

## Book Reviews

Henning Laugerud, Salvador Ryan and Laura Katrine Skinnebach, eds. *The Materiality of Devotion in Late Medieval Northern Europe: Images, Objects and Practices*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2016, pp. x + 191, €26.95, ISBN 978-1-84682-503-3

One of the very lovely things about this volume is the way in which the authors interact with each other's work, both commenting on and building upon ideas across the articles. This is not just a collection of articles around a particular theme, but a volume which tries to integrate information and ideas across the individual pieces, as demonstrated by the shared section of colour plates that illustrate the articles and the jointly shared bibliography at the end of the volume. This limits the notes within the articles, but makes the range of works consulted easier to see as a whole. This approach is very helpful—the references make clear what could be consulted further and the bibliography points to works that might not otherwise be considered. Once in a while it can read as though the authors are addressing each other a little exclusively, rather than a more general audience, but this is a minor consideration.

Given the geographic and temporal range of the articles, it is likely that most readers will discover something unfamiliar to them in terms of the sources or approach used, yet which still provides resonance with ideas from more familiar material. My own interest in St. Jean Baptiste in Amiens has now been augmented by learning about German reliquaries which utilize the familiar head, but in ways previously unfamiliar to me. Other readers will have similar experiences. The editors provide an introduction to each piece in the anthology (pp. 7-9), so this review will offer a brief selection of some highlights from my perspective.

Berndt Hamm focuses on a definition of the “mediation of grace” and the multiple ways that individuals can access grace. He observes that access to grace became ‘near, effortlessly available, local grace’ (p. 24). Print technology, among other options, therefore increases access to grace, for those willing to do the minimum to obtain it. Hamm however, dismisses the importance of the individuality of grace mediation as setting the stage for the Reformation, at least in terms of individual experience rather than theology. Nonetheless, the nearness of grace in the late medieval period is given a full and effective treatment.

Rob Faesen provides a detailed *explication de texte* of a very dense text. He challenges some of the prevailing views of Hadewijch's

Eucharistic *Vision 7-8*, while at the same time providing an entry for readers less familiar with Hadewijch's work, possibly the first vernacular collection of visions that describe an individual vision of heaven and God. Henning Laugerud analyses the ways in which images and medieval memory systems interact with visions. He uses Cicero and Augustine, among others, to help us connect with the medieval understanding of how God would present himself in a vision—i.e., in a direct visual interaction with a human being. 'If God is to reveal Himself, He must do it in a way that the human intellect can acknowledge. In order to be visible, He must be recognizable' (p. 68). The medieval visionary thus sees God in signs and situations that are familiar from images or experiences. Thus memory acts as a path into both understanding and creating the vision, since memory (and memory systems) are in fact individual creative acts.

Salvador Ryan makes the case that in spite of limited extant materials for Ireland (compared to other places during the same time period), there is enough to indicate that 'the influence of mystical thought on the late medieval Irish devotional world was greater than has previously been acknowledged' (p. 71). His discussion of the wounds of Christ and the devotional paths both into and out of Christ's body is extremely interesting and he makes some nice parallels between Irish poetry and other late medieval devotional materials.

Laura Skinnebach outlines the connections between the 'devout *sensorium*' (p. 92) and devotional actions. She provides an interesting example from an early 16<sup>th</sup> century Danish prayer book and attempts to reconstruct the practice described there. This and other examples (the Vera Icon, Henry Suso, etc.) illustrate the creation of physical objects capable of sensory apprehension. In effect the divine becomes physical so that the believer can interact with it devotionally.

Soetkin Vanhauwaert and Georg Geml's contribution raises interesting questions, even if they remain unanswered. They explore the relationship between the materials and formats used to make reliquaries and the relics they contain. Do the materials make the reliquary more or less valuable, is it the relics that make the reliquary more valuable, or some combination of both? Rather than thinking that there is some universally accepted standard for what constitutes a reliquary/statue/image across time periods and geographic areas of Europe, they explore the ways in which the container and the contained have a more complicated relationship than often imagined. Using a trans-European image, they explore this issue, particularly with respect to materials and the hidden/visible nature of relics contained in heads of John the Baptist (*Johannesschüssel*).

Barbara Baert's contribution on the Annunciation and the senses certainly covers the pictorial gaze in the Annunciation, but more fascinating are her excursions into the other senses, both in the

Annunciation and in multiple other medieval themes. It is difficult to adequately outline here the range of ideas that Baert covers in a mere 25 pages. She travels from the 8<sup>th</sup> century to Susan Sontag, uses source material from Gnostic sources, illuminates a buttonhole, and suggests that the sense of smell is highly underrated in our understanding of the visual.

Hans Henrik Lohfert Jorgensen discusses how the medieval and early modern amplification of the senses through objects, rituals, buildings, etc., act to bring the devout closer to God, not further away. He argues that instrumentation acts as an extension of the body and engages the devout in activity that assists the sensorium, rather than separating the individual from the divine. Examples such as the rosary or the sacred ointment of St. Nicholas are used to argue that sensory mediation creates experience that would otherwise not exist.

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Patrick H. Martin, *Elizabethan Espionage: Plotters and Spies in the Struggle Between Catholicism and the Crown*, Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland Books, 2016, pp. 368, \$49.95, ISBN: 978-1-4766-6255-8

In this exhaustively researched book, Patrick H. Martin aims to rehabilitate Elizabethan Catholics' reputation from a traditional charge of terrorism. English Catholics were viewed as willing participants in violence sponsored by Rome, Spain or France. This was intended to draw Elizabeth's subjects from their allegiance to her through a series of regicidal plots lasting from the 1580s to the accession of James I. Martin shifts the focus of the investigation into Elizabethan espionage from the conventional concern for Francis Walsingham and his spying, which have been well researched by Conyers Read, and recently by John Cooper and Stephen Alford, towards Catholic counter-espionage.

Any attempt to understand Elizabethan espionage, undertaken by both Protestants and the Catholics, is hampered by the intractability of fragmentary archives. Substantial quantities of intelligence reports were burned after they were read, in accordance with instructions, or vanished either deliberately or accidentally after spymasters' deaths. Through the resourcefulness of William Sterrell, the principal mole of the English Catholics at Elizabeth's court, Martin traces the establishment of the labyrinthine Catholic counter-espionage machine, which functioned effectively between 1594 and 1603. He offers the first comprehensive study of the intricate interrelationship