

*Dorothea von Hof: "Das buoch der götlichen liebe und summe der tugent": Studien zu einer Konstanzer Kompilation geistlicher Texte des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts.*

Undine Brückner.

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The author originally completed her Oxford dissertation in 2009, writing in English, but then she translated it into German for the publication of her book. She introduces and discusses the extraordinary miscellany manuscript *Das buoch der götlichen liebe und summe der tugent* (Book of divine love and the highest achievement of virtues) by Dorothea von Hof (1 Sept. 1458–27 Feb. 1501), who completed her huge collective manuscript in Constance in 1482 and thereby made a major contribution to the lay religious culture of her time.

The scribe and collector was married to Jörg von Hof (d. 1525), who belonged to the upper social class in the city and for some time assumed the office of mayor and belonged to the Major and Minor Council. Dorothea enjoyed good relationships with the various women convents in the vicinity of the city and appears to have borrowed many books from there, or seems at least to have read them on site in order to carry out her project to excerpt a large corpus of religious texts in the vernacular. We can identify in total forty-one German source texts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that are arranged in fifty-three thematically organized chapters.

Brückner at first contextualizes *Das buoch* within its literary-historical and religious background and discusses it critically. This necessitates that she often treats the individual topics and themes a bit too generally, without reflecting enough on Dorothea's manuscript (Einsiedeln, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. 752). The second chapter investigates what Dorothea's effort to collect all those texts might have meant with respect to her personal authority. Irrespective of Dorothea's gender and her primarily female target group within the city, she really addressed all people, which Brückner discusses in the third chapter. Finally, she turns

her attention to the last four sections in the *Buoch*, which served for contemplation and were strongly influenced by a quasi-mystical form of speech and mystical concepts, as reflected by such mystical texts as those by Heinrich Seuse (Henry Suso) or in the anonymous treatise *Christus und die minnende Seele*, here extensively excerpted.

Brückner employs the very useful term “Buchnetzwerk” (“network of books,” 36) to characterize the phenomenon that emerges here, insofar as not only nuns pursued an intensive exchange with other monasteries or fellow sisters. The texts that Dorothea drew from for her collection had been produced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and belonged to the theological best sellers of their time. Not only the compilation by itself, but also the mentioning of her own name in the colophon confirm Dorothea’s degree of self-awareness. Even though a large number of illustrations accompany this book, they are reproduced here in such a small format that it is virtually impossible to recognize any of the relevant details.

Brückner makes a solid effort to analyze the inner structure of this great compilation and to isolate specific thematic emphases. She also embeds this miscellany well within the framework of late medieval women’s literature, such as the *Schwesterbücher* and Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken’s novels, and then engages with Dorothea’s interest in highlighting the female saints and other female characters, which, in a way, resulted in a set of rules especially for women in regard to chastity and public reputation. The apparatus contains a list of the identifiable authors and their works as they appear in the text of the *Buoch*, a statistical calculation of the text lines per author in the first chapter, a transcription of this chapter, then a transcription of the fifty-first chapter, thirty-four colored and black-and-white illustrations, and the bibliography, which is erroneously titled “Quellenverzeichnis” (“list of sources”), as if there were no titles of secondary literature. Astonishingly, there is no index, although it is rather easy nowadays to create one with the help of a computer. Brückner has difficulties in coming to terms with the German rules for commas, which the copyeditor of the publishing house should have helped her with.

Altogether, we can conclude that this is an important contribution to the world of medieval women’s literacy and skills as readers and writers, shedding significant light on women’s literature at large and on lay piety in the late Middle Ages.

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