

Crafting Knowledge in the Early Medieval Book: Practices of Collecting and Concealing in the Latin West, edited by Sinéad O'Sullivan and Ciaran Arthur, Turnhout, Brepols, 2023 (Publications of the Journal of Medieval Latin; 16), 523 pp., ISBN 978-2-503-60247-9, 115 €.

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The volume brings together 13 essays that were originally presented at a colloquium of the same title, which took place online in July 2021 after being postponed by the COVID-19 pandemic. They cover a vast area of research that focuses on practices of *collectio* and concealment of knowledge, and most of them take early medieval western manuscripts as main points of reference. Given the versatility of these themes, the volume brings together varied responses that cannot be summarised under the fields of intellectual history or the history of the book. Rather, what *Crafting Knowledge* does so well is bringing attention to how the history of ideas directly relates to the book as a technological tool.

This type of publication (proceedings of a conference) suggests a level of disconnection between the individual essays, each of which tends to be aimed at its own specialist audience. While this rings true for this heterogenous volume, its in-depth studies cover a wide range of subjects that, together, vividly demonstrate the complexity of the processes that underpinned the transmission of written knowledge. Broadly, the essays address: the nature of knowledge classification and its role in creating hierarchies of authors; the practice of glossing; the origins and derivations of encyclopaedic knowledge; and inter-textual referencing in medieval literature, with special attention dedicated to contemporary attempts at establishing sources of truth and fiction. Crucially, whenever the discussion focuses on a manuscript, images are provided (sometimes in colour) wherever possible – this is especially helpful when the volumes described are digitally unavailable. Such a visual reference is invaluable, as it ensures that the volume's reader does not lose sight of the material aspect of knowledge acquisition, transmission, or concealment – often manifested in the way text is laid out on the page.

One of the editors and leader of the original project of *Crafting Knowledge*, Sinéad O'Sullivan, begins the volume reflecting on the nature of the Bible as «*the prime source of hidden treasure*» (p. 12) and of ultimate truth and wisdom. It is a very appropriate start: the fact that Christianity, like all Abrahamic religions, is a religion of the book links the object directly with knowledge seeking and concealing – a process which was meant to be formative and selective. It sets up the context that saw different groups of readers and scholars creating taxonomies of knowledge to be acquired, disseminated, or kept hidden: not casually one of the goals of this volume

is to show how «[t]he practices of collecting and concealing provide clues as to what kinds of knowledge were valued and how knowledge itself was made» (p. 14).

The first essays (Grotans, Teeuwen) place emphasis on how structures and hierarchies of knowledge were represented visually on the page, demonstrating how diagrams and other visual cues were an integral part of the intellectual framework underpinning medieval knowledge classification. Their discussion of the role of medieval authorities also underscores the process of «assembling but also recasting» (p. 21) knowledge. Just like scholars such as Augustine understood and justified the Aristotelian or Platonic (Stoic) models, glossators both reproduced and reframed knowledge in the margin of pages: an asynchronous dialogue between *auctor* and reader.

Some of the essays pay specific attention to glosses from conception to assemblage to revision (Cinato, Lendinara, Love). Much of this reflects on how knowledge was sourced and then sometimes interpreted, creating a helpful map of the dissemination of particular words and concepts. These essays are often very technical but provide the necessary granular detail to infer that glosses as paratext were in fact «obscuring as much as ... elucidat[ing]» (p. 235).

Concluding her work on the glosses to Book 3 of Abbo of Saint-Germain-des-Prés' *Bella Parisiaca urbis*, Lendinara argues that *obscuritas* was a rhetorical instrument in itself (p. 224) – something that is also reflected in the philological and codicological essays. For example, if narrative structures are seen as a “type” of knowledge, then the use of archaic language can be viewed as a form of concealment (Herren). Analogously, riddles as a narrative structure are meant to conceal meaning, but they also show common sources within and beyond the text (Orchard). A similar tension is discussed in a case study on Saxo Grammaticus where intertextuality shows both «fusion and dissonance» (p. 488) of sources, as Saxo is seen grappling with fact and fiction regarding England's past (Clarke).

A particularly fascinating contribution, perfectly balancing the practices of *collectio* and concealment, lays out the use of occult *characteres* and Greek script as a way that concealed knowledge and simultaneously showed off the scribe's ability to decode it (Garipzanov). Referring to ecclesiastics' attempts at suppressing the use of such mystical symbols, the essay emphasises the visual impact of script and its influence on knowledge transmission: it was the characters' perceived apotropaic power and belief in their healing capabilities to ensure their endurance throughout the early Middle Ages. Another essay meticulously lists the occurrences of other symbols: those recording direct speech (Ganz). This is a precious manuscript survey.

Other contributions specially rely on codicological analysis, showing how the assemblage of a book (Dekker), quantitative analysis (Stein), and

inter-generational use (Contreni) affected the way knowledge was crafted and received. Here we really see the physical/technological dimension of *collectio*, which implies that the travelling object or scribe created a «transcultural paradigm» (p. 291) that gestures towards the intellectual ramifications behind the circulation of individual texts. In this context, concealment takes “physical” form in the rejection of ideas: through annotations, crossing-outs, erasures, and ripped-out pages.

The concluding remarks of editor Cian Arthur portray the book as a microcosm of the medieval mind at work, highlighting the considerable overlap between *collectio* and concealment, which are sometimes indistinguishable. *Crafting Knowledge* concerns the assessment of the contours of such binaries: not just *collectio* and concealment, but also fusion and dissonance, elucidation and obfuscation, fact and fiction, known and unknown.

Although the process of *collectio* was systematic, and we now analyse it and make sense of its variable dynamics, it is important to remember that «modern taxonomies and definitions ... are just that – modern constructs that do not always neatly fit historical cultural products» (Contreni, p. 366). The essays in this volume do not superimpose categories to the detriment of our understanding of medieval patterns of crafting knowledge. If anything, as mentioned above, they stay close to their area of specialism and often only superficially link with one another. For this reason, they will probably attract more attention as individual contributions rather than, as a volume, inspire a new audience of medievalists to reflect further on the craft of knowledge as an integral part of medieval textual culture.

CARLOTTA BARRANU

MILVIA BOLLATI, MARCO PETOLETTI, *I manoscritti miniati in Italia della Biblioteca Ambrosiana (fondo inferior). Il Trecento*, Roma, Viella, 2022 (Scritture e libri del medioevo, XXI), 187 pp., 88 tavv. a colori, ISBN 979-12-5469-017-8.

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«Questa biblioteca Ambrosiana che Federigo ideò con sì animosa lautezza, ed eresse, con tanto dispendio, da' fondamenti; per fornir la quale di libri e di manoscritti, oltre il dono de' già raccolti con grande studio e spese da lui, spedì otto uomini, de' più colti ed esperti che poté avere, a farne incetta, per l'Italia, per la Francia, per la Spagna, per la Germania, per le Fiandre, nella Grecia, al Libano, a Gerusalemme. Così riuscì a radunarvi circa trentamila volumi stampati, e quattordicimila manoscritti». ¹

¹ ALESSANDRO MANZONI, *I promessi sposi*, a cura di Lanfranco Caretti, Milano, Mursia, 1972², cap. XXII, pp. 332-333.