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The Tree: Symbol, Allegory, and Mnemonic Device in Medieval Art and Thought

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available some of Sandler's valuable studies of other books in the Bohun group. Although Sandler makes limited use of the opportunity presented to draw together a broader reflection on the Bohun manuscripts as a whole, developing the themes for discussion which cross over both parts of the volume, this is a most impressive monograph on a most important manuscript. Beautifully produced, this new book makes a further major contribution to Sandler's impressive bibliography on this group of manuscripts.

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NOTES

¹ Lucy Freeman Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts 1285–1385: A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles 5*, ed. J. J. G. Alexander (London and Oxford: Harvey Miller Publishers and Oxford University Press, 1986), part II, 147–65, numbers 133–42. Two manuscripts listed as number 1 and number 8 in the book under review are additions to the list since 1986, the first published by Christopher de Hamel in 2000 (“A New Bohun,” in *The English Medieval Book: Studies in Memory of Jeremy Griffiths*, ed. A. S. G. Edwards, Vincent Gillespie, and Ralph Hanna [London: British Library Studies in the History of the Book, 2000], 19–26); the second by Lucy Freeman Sandler (*The Lichenthall Psalter and the Manuscript Patronage of the Bohun Family* [London: Harvey Miller, 2004]).

² Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts*, part I, 34–36.

³ Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts*, part II, 151–54, number 135. The manuscript was not discovered in time to be included in the first major publication of the Bohun manuscripts, in M. R. James and E. G. Millar, *The Bohun Manuscripts*, Roxburghe Club 200 (Oxford: Roxburghe Club, 1936).

⁴ Various lists of books survive; the most important is the inventory of goods seized from Pleshey in 1397, with forty Bibles and service books, some described as “well illuminated” with “84 romances” and other texts (6).

⁵ The illustration occurs in the Hours section of the manuscript, at the first of the seven Penitential Psalms that follow the Hours of the Virgin and precede the Litany and the Office of the Dead. See p. 65 for the illustration, p. 64 for the discussion, and pp. 140–41 for detailed description and analysis of the iconography.

Pippa Salonijs and Andrea Worm, eds.

The Tree: Symbol, Allegory, and Mnemonic Device in Medieval Art and Thought.

International Medieval Research, 20. Turnhout: Brepols, 2014.

Pp. xviii + 258; 4 color illus., 102 black-and-white illus.

The collection under review here, which consists of a brief introduction and nine substantial articles, considers the ways in which trees, in various imaginings, function as carriers of meaning in the art of the central and later Middle Ages. The individual essays derive ultimately from sessions on the topic organized by the editors for the 2008 International Medieval Conference at the University of Leeds, which took as its overarching theme “The Natural World.” Much to the editors’ and authors’ credit, this is not a mere gathering together of conference papers lightly polished for publication. Instead, the articles are notable for their scholarly heft. Each, in its own way, digs deep into a different aspect of the book’s title theme, whether devoted to issues of iconography or content delivery. The authors

adopt a broad range of approaches here; some of the studies are built up around the thick description of individual monuments while others interrogate specific medieval objects to consider medieval habits of thought more broadly.

In a concise introduction running to nine pages, the editors touch briefly on issues of historiography and method in relation to the book's theme. In demonstrating how trees and tree-forms in medieval culture were used to bring together the cognitive and the aesthetic, they use as an example the author Ramon Llull (1232–1316), who in his *Arbor scientiae* crafted an encyclopedic treatise that at its heart is a collection of mental tree diagrams that the reader might use to retain the text's intellectual structure and contents. As the authors are aware, many other examples could be given. Trees in medieval art and thought could be used in both complex diagrammatic ways and as iconographic symbols of religious thought. Trees might function as sites of memory, allegory, and/or epistemological organization. They could be bearers of theological, historical, and philosophical knowledge. Their diagrammatic function typically is rooted in organization and hierarchy but was also flexible enough to handle the exceptional and the anomalous.

As with most scholarly essay collections, individual readers will likely read this volume selectively, drawn to articles based on interests and expertise. In what follows, I will touch on each of the book's nine essays, tracing a path that is based on some of the implicit connections that can be found among the contributions.

The collection opens with Marie-Pierre Gelin's consideration of stained glass depictions of the Jesse tree ("*Stirps Jesse in capite ecclesiae: Iconographic and Liturgical Readings of the Tree of Jesse in Stained-Glass Windows*"). Here, the author is interested not only in issues of iconography but also in issues of space, that is, how the Jesse tree helps to structure sacred space in relation to liturgy. This approach allows for a multivalent consideration of an iconography well known to scholars of medieval art. The work of Margot Fassler and others paves the way here, but Gelin expands upon that foundation, noting that Jesse trees are often found in the axial windows of churches, a place of undeniable prominence. She argues that among their functions were both a contextualization of royal power within the sphere of the Church and a strong emphasis on Mary. The genealogy of Christ was, for example, typically read on the feast of the Virgin's Nativity.

In the book's final essay ("*Arbor Jesse – Lignum vitae: The Tree of Jesse, the Tree of Life, and the Mendicants in Late Medieval Orvieto*") Pippa Salonijs also considers Jesse tree imagery in monumental contexts. Her principal focus is the façade of Orvieto Cathedral, which includes a Jesse tree with Old Testament prophecies in the form of eighteen narrative scenes. Salonijs not only considers the Franciscan influence that might be at work here but also the possibility of more distant Byzantine and/or eastern European influences undergirding the iconography and format of this tree. As a result, her analysis ranges widely from Italy to Istanbul, Serbia, and beyond. Salonijs concludes that the Orvieto Jesse tree likely derived ultimately from an eastern European iconographic source.

Taken together, these two articles work both synchronically and diachronically to excavate the complex layers of meaning and the iconographical genealogies of this particular image-type. Other articles within the collection resonate among one another in related fashions as well.

Jesse trees are but one example of the ways in which medieval image makers envisioned significant genealogies as diagrammatic structures. Andrea Worm further considers the genealogy of Christ in her article "*Arbor autem humanum genus significat: Trees of Genealogy and Sacred History in the Twelfth Century.*" Her study offers a sharply focused analysis of three monastic Bibles from

the twelfth century, the Parc Bible, the Floreffe Bible, and the Foigny Bible. The first two books originated in Premonstratensian houses, the third in a Cistercian institution. Strikingly, all three contain Trees of Consanguinity followed by an extensive genealogy of Christ. Worm argues that the consanguinity diagram functions within the manuscripts as a kind of theological gloss on the fall of humanity, a kind of re-thinking, if you will, of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. The viewer is implicitly encouraged to locate himself/herself within the diagram as a fallen being whose own familial relationships form part of the unfolding of history. Ultimately, Worm offers a striking example of a phenomenon considered by other authors in the collection, namely that medieval tree diagrams could potentially function in dialogue, one influencing and even altering another.

Marigold Anne Norbye also considers this notion in her "*Arbor genealogiae: Manifestations of the Tree in French Royal Genealogies.*" She traces the long life of such genealogies in medieval culture from the eleventh through the fifteenth centuries. Especially interesting are her observations on how anomalies were handled. Genealogical trees that presented the succession of rulers in medieval France needed to account for illegitimate kings and disruptions to succession such as changes in dynasties. Norbye demonstrates that these aberrations were often taken into consideration by medieval genealogists. Also notable is her examination of the ways in which a genealogical diagram might be structured to accommodate a rich matrix of historical data. Around the year 1200, for example, Gilles de Paris created a family tree of French royalty that used color coding to distinguish among individuals' status. Thus, although we typically associate tree diagrams with order and hierarchy, they could also make room for the exceptional and the transgressive.

As a means of storing information and ideas, tree diagrams found many other uses in medieval culture beyond the genealogical. Annemieke R. Verboon considers one such use in her article, "The Medieval Tree of Porphyry: An Organic Structure of Logic." This particular diagram is used to define Aristotle's category of "substance" through a listing of various species and genera in a hierarchical format. The structuration traces its ultimate origin to the work of Boethius, but Verboon is especially interested in the diagram's popularization through manuscripts of Peter of Spain's *Tractatus*, an introductory text on logic dating to the thirteenth century. Again, we are confronted with a flexible diagrammatic structure; as Verboon notes, a standard Tree of Porphyry does not exist. Authors were thus able to refashion the structure to suit their own interests. As an example of this, Verboon offers an analogous diagram ranking God and his creation in a manuscript of the *Clavis physicae* of Honorius Augustodunensis.

The intertwined devotional and theological aspects of tree diagrams are considered in Ulrike Ilg's "*Quasi lignum vitae: The Tree of Life as an Image of Mendicant Identity.*" Her investigation centers on those images inspired by Bonaventure's treatise *Lignum vitae* of ca. 1260, which focuses on the life of Christ. Visualizations of the text bring together aspects of a traditional tree diagram with elements of Christ's cross; the resulting hybrid was seemingly popular in both manuscripts and monumental formats. This diagram, like others discussed above, provided ample room for enlargement, revision, and conceptual layering. It demonstrates how the format was repeatedly re-envisioned for different patrons and contexts. Especially noteworthy is her discussion of the scheme's presence in the common rooms of Franciscan institutions.

The three remaining articles in the collection consider the ways in which tree imagery contributes to aspects of biblical iconography. The contribution of Ute Dercks, "Two Trees in Paradise? A Case Study on the Iconography of the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life in Italian Romanesque

Sculpture," is largely taxonomic and descriptive. It considers, in part, the different ways in which artists rendered the specific visual features of trees in the period. The spectrum of examples that she offers demonstrates how medieval sculptors might mix and mingle different fruit-bearing trees and plants (apples, figs, grapes, pomegranates, etc.) in a single composition.

In one of the richest studies in the collection, Barbara Baert and Liesbet Kusters consider "The Tree as Narrative, Formal, and Allegorical Index in Representations of the *Noli me tangere*." In artistic examples ranging from the ninth through the sixteenth centuries, the authors demonstrate the various ways in which a tree could be used as a bearer of theological ideas in the context of images of Christ's Resurrection. In the examples they consider, the tree becomes a boundary marker between the earthly and the heavenly. It might symbolize the New Jerusalem or mark out Mary Magdalene as the new Eve and proclaimer of the Church.

The rich complexity of biblical tree imagery is also considered by Susanne Wittekind in her "Visualizing Salvation: The Role of Arboreal Imagery in the *Speculum humanae salvationis* (Kremsmünster, Library of the Convent, Cod. 243)." The bilingual manuscript, in Latin and German, that is the focus of her study dates to ca. 1325/1330 and was likely made for a Premonstratensian convent in Weissenau. Wittekind's study is at heart an examination of intervisuality, focusing on the ways in which the various trees in the manuscript (both diagrammatic and intradiegetic) created meaning with and against one another. The manuscript is a particularly rich example for such a study, as it contains a Jesse tree, a Tree of Virtues, a Tree of Vices, a Tree of Consanguinity, and a Tree of Affinity, as well as images of trees in its biblical and apocryphal narrative scenes.

The editors of the volume are to be commended for both the wide-ranging contents and user-friendly organization of the volume. The articles themselves often present an ideal of amplification, going beyond the brevity of the conference paper to achieve depths of exposition and thought. The book's format is also praiseworthy. Each article concludes with separate and thorough listings of manuscripts and archival sources, primary sources, and secondary sources, thus facilitating further study on the part of the reader.

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