SOCIETY AND THE SACRED
In this final section, two case studies—the first situated in late medieval Flanders and the second in Anglo-Saxon England—examine how medieval beliefs and religious practices connected with the saints both informed and were informed by changes in contemporary society. During the fifteenth century, ad hoc processions displayed more saints’ relics on the streets of Bruges than ever before. In “Perceptions of Relics: Civic Religion in Late Medieval Bruges,” Andrew Brown argues that besides reflecting anxiety at the growing threats to order within Bruges and the Low Countries as a whole, the increase in processions may be explained by considering who initiated and controlled them. Although they had originated in an ecclesiastical context, by the fifteenth century, the civic government had begun to assume authority over processions and to control when and how relics were seen. The creation of a ‘civic Christianity’, noted by Gary Dickson in his work on local saints’ cults in Perugia, is thus observable in Bruges. But unlike the city-states of northern Italy, the towns of the Burgundian Low Countries were increasingly dominated by princely authorities who themselves sought to exert control over relics and processions. The author explains why ‘civic Christianity’ in Bruges could never be entirely ‘civic’, and why it did not incorporate, as it did in Perugia, the newer ‘enthusiasms’ of mendicant devotion.

Alaric Hall reveals how the hagiography surrounding the Anglo-Saxon saint, Guthlac, provides unique opportunities for investigating the place of saints’ cults in Anglo-Saxon society in “Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity: Tradition, Innovation and Saint Guthlac.” As one of England’s first home-grown saints, Guthlac enjoyed special prominence in Anglo-Saxon culture. Besides being the subject of some of England’s earliest Latin hagiography, Guthlac is the only native saint to have received hagiography in the form of Old English poetry. Moreover, while the majority of Old English poetry was closely based on Latin sources, the long poem, Guthlac A, was not. This study examines this unusual poem’s combination of an Anglo-Saxon subject and medium with a Christian literary genre, and analyses Guthlac A’s portrayal of St. Guthlac as a monster-fighter in the context of other Anglo-Saxon handleings of monster-fighting, principally Beowulf. The author argues that Guthlac A can be seen to invert traditional Anglo-Saxon notions of monster-fighting in order to emphasize that Guthlac’s peaceful invocations of God and the saints are superior to physical violence. As well,