

Henry A. Myers, ed. *The Book of Emperors: A Translation of the Middle High German Kaiserchronik*.

Medieval European Studies 14. Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2013. xii + 400 pp. \$44.95. ISBN: 978-1-935978-70-1.

The *Kaiserchronik* is the first verse chronicle in the vernacular from medieval Europe. Its historical scope stretches from Julius Caesar to (in the first redaction) Conrad III, but it also deserves the attention of a wider audience, for several episodes of literary interest are embedded in it. The work has attracted increasing interest in recent years; in particular, Monika Pohl's dissertation ("Untersuchungen zur Darstellung mittelalterlicher Herrscher" [2004]) provides a study of sources and analogs that extends E. F. Ohly's *Sage und Legende* (1940), the standard point of reference. The Cambridge-Marburg project that will lead to a new edition, commentary, and translation (www.mml.cam.ac.uk/german/staff/kaischron.html) can also be seen against the background of renewed scholarly interest in the work. For the present, though, the edition by Edward Schröder (1892) is the standard critical text, and it provides the basis for this timely English translation. Myers suggests the title "Book of Emperors" rather than "Chronicle of Emperors" in order to avoid confusion with an unrelated Latin text also known as the *Kaiserchronik*.

The translation is eminently readable and deals well with the syntax of the original, where the relationship between clauses is often blurred, without imposing

an overly modern style on the text. The retention of the interjections *hai* and *owî* in their original form might be felt to jar, though, and the translation is not without errors. Thus, for example, “many of my vassals” (189) is singular in the German “ainen mînen dienstman” (v. 6,768; i.e., “one of my vassals”), and *-halb* is repeatedly mistranslated in the length of emperors’ reigns, as in “seven years and a half” (194) for “sibendehalp jâr” (v. 7,129; i.e., “six and a half”). There are also some details regarding the context of the work that could have been mentioned in the notes or reflected in the translation. The adjective “scophelichen” (v. 31), for instance, is justifiably translated as “poetic,” but a note on its problematic definition might have elucidated the prologue’s attack on lies told “with poetic words” (65). The relationship between orality and literacy, which is crucial here, is also sidelined when Henry IV is introduced as “the son of the previous one [Henry III]” (370), omitting the reference to the text as physical object in the original “des oberen sun” (v. 16,534; i.e., “the son of the one above”).

In addition to a bibliography and index, the translation is accompanied by a substantial introductory chapter and commentaries on each ruler. The introduction characterizes the medieval writing of history, and reviews theories about the dating and authorship of the *Kaiserchronik*. It also discusses rulership and the relationship between Church and empire as central themes, and underlines the work’s affinity with the sermon genre. Further consideration of rhetoric and narrative might have contextualized the choice of the term “popular history” to describe its concept of truthfulness, and recent research in German on its literary construction could have been mentioned (e.g., Tibor Friedrich Pézsa, *Studien zu Erzähltechnik und Figurenzeichnung* [1993]). Some factual details should also be updated: Eike von Repgow is no longer considered the author of the *Sächsische Weltchronik* (43), and there are now fifty known manuscripts and fragments rather than the thirty-three identified in the nineteenth century (xii, 41; see www.handschriftencensus.de/werke/189 for a current list). Textual variation has apparently been considered (56), but it is clear neither what material has been used (existing editions or original manuscripts?) nor how the translation has been affected (only one adoption of an alternative reading is marked in the notes: 370n1).

Readers, to conclude, will leave with a good impression of the *Kaiserchronik* as a whole; but they should be aware of the issues raised above, particularly if they are not familiar with the Middle High German original or the research on it. It is also unfortunate that the bibliography contains numerous errors that let down the presentation of the book in accessible paperback format. Nonetheless, it does provide an English-speaking audience with what it has never had before: a complete text in translation of this twelfth-century narrative on the boundary between history and literature.

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