



Sini Kangas, Mia Korpiola & Tuija Ainonen (eds), *Authorities in the Middle Ages: Influence, Legitimacy, and Power in Medieval Society* (Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture 12), De Gruyter: Berlin 2013. 321 pp.

It is a commonplace that medieval intellectuals carefully distinguished authority and power, with the former always granted pride of place. The subordination of Pope Gelasius I (papacy 492–496) of mere secular power to the sacred authority of bishops, a maxim almost every medievalist learns early on, was but one of many attempts to sort out the right order of the world. Nor were such formulations confined to law and theology, as the student of literature quickly learns. In contrast to the modern obsession with the ‘new,’ medieval authors looked to authorities, messengers from a normative past, for guidance and inspiration. Indeed, daily life itself was under authority’s command. From the marriage bed to the field of battle, authority, buttressed by tradition, shaped assumptions about gender and class.

This volume of essays edited by Sini Kangas, Mia Korpiola and Tuija Ainonen thus takes on a fundamental, and formidable, topic. Divided into two sections, ‘Authority and the Church’ and ‘Secular Authority,’ it presents a collection of studies whose range – chronological, topical, and geographical – is impressive. Obviously, there are gaps. These, however are more than compensated by studies, both topical and regional, that explore subjects often neglected by Anglophone medievalists.

There are two contributions by Albrecht Classen. His introductory essay defines the volume’s objective (p. 5):

In short, the exploration of authority at any given time immediately takes us to the core of that culture and illustrates most glaringly where the critical power positions rested, what the central points of disagreement

were, who controlled the resources, and who could make his or her voice heard the best.

In describing the dimensions of literary authority, both sacred and secular, he compares and contrasts Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) and Wolfram von Eschenbach (ca. 1160/80–ca. 1220). Leaving context behind, Classen also ventures beyond the Middle Ages to discover parallels of ‘authority’ across time, and considers such diverse figures as Joseph Smith (1805–1844) and Tiger Woods.

Classen continues this approach in a subsequent contribution – in the second section of the volume – by treating the travel writings of Marco Polo (1254–1324) and John Mandeville, where he contrasts the realistic reporting of the former, who wrote with the authority of his own experience with the latter’s reliance on the writings of others (pp. 247–248). As with the first essay, he also ventures into the modern world, most remarkably by comparing a ‘scientist’ to those who support Intelligent Design. The former is compared to Marco Polo, the latter, to Mandeville because, in his view, they also rely on the authority of others—not empirical evidence – and cling to ‘fantasy’ (p. 248).

The initial section largely treats medieval theology. Apart from an essay by Ken Grant on Pope Gregory VII’s (papacy 1073–1085) understanding of papal authority, there is little direct consideration of law. Grant’s reflection on such classic texts as the *Dictatus papae* or the pope’s correspondence with Bishop Hermann of Metz (ep. 1073–1090) brings no new insights, his contention that Gregory’s actions were driven by his conviction that sacred tradition demanded he confront secular power, not by any personal ‘ideological need’ is amply supported (pp. 52–54). Given, however, the formidable, dissenting view of Walter Ullman on the subject, it is unfortunate that Grant did not consider either him, his apologists or critics. Another consideration of the weight, and uses, of sacred tradition is provided by Sean Otto, who compares and contrasts the ecclesiologies of Giles of Rome (ca. 1243–1247–1316) and John Wyclif (ca. 1330–1384), highlighting how each man’s view of papal authority came from different readings of a common tradition emerging based on Augustine’s understanding of predestination and the ‘two cities.’ His conclusion that these authors ‘demonstrate quite neatly how an authority can be made to say what one wants this person to say’ (p. 157) could easily apply to the conclusions reached by most of the other essays in this volume.

Other essays in this opening section concern themselves with the wider Church and focus more on the practice than the theory, of authority and power. Robin Sutherland-Harris discusses the ‘strategic use of the written word’ in the charters of Glastonbury and Bath (p. 110). She notes the multifunctionality of charters, serving as repositories of information to preserve memory, symbols of

episcopal and abbatial authority and legal documents (pp. 112–113). She effectively utilizes the analogy of the Russian *matryoshka* doll to demonstrate such multiplicity, or, better put, nesting of uses for charters (pp. 116–117). While taking into account the fundamental scholarship of Michael Clanchy on the transition ‘from memory to written record,’ she also highlights the persistence of oral testimony in both legal transactions and litigation (pp. 120–122).

The second section of essays, those treating secular authority and power, range from Iceland to Serbia. Cristian Bratu explores the ‘authorial persona’ in medieval French historiography. The emergence of vernacular language from the shadow of Latin is a particular point of emphasis (p. 187). Late-medieval French historians’ declarations, in the vernacular, that they were eyewitnesses to events also helped to establish their authority as part of an ‘intellectual rebalancing between the authority of the Ancients and Moderns’ (p. 204).

No contribution ranges further in its exploration of authority than the essay by Kirsi Kanerva, who discusses the ‘Rituals for the Restless Dead.’ The ‘strong mind’ of the living could continue after death. This expressed the deceased’s will (p. 209) ‘to continue in the society of the living’. Kanerva locates the interaction, and competition, of authorities from both the living and dead within an Icelandic society, whose law was (p. 226) ‘based on social interaction, negotiations, compensation, and settlements’. The authority of the dead could be powerful and disruptive authority, one that required the living to exert their own status through ritual. Deceased fathers could become ‘restless’ (p. 227). Their sons, accordingly, had to assert their own authority through ritual, although this could also be weakened by witchcraft (pp. 215–216)

In this second section, Sverre Bagge’s examination of the evolution of authority in medieval Norway, ‘From Fist to Scepter,’ is particularly interesting. Ranging across government, both royal and ecclesiastical, law, and the writing of history (p. 162), he explores what authority meant, both in theory and practice. Not surprisingly, the Icelandic Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241) occupies a central role in his analysis. For the student of medieval legal history, his comments on written law and procedure from the thirteenth century onwards (pp. 172–173) help one better understand how Norway developed a ‘middle way’ between English and Continental systems. His nuanced analysis of the differing formulations of authority, both royal and legal, not only provides a useful way to understand the development of medieval Norwegian government but also a model that could be applied to other regions as well (pp. 180–181). Bagge’s essay could thus be read in conjunction with the contribution by Mollie M. Madden, who explores the authority of Edward of Woodstock (1330–1376), England’s Black Prince, and focuses on how Edward III (r. 1327–1377) attempted to assert royal power in Gascony through the Prince’s campaign in 1355. For example, the Prince’s confirming privileges and charters,

strengthened by a new seal specially made for his expedition, was crucial to his representation of royal authority (pp. 276–277).

Two essays explore female authority. From a close reading of Archbishop Daniel II's (archep. 1325–1338) life of Queen Helen of Serbia (ca. 1236–1314), Alexandra Vukovich sheds light on how a fourteenth-century queen continued an earlier, dynastic model of the queen as 'proponent of peace' (p. 261). A key aspect of this model was the queen's authority as teacher of her sons, who learned both Christian belief and duty to their fatherland from her. Her maternal role was the locus of her authority (p. 264). In her essay, Charlotte Vainio also highlights female authority and agency by womens' legal status in late-medieval Sweden. She examines the *malsman* system, where women had legal guardians. On the basis of charters, she challenges older views that the *malsman* demonstrated womens' subjugation. She argues that (p. 303) the '*malsman* system was a complex network of representation and reciprocity, of which matrimonial legal authority was a part but not a defining factor'. Even if the overwhelming majority of legal actions were conducted by their husbands, womens' consent remained essential (pp. 303–304).

In its introduction, the editors compare their work to a medieval stained glass window, whose 'picture is a complex network of interlocking pieces, available only when all the different colors are placed together to interact with each other' (p. xiii). In its range, both chronological and geographic, and topical diversity, this volume amply fulfils the editors' promise to provide a multicoloured and multifaceted view of medieval authority.

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