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Book Reviews

Intellectual Culture in Medieval Scandinavia, c. 1100–1350. Edited by Stefka Georgieva Eriksen. Disputatio, 28. Turnhout: Brepols, 2016. Pp. xii + 442; 28 illustrations. EUR 110.

This volume, edited by Stefka Georgieva Eriksen, collects thirteen essays by Norwegian, Swedish, Icelandic, English, and American scholars and chimes in with recent developments in Norse scholarship on the provenance and adaptation of foreign textual and material culture in Medieval Scandinavia. The subject matter of the essays—which investigates distinctive aspects of literary texts, manuscripts, grammar, philosophy, theology, liturgy, sculpture, laws, and architecture taught, practiced, and produced in the West Norse area (ca. 1100–1350)—has its origin in the editor's postdoctoral project "Attitudes to the Knowledge in Medieval Scandinavia" conducted at the University of Oslo (2011–15) and in a conference entitled "The Making of Intellectual Culture in Medieval Scandinavia" held at the same university and attended by the authors in January 2012.

In the first general introduction, Eriksen stresses the cognitive approaches and intentions of the volume. Intellectual culture is investigated as a reflection on the thinkers' own cognition, namely, their mental faculty of acquiring knowledge and awareness as well as processing experience, perception, memory, senses, and verbal thinking. Consequently, great emphasis is placed on the intellectuals' translation and adaptation of the cultural expression in order to serve a purpose of a certain target culture and on its idealization through different medias (p. 9). Within these premises, the editor explains the aim of the book as that of elucidating on "the variety of intellectual and ideational processes that lie behind, and are inspired by, the textual and material culture of Medieval Scandinavia," as well as explaining the complexity of this process, "not by means of the traditional dichotomies of written vs. oral material, Latin vs. vernacular, lay vs. secular, European vs. Nordic, but in terms of the cognition of the creative individuals where the various faculties . . . are inevitably and constantly linked" (p. 26). The opening essay, by Gunnar Harðarson, serves as a second historical introduction to the following studies. The author analyses the intellectual matrix of Old Norse culture by reviewing the treatment of the traditional medieval disciplines of the *trivium* (grammar, dialectic, rhetoric) along with theology and law from several examples of Old Norse literary sources. Besides the vernacular texts, the author also sketches the backgrounds and careers of some of the most eminent intellectuals of the Norse Middle Ages: Snorri Sturluson (†1241), King Magnús Hákonarson (†1280), Sturla Þórðarson (†1284), and the lawspeaker Haukr Erlendsson (†1334). He stresses how, while Swedish and Danish scholars contributed directly to the European common culture and Latin learning, Norwegian and Icelandic intellectuals adjusted the original matter according to the demands of their target culture and for purposes of their own, producing a highly original synthesis of Latin learning and vernacular textuality.

The two introductions are followed by eleven essays collected in three main sections and respectively dedicated to the interplay between the intellectuals' individual concerns and the local ideological and political circumstances ("Negotiating Identity"); the importance of figurative images in thinking and learning ("Thinking in Figures"); and the link between participation to the mundane life

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and the spiritual preparation for the heavenly kingdom ("Worldly Existence and Heavenly Salvation").

"Negotiating Identity" opens with Ian P. Wei's essay on the organization and intricacy of the academic discourses of the Parisian masters of theology, institutions with which Scandinavian clerics must have been highly familiar. Public quodlibetal disputations—in which the masters were asked by an audience of clerics abstract questions on philosophical and theological matters and more concrete concerns on contemporary and political issues— gradually ranked them to the summit of hierarchical learning. Wei looks specifically into how they constructed their authority in two domains that displayed a lack of normativity: money and marriage. He notices how, when they sought to engage with perceived social realities, Parisian scholars operated on both explicit and implicit levels and their discourses became noticeably more unstable and multilayered.

The section proceeds with Kjartan Hauglid's survey on the use and circulation of the so-called "sunken star" in Norwegian Romanesque churches. A Norman architectural ornament that developed under the patronage of William the Conqueror (†1087), outside Anglo-Norman England the "sunken star" is only found in Norwegian stone churches. In order to elucidate on such a peculiar acquisition, Haugild resorts to Latin and Old Norse sources that claimed that the Dukes of Normandy were descended from the Norwegian royal family, most notably the *Leges Edwardi Confessoris*, *Historia Norvegiae*, *Orkneyinga saga*, and *Passio Olavi*. He notices a formal correspondence of the "sunken star" with the rhetorical style of imported literature in medieval Scandinavia, such as the *riddara sögur* or translations from Latin, and suggests that this decorative feature was specifically introduced by Norwegian kings to propagate their political identity and to emphasize their status as secular rulers in juxtaposition to the Church.

In the third essay, Bjørn Bandlien identifies three literary strategies in Old Norse texts written at the turn of the thirteenth century that portray Icelandic intellectuals. According to Bandlien, figures of Skálholt were portrayed as courtly bishops and perfect householders, well-dressed and well-mannered, as testified by examples form *Hungrvaka* and *Páls saga*. Protectors of Christianity against the demonic wilderness are especially associated with the Benedictine monastery of Þingeyrar and the see of Hólar. A third typology, the ascetic bishop, who embodies the virtues of meekness, steadfastness, and sexual abstinence is represented by the saintly figure of Þorlákr alone. The author suggests that all three strategies may be combined and applied at various degrees depending on the specific context and purpose of the text and resorts to examples from *Sverris saga*, in which he notices that while the text is permeated with the aforementioned Benedictine conflict against evil forces, courtly and ascetic elements have also been attributed to the king.

In the following essay, Kristoffer Vadum surveys the composition of *Jóns saga baptista* II and places its political argumentation within the critical situation of the Icelandic Church in the late 1280s. According to author, the narrative hints at the violent polemic against secular authorities during the regency of Árni Þorláksson (†1298), tenth bishop of Skálholt, who wrested control over church property from Icelandic magnates. He examines in detail Chapter 19, where the regular course of the hagiographical text is halted to include passages from Raymond of Peñafort's (†1275) widely circulated penitential manual *Summa de casibus poenitentiae*. As forerunner of the Savior and *vox clamantis in deserto*, John the Baptist is seen here as the most suitable mouthpiece for such political propaganda. Since

translations and excerpts from the *Summa de casibus* are known to have been read aloud to congregations or even attached to church walls, it seems likely that this hagiographical piece subtly influenced a wider audience without making Grímr and Árni's circle incur the wrath of the secular chieftains.

The second section, "Thinking in Figures," opens with Rita Copeland's overview of the development of innovative methods in the studies of grammar and rhetoric throughout twelfth- and thirteenth-century Europe. After sketching the different receptions of Latin lore of grammar and rhetoric in the Italian, French, and English vernaculars, Copeland concentrates on their adoption in Western Scandinavia. As is known, Old Norse preserves the only medieval translations of Aelius Donatus's *Barbarismus* and sections of Priscian's *Institutiones*, respectively, from the fourth and the sixth century, which were suitably integrated into the *Third Grammatical Treatise* (ca. 1250). Copeland concludes the essay by remarking how the Third Grammarian integrated the ancient doctrine of rhetorical figures and tropes from classical antiquity with practical examples of skaldic poetry and turned to these authoritative works to meditate upon vernacular theories of language and rhetoric, an unusual approach that represents a unicum in medieval Europe.

In the following essay, Åslaug Ommundsen presents an array of Latin sources of education from medieval Norway and Iceland that have been discovered in recent years. Following the selection of texts normally chosen for schooling throughout the Middle Ages, Ommundsen provides crucial evidence for the use of Latin psalters and grammar in Western Scandinavia. Latin Psalters were undoubtedly widely circulated and are today represented by five codices and seventy-five surviving fragments. In terms of grammatical texts, the author examines a fragment of Donatus's *Ars minor* that was unearthed from the floorboards of the Lom Stave Church (Oppland) in 1973; a fragment of Alexander de Villa-Dei's *Doctrinale* employed to bind some paper documents at the Hanseatic Bergenfahrer Archives in Lübeck; and the *Distica Catonis*, which, in addition to their original form were also known in Iceland through the compendium *Liber Catonianus* (fragments of which are preserved in Þjms. 103 and 104 at the National Library) and in Norway, where it is cited among the so-called *Auctores Octo*, a work that is listed among the books in possession of Árni Sigurðarson of Bergen (†1314). Ommundsen reaches the conclusion that although scanty, manuscript evidence seems to confirm that in terms of grammar, Norway and Iceland followed the general European trends, and that in Western Scandinavia a relatively high competence in the Latin language was held throughout the Middle Ages.

In the third essay of this section, Mikael Males identifies three phases of scholarly approaches within the production of what he defines as "vernacular *grammatica*" in medieval Iceland. He recognizes a first twelfth-century phase characterized by the establishment of rules concerning orthography and metrics for the analysis of language and poetry that is best represented by the *First Grammatical Treatise* (ca. 1150) and *Háttalykill*, a list of meters transmitted in *Orkneyinga saga* (ca. 1230). In a second thirteenth-century phase, which corresponds to the composition of the *Third Grammatical Treatise* by Ólafur Þórðarson (ca. 1250), vernacular *grammatica* is applied to the production of new authoritative poetry, and skaldic verses are given the prominence of classic Latin poetry. According to the author, a similar view to that of Ólafr's is shared by his eminent uncle, Snorri Sturluson (†1241), who also regarded Scandinavian skalds as classic poets and yet made a

clear distinction between "ancient poets" (*fornskáld*), which he advises to simply read and enjoy, and "main poets" (*hǫfuðkáld*), which instead should be taken as models by the new poets. A third fourteenth-century phase is exemplified by the Prologue to the four grammatical treatises that precedes them in *Hauksbók* (ca. 1350) and coincides with a lack of poetic composition pseudonymously attributed to the older poets; it is an absence that according to the author mirrors a less vivid interest in the poetic past.

Mats Malm surveys the different approaches developed in medieval Iceland and Sweden with regard to verbal gaze and visual cognition, namely, the ability on the part of the speaker/writer to use verbal dexterity to help the audience achieve vivid visualization. Malm notes that while Iceland's verbal gaze emerged spontaneously in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and was only subsequently theorized with the aid of Latin learning, in fourteenth-century Vadstena such strategies that permeated the visions of St Birgitta (†1373), which were influenced by the literary legacy of her confessor, Magister Mathias of Linköping (ca. †1350), were first imported and based on European learning and only later developed through indigenous strategies. In Iceland in particular, the learned tradition was introduced to consolidate poetological terminology—the idea behind the word *kenning*, for instance, is ultimately derived from Latin theories and practices of memory that were first introduced with Christian teachings, while the literary trope itself had already been in existence and was widely used. Contrarily, Mathias of Linköping's theoretical and practical verbal gaze was built on common Latin learning and on the procedures of Christian homiletics, and his literary works necessarily influenced Birgitta's own verbal dexterity and the entire writing community at Vadstena Abbey.

The following section, "Worldly Existence and Heavenly Salvation," opens with Sigurd Hareide's study, which represents a first survey on the seldom investigated genre of the *expositio missae* in West Norse tradition. The Mass was naturally regarded as the highest of rituals throughout the Middle Ages, and devotees attended it to be allegorically united with the Passion and Resurrection of Christ and for its eschatological promise of the heavenly kingdom. Hareide notices that given the significance of the text, Norse translators did not alter the original expositions easily and that while the illiterate certainly did not understand the sentences of the *proprium missae*—a section that varies substantially throughout the liturgical year—numerous translations of the *ordinarium missae* have survived, very likely because its text remains considerably more stable. The author concludes his study by remarking how Old Norse homilies and expositions were very likely performed with two aims: on one level they deepened the faith of the future priests and monks, who were preparing for service, and on another they presented ordinary people on Sundays and holy days with services they were obliged to attend.

In the following essay, Kristin B. Aavitsland inspects at close range the golden altar of the Lisbjerg church (near Aarhus) and the iconography of its personified virtues. She notices how the altar seems to reflect a tendency to converge a traditional soteriological interpretation of virtues—as, for instance, professed in Bernard of Clairvaux's (†1153) *De filio regis*— with more practical instructions for the elite who commissioned the artwork on how to virtuously conduct oneself within society. Six virtues—Peace, Hope, Faith, Patience, Charity, and Modesty—are depicted along with, and associated with, two female saints, Brigid of Ireland (†525) and Thecla of Kitzingen (†790), who undoubtedly represented excellent personifications and

examples of virtues. Aavitsland concludes her essay by suggesting how the *imitatio Christi* is properly seen as an issue of pedagogy that was widespread in early medieval Europe and became popular in twelfth-century Scandinavia and might underlie the aspirations to imitate Christ on the part of the Danish royal family. Such an attempt might have motivated Valdemar I (†1182) and Archbishop Eskil of Lund (†1181) to canonize Valdemar's father, King Canute Lavard (†1131).

The final essay, by Stefka G. Eriksen, investigates two examples of body-and-soul debates that have survived in Old Norse tradition: *Einn laugardag at kveldi*, a thirteenth-century translation of the Old French poem *Un samedi par nuit*, extant in the *Norwegian Homily Book* and in two Icelandic manuscripts (AM 764 4to and AM 696 XXXII 4to); and *Viðrøða líkams ok sálar*, a translation of Hugh of Saint-Victor's *Soliloquium de arrha aniamae*, transmitted in codex unicus in Hauksbók (ca. 1310). Eriksen argues for two different targets of the texts: while the first is centred on punishment and on the consequence of sinning and might have been specifically intended for an audience of Augustinians in Bergen, the second was compiled by Haukr Erlendsson (†1334), an Icelandic lawman and knight in Norway, who surely benefited from the moral meditations of the *Soliloquium* throughout his career as political figure and for his own ethical development. According to the author, in medieval Scandinavia these two texts served both priests and the elite as a link between abstract theology and the practice of a good ethic in everyday life. Eriksen concludes by reminding the readers how ethical development and spiritual perfection were essential components within clerical and secular intellectual culture.

This volume of essays has certainly brought new knowledge to the surface and represents an excellent start for future research. In this respect, the essays by Hauglid, Vadum, Ommundsen, Hareide, Aavitsland, and Eriksen are particularly commendable and worthy of note, since they have dug in nearly unexplored territory. However original and needed, some essays appear to miss significant information and references that would have made the discussion more cogent and would have been valuable to an audience of philologists, historians, and archivists, which represent a great portion of scholars to whom the miscellany is aimed. Four omissions in order of their appearance seem particularly onerous:

- At the beginning of his discussion, Bjørn Bandlien (p. 138) mentions an important list of forty high-born Icelandic priests dated 1143 but does not provide full reference to the manuscript containing it, nor does he mention the edition consulted. The four leaves transmitting the so-called *Nöfn nakkverra presta kynborinna íslenzkra* are extant in a very well-known manuscript, Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, GkS 1812 4to, f. 5ra-b (ONP ca. 1225–1250), and the text is edited in DI vol. 1, pp. 185–186. Readers should have been reminded of the later date of a document that bears a high historical value within the author's presentation of the twelfth century.
- In his presentation of the reception of Raymond of Peñafort's *Summa de casibus poenitentiae*, Kristoffer Vadum (p. 176) does not include a yet unedited theological text extant on ff. 63r-88v of AM 672 4to (ONP ca. 1450–1500), in which "Meistari Raimundus" is mentioned several times. The text is very likely a translation of sections of the *Summa de casibus*, given the fact that several other neighboring texts are also centered on sins and their expiation. (A first diplomatic and digital edition of the entire codex, by Kirsten Wolf entitled *The Priest's Eye: A Handbook for Priests from Medieval Iceland*, and is forthcoming in the Manuscripta Nordica series.)
- When introducing the genre of *messuskýringar*, allegorical commentaries on the texts and actions of the Mass, Sigurd Hareide remarks that the Old Norse com-

pound calquing the Latin *expositio missae* first appears "as a heading for a manuscript from about 1400" (p. 342). These are three fragmentary leaves, Copenhagen, Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, AM 238 XXVI fol. (ONP ca. 1400), in which the rubric on f. 2r precedes the same exposition built on Honorius Augustodunensis' (†1154) *Gemma animae* that is also extant in the Norwegian Homily Book (AM 619 4to, ff. 69r-71v; Indrebø 160–167). Such information could have turned handy to the readers, especially since the ONP does not seem to record a voice for *messuskýring*, whereas some seventy-four nominal compounds with the noun *messu-* as first element are registered.

- In agreement with Kirsten Berg (2010), Stefka G. Eriksen advances the theory that the Norwegian Homily Book (ca. 1200) might have been intended for schooling purposes, and that its place of production should be identified within the Augustinian circle in Bergen, either the cathedral chapter or Jonskloster. In order to support this theory, the author selects and discusses certain extracts from *Einn laugardag at kveldi* that are reminiscent of Augustine's reflections on consciousness, thought, memory, faith, hope, love, knowledge, wisdom, etc. However, while the Norse passages are carefully quoted from Indrebø's 1931 edition and constantly accompanied by English translations, Latin originals are never cited, and the entire discussion on fundamental philosophical issues is based exclusively on general introductions to medieval philosophy and their treatment of Augustine (pp. 403–4). A similar procedure is followed in her analysis on the relations between *Viðrøða líkams ok sálar* and its source-text (p. 415). The Norse text is here compared to a 1984 English translation of Hugh of Saint-Victor's *Soliloquium de arrha aniamae* by Kevin Herbert, while no information is given on the stability/mouvance of the Latin text nor on the very manuscript followed for the translation, its context or age.

Perhaps one of the most important conclusions of this volume is one that has been reached in the three essays by Wei, Hareide, and Eriksen. Hereide and Eriksen have distinguished a similar discourse organization and homiletic approach in Old Norse theological texts dating from the early twelfth to the fourteenth centuries. Latin exposition of Masses and theological soul-and-body dialogues that were translated in Iceland and Norway in this period seem to dichotomically conflate and combine abstract theological matters with more ethical and moral theological prescriptions that are commonplace of everyday life. The advantage of such doctrinal and moralizing operations is naturally that the vernacular text(s) could reach the highest number of devotees, and concurrently address clerics, monks, chieftains, and ordinary people who, if any, only had a very rudimental grasp of the Latin language and theology. As shown in Wei's essay, this approach is also typical of late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century academic discourses of the Parisian masters of theology and was undoubtedly acquired by Icelandic and Norse clerics at foreign universities during studies abroad, France in particular.

Collectively, the individual essays in this wide-ranging collection will be of considerable interest and value to present and future research in the field of Old Norse–Icelandic studies. Besides the novelty and breadth of the material treated, this volume provides a creditable example of fruitful insights that can be drawn from the interplay of various subjects encompassed in the intellectual life of medieval Norway and Iceland. Eriksen, in particular, should be lauded for successfully conceiving and coordinating a profitable scholarly dialogue among twelve well-known scholars, who illuminate on a great variety of intellectual activities and processes underlying the textual and material culture of medieval Scandinavia.

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