third International Congress on *Misericords and Frescoes in Catalonia* to be held in Barcelona July 3-6, 1997. We will have access to the choir stalls at the Barcelona Cathedral and at Gerona. We plan a journey into the mountains to see the Catalonian churches, their carvings and frescoes. We are arranging for other Spanish churches to be open to our group so that anyone who wishes to continue traveling in Spain to see the stalls at León Astorga Toledo,

Plasencia and other cities can proceed more or less independently or in tandem. Information on all the choir stalls in Spain will be available at the Barcelona colloquium.

Please note the registration form at the end of this issue and join us for a good time and a "learned" experience.



Saint Jerome

Jouée Saint-Martin-aux-Bois