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Reading in Medieval St. Gall (review)

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READING IN MEDIEVAL ST. GALL. By Anna Grotans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. P.p. xv + 363; 7 plates. \$120.

Anna Grotans has written a remarkable and fascinating book on the teaching methods used in the eleventh-century Abbey of St. Gall, Switzerland. The dominant figure of this time was Notker Labeo (a.k.a. Notker the German or Notker the III of St. Gall) who lived from ca. 950–1022 A.D. Notker was a scholar, teacher, and monk and his methods are made apparent to us through his numerous translations and commentaries that are preserved in both Latin and medieval (or Old High) German.

The book is divided into two halves. The first comprises the first three chapters and deals with a survey of monastic reading, monastic learning, and the use of the vernacular in texts at this time. Chapters four through seven represent studies on Notker's instruction on syntax, punctuation, accentuation, and spelling.

Chapter one (*Medieval Reading*) is a review of orality in classical reading and how this was translated into the culture of medieval monastic learning and reception of texts. Some of the important changes at this time (ca. ninth to eleventh centuries) were the separation of words, the use of abbreviations, *prosodiae*, punctuation, and terminal forms, all of which facilitated the medieval reader's comprehension and oral performance of the text. Notker certainly drew upon these practices but also added his own contributions to the medieval *lectio*. The fact that he used the vernacular to help his students understand texts was not new but "[. . . his] attitude toward the status and function of the vernacular [. . .] and the effect that this had on the way in which he recorded the vernacular . . ." was new (p. 45). As an example of this new attitude toward the vernacular, there is a contrast with Otfrid who wrote some one hundred years before Notker. In Otfrid's view, the vernacular was "uncultivated," "undisciplined," even ungrammatical. And yet, Otfrid chose to write in it and he is largely acknowledged to be the first to have introduced ending rhyme. A brief mention of this and a clarification would have been welcomed here.

In chapter two (*Education at St. Gall*) we read about learning in St. Gall (Switzerland) from ca. 825–1050 AD. Here we find out who the teachers and students were and what they were learning. Toward the latter part of this period significant changes were taking place in the European monastic world and Notker was at the head of these reforms at his monastery. *Dialectica* and, to a certain degree, *rhetorica* were now emphasized over *grammatica*. It was Notker's job, for example, to translate and/or collect works for elementary study of these areas. Toward the end of the chapter Grotans tells us how Notker's work may have been used for more advanced levels of learning. It is interesting to read here about the logistics of using Notker's translations/commentaries in the classroom, for private tutoring, individualized study, and private reading.

The social history and sociolinguistic context are the topics of chapter three (*Language and Choice*). Interestingly, we find that German was not just used in glosses but also read and performed in tenth-century St. Gall. Of course Latin was the main language of discourse, work, etc., and the prestige language, but not all monks and clerics spoke or were completely competent in it. Everyday language use is gleaned from Ekkehard IV's *Casus Sancti Galli*, which depicts a history of the Abbey. Grotans asserts that there was a diglossic situation in St. Gall where Latin and the vernacular were used in mutually exclusive spheres. An assertion as this for an historical period is particularly difficult to verify but may well have been the case.

At the end of the chapter Grotans characterizes Notker's frequent use of a German/Latin mix as a kind of code-switching. The variety chosen is fixed by the classroom domain, with the extra-added constraint of the pupil's knowledge of Latin. As an example, Latin would be chosen for clarifying word formations and etymologies, and to drill technical terms.

Chapter four (*The St. Gall Tractate*) begins the second part of the book wherein Grotans provides individual studies on Notker's classroom activities. The topic here is *discretio*, which is an analysis of the syntax together with the punctuation so that the reader could perform the text with optimal understanding. Grotans uses the *St. Gall Tractate* which in all likelihood was written by Notker. In it the author discusses the *natural* order of grammatical units (the *ordo naturalis*), the meaning of these units, and how (roughly) clauses, phrases, and sentences are constructed based on rhythmical and semantic criteria. The SGT author also provided lexical voice cues for proper intonation.

In chapter five (*Discretio in the Classroom*) Grotans shows how Notker implements and develops the SGT methodology in his classroom. For example, Notker sometimes changed the *natural order* of elements depending on the difficulty of the text, his pedagogical aims, and text formation strategies. In the second half of the chapter we learn about how Notker used syntactical and rhetorical punctuation to help the student distinguish phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs.

Chapters six and seven (*Accentus* and *Spelling for Reading*) is a discussion of how Notker taught and represented accent and spelling in German. Linguists have long sought to explain the discrepancies in Notker's accentual and spelling systems much to their frustration but it is important to understand that texts were to be read aloud by students, teachers, and assistants, and so, in all of Notker's efforts, whether in syntax, spelling, accentuation, etc., the aim was always to make clear the meaning of the text as heard. This explains why, for example, though circumflexes are to be used for long vowels and diphthongs and acute accents for short vowels, there are numerous inconsistencies—so, too, with Notker's well-known *Law of Initial Consonants* or *Anlautgesetz*.

There are copious footnotes and translations of both the Latin and Old High German in this book. This alone makes the book a useful resource. The extensive bibliography lists both primary and secondary literature, and the volume of primary literature that Grotans draws upon is impressive. Grotans has obviously spent considerable time in a number of archives and brings a wealth of data to support her claims. No student of Old High German should miss this book. This also represents an important contribution to our understanding of literacy in the medieval West.

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DIE LITERARISCHE WELT DES MITTELALTERS. By Claudia Brinker-von der Heyde. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007. Pp. 191; 40 illustrations. EUR 29.90.

Brinker-von der Heyde's *Die literarische Welt des Mittelalters* makes a significant contribution to the ever-widening field of the history of the book. What makes Brinker-von der Heyde's book particularly appropriate for the present time is the connections she draws between the current medium shift from physical book to digital texts, and the medieval one from orality to a "culture of the book." Concentrating on the