

Predigt im Kontext. Edited by Volker Mertens, Hans-Jochen Schiewer, Regina D Schiewer and Wolfram Schneider-Lastin. Pp. xiii + 572 incl. 23 black-and-white and 2 colour ill. Tübingen: Walter de Gruyter, 2013. €164.95. 978 3 484 64016 0
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The twenty-three articles assembled in this volume offer close readings of German and Dutch sermons from about 1200 to the Reformation (and Martin Luther). The usual suspects such as Berthold von Regensburg, Meister Eckhart and Geiler von Kaysersberg all figure, and deservedly so, but it is one of the strengths of this collection that it also deals with lesser-known preachers and manuscript collections as well as previously unpublished individual sermons which are edited here for the first time. In one way or another all of the contributions share an interest in the overarching theme of ‘sermons in context’, thus supporting the editors’ contention that sermon literature is an interdisciplinary topic par excellence (p. ix). It is certainly true that in order to understand medieval sermons fully, and bring these texts to life, requires not only philological expertise but also knowledge of history, theology and philosophy. This is exemplified by Walter Haug’s opening essay on Meister Eckhart which, with typical verve, delineates the shift in theological tendency of Eckhart’s later sermons. That sermons are indeed a very valuable resource for literary and cultural historians is something which most if not all of the following essays establish beyond doubt.

The volume is subdivided into five parts of varying length and coherence, representing five different ‘contexts’. Part I concerns sermons in their literary context and as such is perhaps the section of greatest interest to the non-specialist. Almut Suerbaum analyses the literary construction of the ‘dramatic’ roles (of speaker and audience) in the sermons of the Franciscan preacher Berthold von Regensburg (d. 1272); Helmut Puff discusses a highly unusual collection of sermons and tracts devoted to one particular sin of the tongue (*detractio*); Michael Stolz expounds the spiritual exegesis of the Seven Liberal Arts in a previously unknown fifteenth-century sermon; whilst Ralf-Hennig Steinmetz provides a lucid account of a cycle of sermons by Geiler von Kaysersberg that is based on Sebastian Brant’s *Narrenschiff* (1494) no less.

Part II deals with sermons in the context of their pastoral function (as *cura animarum*) and is the largest in the volume, containing eight articles which take as their point of departure either a specific preacher, the process of preaching itself or a target audience. Regina Schiewer offers a case study of thirteen vernacular sermons from about 1200 that are devoted to the Feast of Epiphany; David d’Avray briefly assesses the power of marriage symbolism in the thirteenth century against the background of certain social and legal developments; Freimut Löser assesses the significance of preaching itself as a theme in the works of Meister Eckhart and Johannes Tauler; Ulla Williams investigates the role of an unknown redactor in the vernacular translations of the works of Nikolaus von Dinkelsbühl (d. 1433), whilst Anke Wrigge and Falk Eisermann provide a comprehensive introduction to a prominent preacher in Nuremberg, Albrecht Fleischmann (d. 1444); Christoph Burger explores the techniques used to preach on advanced theological topics to the laity in the fifteenth century; Volker Mertens describes the veritable ‘Predigtfabrik’ (p. 271)

surrounding Luther in his later years; finally, Christoph Fasbender discusses the *topos* of the disparity between word and deed in the criticism of preachers over the centuries.

The remits of Parts III and IV, by contrast, appear rather narrower. On the one hand, the contributions of Jochen Conzelmann, Annette Volting and Martina Wehrli-Johns concern the devotional and literary significance of SS John the Evangelist and John the Baptist for various circles of Dominican women; on the other hand, articles by Wybren Scheepsma, Thomas Kock and Thom Mertens investigate the collection, composition and reception of German sermons in the Dutch context of the 'Devotio moderna', including for instance the intriguing figure of Prioress Alijt Bake (d. 1455 [Scheepsma]), a 'disappointed mystic' (p. 379) and the author of a 'sehr schöne Spiritualität des Esels in sechs Punkten' (p. 388). Part V returns to the general category of particular preachers and preaching practices in the vernacular: Britta-Juliane Kruse discusses the significance of various notable women as preachers, apocryphal and otherwise; Eeef Overgaauw sheds light on the little-known topic of Carmelite sermons and preaching; Dorothea Walz provides a fascinating insight into the 'workshop' character of the extant sermons of the first chancellor of the university of Heidelberg, Konrad von Gelnhausen (d. 1390); and Hildegund Hölzel-Ruggiu shows how Heinrich Toke (preacher in the cathedral of Magdeburg; d. 1454) manifestly adapted his sermons to suit his very diverse audiences.

In spite of the obvious quality of many of these contributions, it cannot go unremarked that this volume (published in 2013) offers the proceedings of a conference that took place in 1996. The introduction is overly defensive on this point and too much time is spent on asserting the significance of this original conference in European 'Sermon Studies'. Many of the contributors evidently feel obliged to list all the relevant scholarship that has appeared in the intervening period without actually engaging with it in their articles; and at times this bibliographical baggage seems rather self-centred (see above all Regina Schiewer, at pp. 143–4). Nevertheless, the collection as a whole is drawn together by a number of recurrent issues of broader literary historical interest, such as the often uncertain but dynamic relationship between oral sermons in the vernacular and the transformations that they undergo in their written transmission. Sermons, we are encouraged to conclude, fulfilled a greater number of functions in context than we might at first expect, ranging from moral instruction to provocation and intellectual stimulation.

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