

Karl Enenkel and Henk Nellen, eds. *Neo-Latin Commentaries and the Management of Knowledge in the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period (1400–1700)*.

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*Encyclopedic* may be ascribed to several ages of Western intellectual history: the ancient Alexandrian, the Severan, and the medieval Scholastic periods qualify for their synthetic activity, as does the present digital age. Today's scholars contribute to a rapid proliferation of guidebooks, handbooks, and compendiums, over which academic publishers compete. It is useful to see how an earlier age experienced a similar burst of encyclopedic activity.

The early modern centuries (1400 to 1700), which are the focus of a collection of studies edited by Karl Enenkel and Henk Nellen, experienced the riches and the bane of information overload. Commentaries on authoritative source texts were a sometimes strained medium for transmitting broad knowledge. Frequently eclectic, multidisciplinary, and composed for various practical aims, commentaries were not restricted to text criticism but included political, scientific, and ethical instruction in varying proportion according to the interests of both author and the original interpretive community.

Researchers often neglect early modern commentaries owing partly because there has been a change in standards for the genre. But since our preference in commentaries answers Juan Luis Vives's appeal "Dum in alium scribis, illi est ubique subserviendum" (11) more than his own age did, we risk failing to understand the way commentaries were composed and used. The volume offers a detailed introduction and thirteen essays addressing five types of source text: history and geography, Latin poetry, works for the theater, Roman law, and the Bible.

Karl Enenkel's article discussing two commentaries on *De dictis et factis Alphonsi Regis Aragonum* (1455), a *Fürstenspiegel* (mirror for princes) modeled on classical sources, shows how commentators aimed to guide aristocratic behavior, conversation, and views on politics, history, geography, and natural science. These case studies are meant to show how readers could acquire a broad humanist education from commentaries.

Craig Kallendorf's "Virgil and the Ethical Commentary" responds to criticism of Renaissance pedagogy as narrowly focused on philology. The article discusses

commentaries of Cristoforo Landino and Sebastianus Regulus that include text-critical and ethical elements. Kallendorf notes the presence of both Platonist and Aristotelian ethos and method, also showing how the process works in reverse, with Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples using poetry to comment on Aristotle's *Ethics*. We know that some commentaries, like the *Ovidius moralizatus*, which was reprinted often throughout the sixteenth century, were dominated by ethical interpretation, but this collection does not discuss Ovidian reception.

Marianne Pade discusses Niccolò Perotti's *Cornu Copiae*, one of the most expansive commentaries ever composed. While the work is technically on Martial's poetry, Pade shows how Perotti offered a treatise on the entire Latin language. Henk Nellen's article on Bible commentaries shows how the genre served scholarly debate. Here Abraham Calovius, who used the commentary to promote Lutheranism, opposed Hugo Grotius, whose central aim is described as a renewed Christianity, historically aware and ethically rather than dogmatically focused. Some tendencies Nellen describes were common to the tradition of biblical commentary, such as polemics and the distinction between historical and figural meanings. Similarly, the practice of explaining scripture by scripture, which he describes as "a Protestant rule of thumb" (456), is later described more accurately as "a general hermeneutical rule" (464). It is found equally in Jewish exegetes and ancient commentators on Homer. Some polemical spirit remains, as Nellen himself describes Grotius in terms of a proto-historical-critical method that, according to Nellen, "would eventually prevail."

The articles summarized above are representative. Collectively, the essays show the commentary genre moving variously, in some cases reaching a saturation point of encyclopedic detail, in others, achieving a reverse commentary in undoing the work of past exegetes. The essays also show, on the one hand, commentaries virtually standing free ("scholars often avoided studying the source text in favor of the commentary" [27]), on the other hand, as subservient to their source texts. Indeed, the great weight of an authoritative text thwarting the commentator's desire to emend is described in the articles on law by Willem Zwolve and Bernard Stolte. As the editors intended, here is a starting point for detailed study of an understudied genre. This substantive, if not comprehensive, collection is carefully edited and fully annotated, with an *index nominum*, and contains only a few printing errors (e.g., "posses" [253]; "Bibla" [452]).

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