



Jesse Keskiaho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages: The Reception and Use of Patristic Ideas, 400–900* (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, New Series, 99), Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2015. 329 pp.

Jesse Keskiaho's book, based on his doctoral thesis from Helsinki, is a timely and important addition to the body of research on dreams in the Middle Ages. Keskiaho focuses primarily on the writings of St. Augustine of Hippo and Gregory the Great regarding dreams and visions, and traces their reception through to the tenth century: Thus this is, as Keskiaho himself puts it, a study in how the contexts of early medieval reception of Patristic theological opinion shaped and in a certain sense created the 'teachings' on dreams. The same teachings could then be applied to arguments both for and against believing the content of dreams, again, depending heavily on the context of their use. One of the particularly fascinating aspects of Keskiaho's study is his search for these contexts in specific manuscripts, not only where Gregory or Augustine's writings were excerpted and propagated, but also where writers employed Gregory or Augustine's writings to support an argument for or against the belief in dreams.

The book begins with an introduction, wherein Keskiaho describes his approach and the parameters of his study. He then moves on to give a background of classical and early Christian views on dreams and visions, though his emphasis here is clearly on the early Christian traditions and the classical ideas that informed them. He concludes the section by observing that while Augustine and Gregory advanced ideas regarding dreams and visions that largely accorded with the ascetic tradition; they also took an interest in the role of dreams and visions within the cult of

saints and eschatology. This allows Keskiaho to segue into his discussion of his approach within the context of previous studies, as his study explicitly address what he (in many cases rightly) sees as fundamental conflicts within how medieval ideas about dreams and visions, and in particular their patristic inheritance, have been studied in the past. Earlier scholarship has focused on the critical nature of dreams, whereas the important roles of dreams and visions are increasingly apparent in more recent studies. While some have attempted to resolve the conflict, Keskiaho finds these attempts largely unsatisfactory. Finally, he presents his sources and methods: of importance is the employment of both narrative and theoretical texts, in contrast to many previous studies which have tended to focus on one to the exclusion of the other. Furthermore, he examines the manuscripts themselves, including groupings of texts, marginal indices and summaries, and annotations. Keskiaho's focus on 'learned culture' leads him to focus on exclusively Latin texts. Here he also defends his concentration on Augustine and Gregory by arguing that they were indeed the central authorities on dreams. Keskiaho's introduction is informative and far-ranging, though it does repeat and rephrase the study's aims and objectives rather frequently, which can occasionally lead to minor confusion when they appear to contradict or countermand each other.

The study proceeds with a chapter focuses on dreams and attitudes portrayed in hagiography and other narratives. Keskiaho argues here that variations in visibility and values related to critical or prudent views towards dreams are largely explained by different authorial context and goals. Thus, he points out that one cannot expect to synthesize a coherent opinion on dreams from these narratives. Importantly, as this is a point not taken into account by all scholars writing in this area, Keskiaho emphasizes that the narratives are *not* to be understood as actual dreams which one can interpret; for all intents and purposes they have already been interpreted within their texts. Consequently, Keskiaho describes the importance of dreams within the context of the apparitions of the saints, both from the perspective of determining the credibility of dreams of saints, and of the credibility of saints in dreams. This chapter also discusses the monastic context of dreams and the supervision of those dreaming, where Keskiaho draws an interesting contrast between Merovingian and Anglo-Latin (largely Northumbrian) narratives, whereby the latter appear to take a much more critical view towards the authentication of dreams. The question of legitimating dreams draws Keskiaho onwards to dreams of pregnant women. His decision to structure the sections in this way can be

questioned, since the interpretation of these dreams shares many features with interpreting the appearances of saints based on likenesses; however, it does help him to give a coherent and comparatively self-contained type of dream to exemplify his discussion of the control and interpretation of dreams from the previous section. The arguments of the previous section are largely reiterated in the final section on narratives of visions of the afterlife, with additional evidence being presented for the use of dreams and visions in discerning differences between monastic communities in Western Europe.

Keskiaho then moves on to his exploration of receptions Patristic thought on dreams. He does this in two parts: firstly, a chapter on dreams as images and apparitions of the dead; and secondly, in a chapter on perception or, as Keskiaho calls it, 'the epistemology of dreams'. In the first of these chapters, Keskiaho explores the career of Augustine's *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* and in particular his opinions about appearances of the dead in dreams. He shows how over time new concerns and the mediation of others caused readers to 'misunderstand' Augustine's opinions about the apparitions of the dead. Keskiaho then moves rather abruptly to a discussion of Gregory the Great's teachings on and portrayal of dreams, including a quotation in full of Gregory's teaching on dreams in *Moralia in Iob*. A very similar version appears again in Gregory's *Dialogi*, advising caution but nevertheless surrounded by narratives wherein dreams of saints play important roles. Keskiaho makes an attempt to harmonize this apparent conflict, but ultimately suggests that the *Dialogi* represents the tensions between a cautious approach to credence and the use of dream and vision stories in hagiography, where different narratives (both in the *Dialogi* and elsewhere) resolve the tension in different ways. Readings of the *Moralia* and the *Dialogi* are then traced, culminating in three case studies in the form of Isidore of Seville's *Sententiae*, Taio of Saragossa's *Sententiae*, and the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*. The first two demonstrate how Gregory's reflections on the origins of dreams became detached from their origins and contexts and became crystallised as a 'teaching' or 'theory' about dreaming, a point which Keskiaho returns to later in this chapter. The section on the *Hibernensis* returns us at last to Augustine and apparitions of the dead. Keskiaho's command of a vast amount of information is truly impressive; however, although he at the top of the chapter argues that the exploration of Augustine's views in *De cura* are important for understanding Gregory's own legacy, the transition between the two is not well done, and one has the impression that Keskiaho's

argument would have been stronger, or at least more coherent, either with a more explicit connection between the two at the point of the transition between the focus on Augustine and that on Gregory; or, alternatively, by splitting the two sections into separate chapters and taking a bit more time with both.

The final chapter in contrast focuses almost exclusively Augustine's theory of vision, and thus the role of human senses and perception in dreaming, and its reception. Keskiaho places this chapter last because of the slow reception of this theory in the medieval West; however, he also mentions that this theory can be seen to have influenced Gregory's own views on dreams. The main difference between Augustine's thought on apparitions in dreams and his theory of vision is in the fact that the former can be said to have influenced the background in which Gregory's own writings were later read, while the latter cannot. Nevertheless, Keskiaho shows that it did find readers, many of whom understood it, even if many used the three visions more as a classification than an epistemological model. These readers, however, accessed Augustine's theory in a variety of ways: sometimes first hand from Augustine's own works, but also from derivative texts, and Keskiaho shows how the theory of the three visions was reinterpreted and repurposed according both to the way in which it was accessed, but also according to the needs and goals of its audience. Most often the theory of the three visions was applied to exegesis, though it was not limited to this context. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the *Opus Caroli regis contra synodum (Libri Caroli)*, which Keskiaho contextualises it and explores it against the background of the transmission of Augustine's theory.

The book concludes with an epilogue wherein Keskiaho discusses his main conclusions, though he also discusses some of the limitations of the study here, such as its difficulty in accessing 'ordinary Christians'. It also includes, as alluded to above, an appendix containing the pre-tenth-century manuscripts of the main works discussed in the book. The handlist is organised by author and work, followed by a list of manuscripts containing excerpts of that work. Available information on individual items varies due to whether or not Keskiaho examined the manuscript in person. The bibliography contains three parts: manuscripts (listed here by location, library, and shelfmark), printed sources, and secondary literature. Stylistically the book is very clean and easy to read. Chapter subheadings and bibliographic subdivisions are not given in the table of contents, which, given the individual and specific character of many chapter sections

can be a bit bothersome when one seeks specific information. There are occasional proofreading errors and examples of odd syntax; however, these are minor complaints and neither common nor egregious enough to detract from the quality of the scholarship evident in Keskiaho's book. He presents a compelling argument for the development of thought about dreams and visions, in particular the many different contexts in which different ideas were appropriated. Through Keskiaho's thorough approach towards the manuscript evidence, as well as his integration of narrative as well as theoretical sources he has made a fascinating study of early medieval attitudes towards and interpretations of dreams and visions.

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