

The 111 Psalters described in this book (a substantial proportion of the Bodleian collection, omitting the handful of psalters from the Buchanan and Lyell collections, as well as three others) could be seen as part of a giant jigsaw. With the thorough nature of entries and aids, it can shed light not only on scribes, patrons and illuminators, but also on religious communities, lay piety (and the blurred boundaries between the two), as well as patterns of early modern reception and modern collectors. This catalogue, therefore, is of interest for scholars of religion, society, literature and literacy, to those studying medieval religious practices, orders and houses, as well as manuscript and art historians. The book is lavishly produced, with a plethora of colour plates of the highest quality. However, the constant leafing back and forth while trying to identify Dominican psalters or patterns of illumination leaves one to wonder whether some of its features would be better complemented by new technologies. Putting even some appendices into a machine searchable format would introduce a great ease into mining and querying this immense puzzle, adding another layer to our exploration of medieval psalters. It would also enable scholars whose libraries cannot afford to buy this catalogue to tap into the wealth of knowledge encoded in its entries.

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To see into the life of things. The contemplation of nature in Maximus the Confessor and his predecessors. By Joshua Lollar. (Monothéismes et Philosophie.) Pp. 357. Turnhout: Brepols, 2013. €80 (paper). 978 2 503 54893 7
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How does the ordered living of human life relate to the natural order of the cosmos? What is the place of humanity in creation? For Maximus, the contemplation of nature is the middle stage in a tripartite division of spiritual development as derived from the philosophical life, beginning with praxis and ethics, and culminating in wisdom and union. Contemplation of the natural world leads inescapably to contemplation of the Creator, and hence is not only theological but necessarily Christological: Christ is ‘the measure of all things’ and the clearest expression of the appearance of God, and in him, creator and creation are united. The contemplation of reality, of ‘what is’, leads to the contemplation of what cannot be perceived with the physical senses but adduced by the intellect. Contemplation of the natural world is the only way that we have of getting close to the mind of the One who made it; we cannot see God, but we can comprehend something of his essence through looking at the way in which creation is arranged. The relationship between the *logoi*, or rational principles, and the incarnate Logos is of key importance. The first section of this book is devoted to the exploration of the ‘deep structures’ of Hellenistic thought on the contemplation of nature discernible in Maximus’ philosophical predecessors – Parmenides, Heraclitus, Plato (especially the *Timaeus*), Socrates, Aristotle, the Stoics and Plotinus – and how these structures underpin a later understanding of nature and of the world in patristic theology as represented by Clement, Origen and the Cappadocians, culminating in a closer analysis of Maximus’ relationship to Evagrius and Dionysius the Areopagite. The

second half of the book comprises a systematic examination of the way in which Maximus' ideas on the contemplation of nature, as derived from these two sets of influences, are developed in his *Ambigua to John*, itself a commentary on Gregory of Nazianzus. The way in which the first half of the book is structured is not altogether helpful in establishing the relationship between Maximus' thought and the work of the philosophers and theologians who preceded him; a more synthetic treatment, making it clearer in what way Maximus agreed with or diverged from each, would have been valuable preparation for the more detailed analysis in part II. An appendix gives a list of the references to Gregory's works treated in the *Ambigua*, plus a detailed breakdown of the *Ambigua's* structure; this could usefully have been placed earlier and integrated into the main text to chart the intended progress. However, this is a minor point. The first chapter, on the key developments in philosophical thought on the contemplation of nature, occasionally betrays its origins as a PhD dissertation through a certain stiffness of style. Maximus' patristic predecessors are handled with considerably more confidence. The sections on Evagrius and Dionysius, in particular, are well argued and engaging. The final chapters on the *Ambigua* reveal wide reading and an awareness of nuanced translation. The whole throws useful light on a complex area of philosophical theology.

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Dreams and visions in the early Middle Ages. The reception and use of patristic ideas, 400–900. By Jesse Keskiaho. (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th Ser.) Pp. ix+329. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. £64.99. 978 1 107 08213 7; 978 1 107 44265 8
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Jacques Le Goff once referred to the early Middle Ages as 'a society of frustrated dreamers' ('une société de rêveurs frustrés') because it was a time, he argued, when Christian authorities stripped the common people of the ability to discern the value and meaning of their dreams. This study by Jesse Keskiaho challenges Le Goff's crude caricature of the period by examining the ways in which early medieval readers – primarily monks and clerics, but also a few laypeople – read and understood patristic texts related to the Christian understanding of dreams and visions, in particular Augustine's treatise *On the care of the dead* (*De cura pro mortuis gerenda*) and Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* (*Dialogi*). At the heart of this book is an important methodological agenda: early medieval readers usually encountered the ideas of patristic authors second or third hand, mediated by later compilers and often accompanied by marginal notes and commentary. This only becomes apparent when scholars, like Keskiaho, deal directly with the manuscript evidence. To take one example, only seven manuscript copies of Augustine's *On the care of the dead* are known from the first millennium, but selections from it circulated much more widely in compilations like Eugippius of Lucullanum's widely read sixth-century collection of Augustinian excerpts (*Excerpta*), which survives in seventeen copies dating before the year 1000. Carolingian compilers 'cut and paste' Eugippius' work in turn, a process that Lynda Coons has called 'bricolage'. As a result, most early medieval readers