

Constructing Authority in the Middle Ages

A note from the editor

Jesse Keskiaho

This issue of MIRATOR¹ presents a selection of five articles based on papers delivered at the international conference *Seeing, Hearing, Reading and Believing. Authorities in the Middle Ages*, in Helsinki 20–23 September 2010. Participants to the conference presented a fruitfully varied understanding of authority and authorities. This theme issue includes a somewhat narrower selection of articles that discuss aspects of the authority of texts and the way texts construct authority. In these studies, indeed, authority for the most part is something that has to be argued. The contexts vary, and we learn of authority and the generation of authority, in poetry, hagiography, a recipe collection, in a sermon, and again in poetry.

As is the usual style of this journal, the articles are presented in the rough chronological order of their subject matter. However, they can also be seen to present a concentric structure by the affinities of the ways they discuss authority. In the article opening this issue Frog examines Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* as an authoritative text in the traditions of mythological narrative in medieval Iceland. The article, as its author argues, presents a case where a textual authority, Snorri's *Edda*, transformed the understanding of largely oral mythological materials in a Christian milieu. This selection of articles on the theme of authority also closes with an article discussing poetic authority in vernacular poetry. In the final article of this thematic selection Christina M. Carlson examines the structure of Chaucer's *House of Fame*, showing how Chaucer in that unfinished poem constructs his own authority as a poet.

¹ Glosa is grateful for the funding it has received for the preparation of this issue of MIRATOR from the funding for the Authorities in the Middle Ages –conference (chiefly from the Thure Galléns Stiftelse) and the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies.

The second and penultimate articles of the collection also discuss similar aspects of authority, in that both examine how a text constructs or argues the authority of a third person. In the second article of this issue Nicole Leapley draws attention to the importance of vision and the visual senses in the context of Matthew Paris and his *Estoire de seint Aedward le rei*. Leapley shows how Matthew used the concepts of vision and blindness to argue the authority of the monarchy and of his own monastery. In the fourth article of this theme issue Sean Otto examines John Wyclif's theological argument for the spiritual authority of teachers of faith. Otto shows how Wyclif's sermon for the Fourth Sunday after the Octave of the Epiphany argues that the authority of a preacher is founded in his correct interpretation of the scripture and his good moral standing, with particular emphasis on the former.

The third article of this issue discusses the construction of authority for a learned text in a context where no institutional structure provided such authority. Susanna Niiranen investigates how a thirteenth-century collection of medical recipes in Occitan constructs authority through the occasional use of Latin and made-up words and phrases. Niiranen argues that to enhance the authority of the recipes the text appeals to the language of learning and liturgy, but resorts also to magic in the form of numinous made-up words.

In addition to these five articles discussing questions of authority, the issue includes one other refereed article. Eva Ahl-Waris presents a case study in the history of Swedish and Finnish historical archaeology, examining two scholars who both took an interest in the history of the Bridgettine order, using it to emphasise cultural connections with Western Europe in during rise of the Soviet Union and nationalistic politics. We are also pleased to offer several book reviews, in all three of the main languages of the journal. On behalf of Glossa, the Society for Medieval Studies in Finland and MIRATOR I wish to express my gratitude to all contributors, to the editorial board, and especially to the anonymous experts who carefully read the articles offered for consideration for this issue.

The next volume of MIRATOR will be published in late 2012. There is no special theme set for that issue, but the journal welcomes all proposals for articles within its field. To be considered for the volume, articles ready for peer review will need to be submitted to the editor by the end of April 2012.

Jesse Keskiaho
Editor-in-chief
MIRATOR
mirator[at]glossa.fi