

---

## Book Reviews

---

Bryan C. Keene, ed. *Toward a Global Middle Ages: Encountering the World Through Illuminated Manuscripts*. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2019. 285 pp. ISBN: 9781606065983. \$60.00.

Bryan C. Keene, associate curator of manuscripts at the J. P. Getty Museum in Los Angeles, has edited, with the help of 26 scholars, a collection of 22 object-oriented articles plus an introduction, a timeline, and an epilogue. The epilogue treats manuscripts, book arts, or codex culture and material evidence and networks of many types of written-upon surfaces from around what we might call the Medieval World. Beautifully illustrated primarily from the contents of the Ludwig Collection of manuscripts, the essays cover a wide range of material with writing on it. The collection is explicitly not intended as a textbook for global Middle Ages courses, but certainly a number of the chapters come ready to hand for such projects. All of them are well done but a few are very specific to their genre of material and would need contextualization if they are used for teaching. The collection would be an excellent addition to any course on manuscripts and codicology, especially those devoted to European writing. The volume had its origins in several exhibitions on Medieval Global history, most of them at the Getty itself. The exhibitions showed Europe reacting dynamically with surrounding cultures, some close, some far away, by means of trade and other exchanges.

The volume is bracketed by a prologue by Keene and an epilogue by James Cono, the president and CEO of the J. Paul Getty Trust. Cono in particular emphasizes the value of cultural institutions and museums in fostering an approach to the global Middle Ages and Medieval Studies by showing how inclusive such approaches can be.

The collection is divided into four sections with introductory essays by Keene, which hold together the volume's diverse content. It is best reviewed and presented to its many potential audiences by working our way through the four sections and their articles. Each of the four units has at least one "case study." These are shorter discussions of a particular item or genre of material objects related to the theme of the section. They can stand alone and could be used in general surveys as examples of kinds of written material objects, although without the accompanying articles they would require contextualization. Because of time and space, not all the articles can be discussed in this review.

Keene's "Introduction: Manuscripts and Their Outlook on the World" is one of the most valuable sections of the book. The collection, like the exhibition, demonstrates our "shared global past" and helps scholars to "think globally with compassion" by moving beyond Eurocentric historiography, chronology, and geography. The volume shows a connected world long before "modernity" by examining the mobility of objects set in the context of geography, race, religion, gender, trade, travel, contact, and assimilation. The ambitious goal is to aid interdisciplinary scholars by providing "tools, methodologies, and frameworks for interrogating the idea of the global Middle Ages" (31). The book also has much to say about the efforts of museums to deal with their imperial and racist pasts. To acknowledge that these pasts are part of contemporary society is a way to combat appropriation of contemporary erroneous and specious ideas about the nationalist and racially pure European Middle Ages. The introduction is followed by Morgan Conger's "A Timeline for a Global Middle Ages: Linear Time and Modes of Remembering the Past," which sets out chronologically significant moments in textual communities around the world, from the sixth to the seventeenth centuries.

Keene, in his introduction to the first set of essays ("I. Glimpsing a Global Middle Ages"), seeks "to dismantle Eurocentrism or Western-centrism in regard to the constructs of linear time, literacy and textuality, and world-making strategies often falling under the rubrics of empire, nation, religion, or a vague sense of 'culture'" (49). This is a timely aim of the collection.

Jeremy Brotton's "World Views and the Map Maker's Craft" compares map making techniques and biases from the Mediterranean and Korea. Aleka Patel's "Stories and Pictures from All the World: South Asian Book Arts from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century" is an especially important discussion of "Medieval India" and south Asian book arts. It is followed by Brian Ellsworth Hamann's "The Middle Ages, Middle America, and the Book," an article which challenges the traditional framework of our understandings of "Medieval Mesoamerica" and its writing and book arts. Susan Conklin Akbari's "Where is Medieval Ethiopia? Mapping Ethiopic Studies within Medieval Studies" places maps of Ethiopia in the context of European map making. In "Manuscripts and the Medieval Tropics" Alex J. West explores the problems of understanding written records where almost none are extant by deploying the techniques of "archeology, ethnography, historical linguistics, oral history, and ethnohistory" (98), in hopes of avoiding European, white, and colonial biases. The concluding essay in this set is Asa Simon Mittman's "Case Study: Mapping Global Middle Ages" which examines inclusion and exclusion of peoples in T-O maps.

Keene in "II. The Intermediality of 'the Book': Bound, Rolled, and Folded Textual Objects" introduces the section on "the relationship between the book, broadly defined to include bound, rolled, and folded as a text written and then embellished by hand (including printed examples with metal-leaf decoration), and other media or visual traditions" (108). J. Sören Edgren in "Buddhist Illuminated Manuscripts in East Asia" examines illuminated sutras in order to make East Asian book history and manuscript culture better understood. Eyob Derillo in "Case Study: Traveling Medicine: Medieval Ethiopian Amulet Scrolls and Practitioners' Handbooks" studies the global connections among

talismanic objects from different writing cultures. Megan E. O'Neill's "The Painter's Line on Paper and Clay: Maya Codices and Codex-Style Vessels from the Seventh to the Sixteenth Century" compares the rare surviving Mayan written manuscripts with decorated ritual clay vessels or ceramics. She importantly points out that many codices were lost due to climate and simple destruction by the conquering Spanish. Sussan Babaie in "Case Study: Missionary Effects and Messianic Aspirations at the Court of Shah 'Abbas I" traces contacts between Europe and the Safavids, especially gift exchange. Sylvie L. Merion's "Reproducing the Resurrection: From European Prints to Armenian Manuscripts" interrogates and compares images of the resurrection from late Medieval and European prints and illustrations with examples from Armenia.

Keene's "III. Identity: Finding One's Place in the Medieval World" introduces essays that examine texts and images which reveal the spatial, cultural, temporal, and racial dimensions of the global Middle Ages. In this endeavor to update our understanding of a global world, elites, the main audience, set the tone for ideas about identity. Roland Betancourt's "Imperial Brutality: Racial Difference and the Intersectionality of the Ethiopian Eunuch" portrays ideas about and tolerance of the race and identity of Ethiopian eunuchs as portrayed in Byzantine manuscripts. Kristen Collins and Bryan C. Keene draw on their curatorial experiences in "Case Study: Mobilizing the Collection: Teaching beyond the (Medieval) Canon with Museum Objects" to show how one can move beyond the western canon to engage with the derogatory and prejudicial images of other people found in museum collection of manuscripts. Pamela A. Patton in "Color, Culture, and the Making of Difference in the *Vidal Mayor*" uses the *Vidal Mayor*, a collection of feudal laws from Aragon from about 1300 and one of the Ludwig manuscripts in the collection of the Getty, to analyze stereotypical ideas about Jews, money, Muslims, sin, and slavery. These concepts and stereotypes reflected anxieties about the complex worlds of Aragon. Kaiqi Hua in his "Case Study: 'Horses, Arrows, and Trebuchets: Picturing the Mongol Military Campaigns in Eurasia'" traces how the terrifying Mongol military campaigns were vividly depicted in manuscripts in Europe. Mark Cruse's "Novelty and Diversity in Illustrations of the Marco Polo's *Description of the World*" explains how the wider world described by Marco Polo in the earliest manuscript of his work might have been incorporated into European consciousness. Last in this section, Alexandra Kaczynski in "Case Study: Visualizing Byzantine and Islamic Objects in Two Fifteenth-Century Francophone Manuscripts" looks at how various types of Byzantine and Islamic objects and styles are reflected in two fifteenth-century French manuscripts.

In "IV. Itineraries from the Atlantic to the Pacific: Travel, Circulation, and Exchange," Keene sets the stage for this section on the movement of manuscripts, scattered all over the world because of commerce, warfare, travel, looting, and gift exchange. Jill Caskey in "Transplants and Transformation in a Global Middle Ages" shows how Keene's ideas worked in transcultural and transplanting such concepts back into Europe. Michelle H. Craig in "Case Study: Manuscripts, Faith, and Trade across the Medieval Sahara" does the same for material objects that crossed the medieval Sahara. Tushara Bindu Gude in "Narrative Shifts: The Life of the Buddha in Palm-Leaf Manuscripts" demonstrates the importance of empowering depictions of the Buddha. This was a much more refined and

cosmopolitan world than has been commonly appreciated. In a somewhat out of place but fine essay, Melanie Holcomb and Elizabeth A. Eisenberg strive in “Traveling off the Page: Bringing the Voyage to Life in Hebrew Poetry and Paintings” to show how fifteenth-century Jews from Iberia depicted imagined journeys to escape or temper their displacement. Rheagan Eric Martin in “Case Study: Peregrinations of Parchment and Pewter: Manuscripts and Mental Pilgrimage” provides a close study of manuscripts, visitor or pilgrim badges and other portable items, all viewed in similar spiritual terms.

James Cuno in “Epilogue: Global History and the Art Museum” asserts the value of cultural institutions in the history of the Medieval World, including historical work and museum curatorship. This is important to avoid being overwhelmed by the idea of the nation-state isolated from the rest of the world and also dominating it. He claims the encyclopedic art museum can facilitate such endeavors. The volume ends with an important and unusual 20-page bibliography.

This volume is significant for all scholars of the Medieval World, and could be useful in courses on the period at the graduate and undergraduate levels.

University of California, Santa Barbara

EDWARD D. ENGLISH

---

A. Albin, M.C. Erler, T. O'Donnell, N.L. Paul, and N. Rowe, ed. *Whose Middle Ages? Teachable Moments for an Ill-Used Past*. New York City: Fordham University Press, 2019. 240 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8232-8556-3. \$70.

This is a significant contribution to medieval studies and has already generated discussion among medievalists debating disciplinary politics. Trisected into “Stories,” “Origins,” and “#Hashtags,” the book reads like a polyvocal series of blog posts on doing medievalism in an age of recrudescing fascism.

The volume begins with pieces introducing students to vexing and/or easily misunderstood concepts such as the Crusades (Nicholas Paul) and Shari'a (Fred Donner). W.M. Ormrod's piece, summarizing a recent project on immigration in later medieval England, could feature in courses on contemporary Britain, as a corrective of the myth of homogeneous ethnic purity that Brexiteers fetishize. Several contributions are stand-alone reads: Sarah Guérin's article reconstructs the world of the trans-Saharan exchange networks that provided medieval Europe's ivory and gold.

One of the most telling moments in the volume comes in Magda Teter's piece on anti-Semitic blood libel. Teter describes a scene in Lincoln cathedral, when neo-Nazis attempted to honor Hugh, star of an anti-Semitic tale at the heart of the blood libel myths (44–45). A priest drew their attention to a 1953 plaque the cathedral erected to underline the nefarious history of the cult. This didn't interest the Nazis, who proceeded to memorialize the “saint.” Ideological thinking's intractability is on abundant display here. As Kant once observed, against stupidity, there is no remedy.

Sandy Bardsley's article introduces the reader to the English peasantry and sources for its history, rightly underlining archeology's importance here. It does not leave room for