



Methods and the Medievalist: Current Approaches in Medieval Studies, Marko Lamberg, Jesse Keskiäho, Elina Räsänen and Olga Timofeeva, with Leila Virtanen (eds), Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle 2008. 302 pp.

The past decades have witnessed a seismic shift in historical scholarship, which has had a profound effect on the understanding of the nature of the historians' craft. One aspect of this development has been the broadening of the scope of scholarship beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. The present volume, which is a selection of papers given at the conference "The Methods and the Medievalist" in Jyväskylä, Finland, in 2006, testifies to the fact that openness to the theoretical perspectives and analytical tools of neighboring fields is successfully taking root in medieval studies as well.

According to the editors, the collection aims at providing (2) "an overview of the current trends and methods available within contemporary medieval studies", with particular focus on multidisciplinary and recent theoretical developments. As noted in the Introduction, speaking of "medieval studies" as a unified discipline is somewhat problematic in itself, since different scholars working within the field always approach their individual research problems from a particular disciplinary standpoint. Indeed, it appears that apart from the general interest in the broadly defined period of the Middle Ages, there is not much common ground shared by all medievalists. This is especially true when it comes to methodology, and the editors of the present volume are to be commended for bringing this issue to the fore.

The book has fifteen contributions, including the editors' Introduction, which briefly outlines the background and contents of the volume. As is often the case with article collections and conference

proceedings, the individual chapters vary greatly in topic and scope. The articles have been divided into three sections according to topic and the source materials analyzed. Of the three, the first section, titled "Investigating Texts and Textual Constructs" is the most extensive with seven articles, whereas "Researching the Popular and the Quotidian", and "Interpreting Materiality, Visuality and Orality" are shorter, with four and three contributions respectively. The division is clear, although some of the articles seem a bit out of place in the overall structure of the volume. In particular, the closing chapter of the first section, Nicole Crossley-Holland's "Learning from Primary Sources: The Study of Moral, Ethical and Spiritual Responsibilities" (123–131) differs in approach and style from all the other articles. Considering the pertinence of the issues that the author raises with regard to intellectual honesty and the use of primary sources, it seems that the article would have worked better as an introductory essay to the whole volume.

Opening the first section with her article "Manuscripts, Editions and Textual Interpretation: Alan of Lille's Distinction Collection Summa 'Quot modis' and the Meaning of Words", Tuija Ainonen gives an example of how a re-examination of the manuscript tradition of a given text may elucidate the significance of scribal activity in the later developments of the work's reception history. Ainonen traces the processes by which Alan of Lille's distinction collection underwent significant changes in the course of its transmission, changes which, as she proceeds to point out, have resulted in a misinterpretation of the text in modern scholarship. Her argument that the (33) "banal, practical production aspects" of the text should be seen as being inseparable from the content is well made, and definitely worth considering by all scholars working with medieval manuscripts and their modern editions.

In her article "The Written Space: Theories of Space in Reading Medieval Latin Drama", Katriina Kajannes uses spatial and feminist theories to discuss the representation of literary spaces in a medieval drama *Dulcitius*, written in the tenth century by Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim. By analyzing (39) "the structural and thematic positions of the places" in the drama, Kajannes guides the reader through different levels of the text, including the literal, metaphorical, allegorical, and anagogic. The feminist perspective supports her view that the spatial approach may help in teasing out aspects of medieval ideology which defined the place of women in the world, while also revealing the underlying Christian message of the work.

The following three articles all deal with image research, a versatile method which proves appropriate for the study of a variety of sources. Mari Isoaho's "Methodology of the Historical Image Research in the Study of Medieval Sources" focuses on a case study of Aleksandr Nevskiy and the development of his legendary image in Russian historical writing. The method is here applied to hagiographic material, a genre which has long been neglected in historical scholarship. Isoaho demonstrates that (61) "as a part of society's collective realization of its own era, and its own set of values" these sources are in fact eminently suitable for image research, because the images they present are "exactly the kind of simplified models of reality" that historical image research is interested in. Thus, instead of factual information, these sources may be read by looking at how a particular image is created, and what the motivations behind this process could have been. These same questions also lie at the heart of Inka Moilanen's article "The Construction of Images: Representation of Kingship in the Historiography of Early Medieval Britain", and Mikko Vasko's "The Image of the Mongols in Syriac Texts in the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Century". Whether considering the presentation of kingship in the writings of the ecclesiastical elite of early Anglo-Saxon England, or the depiction of the Mongols in the texts written by Syriac Christians, the authors succeed in highlighting the point that image research does not provide a description of the object of the image, but rather reveals something of the ideals and expectations of its creators.

"The Genesis of an Early Twelfth-Century Crusade Chronicle" by Sini Kangas takes a "context-oriented" approach to a body of textual material dealing with the First Crusade. Kangas studies a number of early crusading chronicles and compares them with vernacular *chansons de geste* in order to illustrate the interrelation between the sources. In her analysis she detects several interpretative layers which may be seen as constituting different contexts for the texts under consideration. The discussion seeks to draw attention to the manner in which the crusading chronicles, far from being critical reports of actual historical events, reflect (119) "the mental framework of early crusading as a conglomeration of ideas and concepts". Her conclusion that (ibid.) "there is no such thing as objective historical writing" is not only relevant to the understanding of the chronicles, but essentially crystallizes the underlying theme of many of the contributions in this section.

The articles in the second section deal with aspects of medieval social history. Janken Myrdal's "Source Pluralism and a Package of Methods:

Medieval Tending of Livestock as an Example” outlines the principles of what the author calls the “source pluralistic method”, namely an approach that utilizes several different source materials to answer a particular research question. Myrdal gives a detailed presentation of this method before applying it to a case study of livestock tending in medieval Sweden. The author posits that the source pluralistic approach is particularly useful when addressing a topic for which the evidence is limited or scattered. While the relevance of all the acquired evidence may sometimes be hard to determine, the method still allows for conclusions which arguably could not be reached otherwise. One aspect of Myrdal’s “package of methods” is the use of both qualitative and quantitative data, which enables the scholar to draw interpretive syntheses from a vast body of information. The statistical analysis is also at the focus of Johanna Anderson Raeder’s chapter “Turning Genealogy into Statistics: Remarriage among Noble Women in Medieval Sweden”, which examines the family building patterns of the Swedish nobility. Many medievalists tend to shy away from quantitative methods, but as the author clearly illustrates, statistical information can be used to discern both continuity and variation in a given pattern over a period of time, and also to trace geographical and social features in the data.

The following two articles in this section discuss methods used in archaeological research. Ylva Stenqvist Millde’s “Traces of Roads and Travel in Pre-Industrial Agrarian Society” examines (177) “human patterns of movement” by looking at roads and travel in medieval and pre-modern Sweden. The author argues that an approach which combines archeological evidence with written historical sources is indispensable to an understanding of peoples’ (178) “reach and range”, in other words the kind of travel possible for individuals and communities. The investigation of road use highlights both the stability and the flexibility of peoples’ travel patterns, concluding that the peripheral forest communities were not isolated, but instead were (189) “perpetually on the move”, whether for economic, political or social reasons. Also the authors of the chapter “Bringing Together Interdisciplinary Strategies for the Study of the Seats of Power in Medieval and Early Modern Finland in 3D Modeling” share the view that archaeologists should avail of different source materials and methods of analysis in their research. The article presents the first results of a research project, which explores the building history of medieval castles in Finland with the aid of simulated 3D models. The contributors Kari Uotila, Anna-Maria Vilkuna, Isto Huvila, Elisabeth Grönlund and Heikki Simola who are experts in archaeology, history, data and information management, and

palaeoecology, give a fine example of interdisciplinary collaboration by demonstrating how archaeological research may benefit from modern technology.

The chapter opening the third section of the book, "Zooarchaeology and Historical Sources" by Auli Helena Tourunen, addresses the issue of multidisciplinary from the viewpoint of zooarchaeological research. Tourunen examines animal husbandry in medieval Finland by integrating osteological data with written documents, and pays careful attention to potential problems inherent in such a method. Taking a different approach to materiality in their article "The Visible and the Tangible: Questions of Materiality in the Study of Medieval Images and Objects", Sofia Lahti and Elina Räsänen focus on the (242) "interplay between the visual and the material in medieval art". By presenting two case studies of late medieval ecclesiastical artifacts, the authors show how the insights of "visual culture studies" can be fruitfully appropriated in the interpretation of medieval images. Finally, the closing chapter of the volume, Alaric Hall's "The Oral Culture of a Silent Age: The Place of Orality in Medieval Studies" moves from visuality to orality, and offers an insightful and balanced consideration of the heuristic applicability of the concepts of orality and literacy in medieval studies.

Compared with the other two sections of the volume, the group of the last three chapters is perhaps somewhat less unified. Since the methodological position advocated by Tourunen comes very close to that presented by Stenqvist Millde, the placing of these two articles in different sections of the volume seemed a bit arbitrary. Another contribution which to my mind appeared out of kilter was Hall's well-argued piece, which offers plenty of food for thought to all medieval scholars, including those outside the field of Anglo-Saxon studies. I would have liked to see this article in the first section of the book, where it surely would have fit well.

On a technical note, it has to be said that for a volume with four editors the book contains a remarkable number of stylistic blunders. Admittedly, the errors in punctuation and lack of consistency in references are likely to bother only the most pedantic of readers, but being one myself, I found this quite irritating. While most of these may be just hapless slip-ups, spelling the title of one primary source in three different ways on the same page (114), and differently again in the bibliography (120), is just one example of the kind of carelessness that could have been easily avoided. It is also regrettable that despite the work of the language editor many of the articles suffer from grammatical mistakes, including confused vocabulary

and basic errors in syntax. Minor shortcomings aside, the editors' role in any publication is particularly important in ensuring that the text is intelligible and the argumentation easy to follow. Falling short of this standard implies doing a disservice to the authors and the readers alike.

Overall, the volume includes several fine contributions by young medievalists, and as such can be recommended to anyone interested in the current developments in the field. The basic tenet of contemporary historical thinking, which emphasizes that all knowledge of the past is mediated, is particularly evident in the first section of the book, but its implications are equally important throughout. Many of the authors succeed in articulating the need to interrogate the various personal, institutional, cultural, and political underpinnings of the source material, while also clearly outlining the theoretical parameters of their own work.

Although most readers are likely to search for articles that bear immediate relevance to their own research interests, taking the time to read the whole book may well be worthwhile. Several chapters work well together, allowing the reader to gain a fuller understanding of how the same theoretical apparatus can be applied to different sources, or how similar source material can be analyzed from different points of view. Most importantly, the present volume shows that scholars working in the field of medieval studies can and should avail of the methodological advances of other disciplines, including the natural sciences. By raising interesting new questions and providing stimulating and perceptive analysis, the contributors in this volume demonstrate that the future of medieval studies truly lies in interdisciplinary dialogue.

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