HOSPITALITY AND HOUSEHOLD

BISHOP METFORD'S HOUSEHOLD ACCOUNTS

October 1406-June 1407

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by

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Frontispiece: Bishop Richard Metford's tomb in the south choir aisle of Salisbury Cathedral

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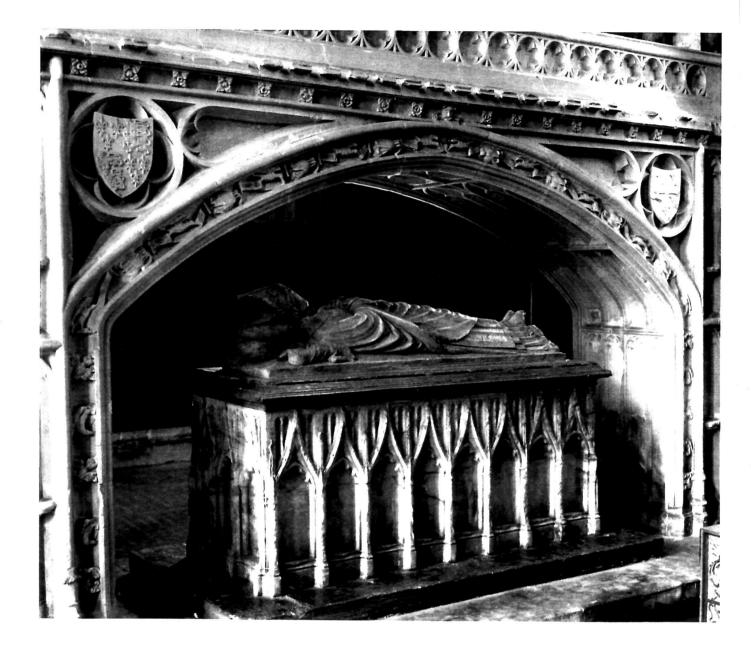
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SUMMARY

To date very little work of a quantitative nature has been devoted to hospitality in the Middle Ages. Statements and assumptions have been made as to the level and quality of hospitality, but they have seldom been supported by hard data. The recent publication of the household accounts of the bishop of Salisbury for October 1406 to June 1407 provides a rare opportunity to determine not only the quantity of material goods and services involved in the provision of hospitality in the context of a late medieval household, but also the proportion of household expenditure and annual income devoted to the fulfilment of that obligation. Bishop Metford's household accounts relate to the episcopal manors of Woodford and Potterne in Wiltshire, both some distance from Salisbury itself, where the dean and chapter held sway in the cathedral. Despite this apparent isolation in the countryside, which was not uncommon with bishops of secular cathedrals, the accounts reveal an extraordinarily active programme of hospitality. By analysing the data using EXCEL 2000, this study shows that about fifty percent of annual income was expended on maintaining the bishop's household and twenty percent of that - or ten percent of annual income - was spent on hospitality.

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