

flavoured with observations that are witty (p. 25: ‘I have known too many good historians to leave half-finished books on their desks for decades at a time to think that the unfinished nature of the text means that Nikephoros had pen in hand in the last months of his life’) and to the point at the same time (p. 184: ‘Nikephoros learned how to fight by fighting, but he learned to write about military engagements by reading’).

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Medieval Narratives between History and Fiction. From the Centre to the Periphery of Europe, c. 1100-1400, éd. par P. A. AGAPITOS et L. BOJE MORTENSEN, Copenhagen, Museum Tusulanum Press, 2012, VIII + 389 pages. ISBN 978-87-635-3809-1.

This is a rich, attractive and multifaceted volume on conceptualizations of history and fiction in medieval narrative literature. It covers a wide range of texts that blur borderlines between these two categories in interesting ways. Some of these texts have received remarkably little attention in scholarship up to the present day. One of the reasons of this neglect is that fictional(ized) narratives for a long time tended to be perceived as forgeries, historically unreliable and inaccurate and, therefore, generally uninteresting. This book, on the other hand, approaches these texts *as narratives* and explores a number of themes relevant to the question of how fictional modes rise and thrive in the field of historical narrative. The reference to centre and periphery in the title points to the revisions of both geographical and generic conceptualizations that this book aims to bring to the debate: while scholarship often presents northern France as the spatial centre of medieval fiction and at the same time foregrounds epic and romance as the canonical genres, this book aims to focus, first and foremost, on non-canonical literature, not in just one language but in different regional cultures and linguistic traditions. In doing so, it attempts to write a ‘more open narrative of European literature’ (p. 8) and reads medieval Europe ‘as a broad and open system of distinct and yet interrelated regional cultures that come to display, against nineteenth-century constructions of nations and (non-)national literatures’ (pp. 6-7).

After an instructive introduction by the editors, nine chapters set out to write this ‘open narrative’ from different, well-chosen angles (I include a table of contents below). The first and the second chapters address relations between history and fiction in Graeco-Roman Antiquity (T. HÄGG) and the French 12th c. (D. H. GREEN). Subsequently, three chapters (P. G. SCHMIDT, Päivi M. MEHTONEN and L. BOJE MORTENSEN) explore a number of medieval Latin narrative texts from the 12th-13th c., while in the next triad (J. WELLENDORF, Else MUNDAL and Slavica RANKOVIĆ) Scandinavian narrative traditions in the 12th-15th c. are discussed. The apotheosis to the volume is the closing ch. (P. A. AGAPITOS), which in roughly 130 pages takes the reader on a breathtaking, panoramic tour through Byzantine, Persian, Arabic, French and German medieval narrative – an article very likely, in my view, to become seminal for scholarship in future years and decades.

An important strand throughout the book is the grounding in Antiquity of different concepts and conceptualizations of fiction/history, be it in ancient school curricula and rhetorical education (e.g. pp. 7-8; 252-253) or specific ancient literary genres (e.g. GREEN on the importance of the Latin tradition, and Vergil and Ovid in

particular, for the establishment of a space for fictional experiments in Latin literature in the 11th c., and AGAPITOS (esp. pp. 284-285) on the crucial role played by ancient Greek novels in the conceptualization of fiction in Byzantium). Another notion central to the volume is the problematic nature of the concepts of both history and fiction (on which there is good discussion on pp. 11-13) in the narratives under scrutiny. An insightful definition that has some role to play and is cited on p. 15, is that of GREEN (*The Beginnings of Medieval Romance: Fact and Fiction, 1150-1220*, Cambridge, 2002, p. 4), who highlights as essential a contract of make-believe underlying the literary communication with the intended audience. Of course, in most cases, any distillation of such a contract from the texts is far from self-evident. Illustrative of this difficulty is Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britannia*, which has been read as a piece of fiction by some (as pointed out by SCHMIDT, p. 63) but has been viewed as more closely aligned with history by others (GREEN, pp. 58-59) and, in any case, consciously presents itself as *historia*. Similarly, ancient texts such as the *Cyropaedia* and the *Alexander Romance*, both discussed by HÄGG, defy any straightforward approach of readerly contracts underlying them.

In coming to grips with such problems, the chapters form an admirably consistent book, first and foremost because three major themes resurface throughout, all connected and contextualized in the introduction (pp. 17-22). The first of these is the tendency of narrative gaps in historical accounts to act as *loci* for fictionalization – a theme that invites ample comparison with similar gaps in ancient narrative genres characterized by comparably vague borderlines between history and fiction (on childhood episodes in ancient biography, for example, see C. Pelling's classic 'Childhood and Personality in Greek Biography', in: C. Pelling (ed.), *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*, Oxford, pp. 213-244). The second theme is authentication and is put to good use by BOJE MORTENSEN (on the *Historia Norwegie*, *Brevis historia regum Dacie* and *Gesta Danorum*, three national histories written in Latin), WELLENDORF (on vision literature) and RANKOVIĆ (on the sagas of Icelanders and Serbian epic poetry) among others. The third theme is rhetorical elaboration and explores, among other things, descriptions (e.g. GREEN on Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannie*) and *ethopoeia* in (purportedly) historical accounts as pockets of fictionalization (e.g. MEHTONEN, also on Geoffrey of Monmouth).

Among the numerous other achievements of the book, let me just single out one or two. First, its interesting discussions of the importance (and intertwinement) of written and oral traditions in the conceptualization of fiction (e.g. GREEN on Vergil, Apollonius of Rhodes and literarity, BOJE MORTENSEN on orally transmitted stories (pp. 114-118), and MUNDAL (esp. p. 177) on the sagas of Icelanders). Second, in exploring from different angles the traditional tripartition between *historia*, *fabula* and *argumentum*, the book often raises the interesting question of how useful this tripartition really is (e.g. MEHTONEN, MUNDAL p. 174, and BOJE MORTENSEN pp. 133-134). On the one hand, to be sure, these categories are themselves instrumental in self-presentations of and by narrators. HÄGG, for example, discusses the *Vita Apollonii's* self-presentation as *historia* (pp. 39-40) and GREEN takes as a starting point Ovid's and Baudri de Bourgueil's explicit comments on the fictional nature of their narratives (pp. 50-51). On the other hand, contributors to this volume aptly point out that these labels cannot simply be attached to texts without qualifications (e.g. WELLENDORF p. 150) and raise the question of to what extent they necessarily apply to a work as a whole or can be split up to apply to certain sections or passages of narratives (e.g. HÄGG pp. 33-35). Surely, different pulls towards factuality and

fictionality are operative in any given narrative text. These are labelled as ‘attractors’ by RANKOVIĆ (pp. 207-211) and interestingly discussed in the context of different literary traditions by AGAPITOS (pp. 254-276). In addition, questions about truthfulness and fiction are also explored in episodes that thematize an access to thoughts and personal experiences. WELLENDORF, for example, asks with regard to vision literature ‘how the reader can possibly evaluate the truthfulness, or lack thereof, of an account of a personal experience about a contract with the divine or the transcendent to which there might not have been any witnesses’ (p. 144). A similar question can be asked not about readers but about narrators who narrate aspects not readily available to them such as, again, thoughts or personal experiences of characters. D. Cohn’s *The Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore, 1999) has valuable things to say about this question and its implications for conceptualizing fiction and would have been relevant to some chapters. Similarly, the notion of self-referentiality of fiction, discussed by GREEN (p. 60) and picked up by RANKOVIĆ (p. 205), is discussed at length in this book.

In short: both authors and editors have done a nice job in addressing key concepts about fiction and history in subtle and persuasive readings of highly interesting texts and uniting them into a consistent and balanced volume. This book will undoubtedly be of interest and profit to anyone even remotely interested in medieval (fictional and/or historical) narrative.

Table of contents: 1. *Introduction* (P. A. AGAPITOS and L. BOJE MORTENSEN); 2. *Historical Fiction in the Graeco-Roman World: Cyrus, Alexander, Apollonius* (T. HÄGG); 3. *The Rise of Medieval Fiction in the Twelfth Century* (D. H. GREEN); 4. *Fictionality in the Medieval Latin Novel* (P. G. SCHMIDT); 5. *Speak, Fiction: the Rhetorical Fabrication of Narrative in Geoffrey of Monmouth* (Päivi M. MEHTONEN); 6. *The Status of the ‘Mythical’ Past in Nordic Latin Historiography (c. 1170-1220)* (L. BOJE MORTENSEN); 7. *True Records of Events that could have taken Place: Fictionality in Vision Literature* (J. WELLENDORF); 8. *The Growth of Consciousness of Fiction in Old Norse Culture* (Else MUNDAL); 9. *Authentication and Authenticity in the Sagas of Icelanders and Serbian Epic Poetry* (Slavica RANKOVIĆ); 10. *In Rhomaian, Persian and Frankish Lands: Fiction and Fictionality in Byzantium* (P. A. AGAPITOS).

K. DE TEMMERMAN.

D. KRUEGER, *Liturgical Subjects. Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative, and the Formation of the Self in Byzantium*, Philadelphie (PA), University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014, xi + 311 pages. ISBN 978-0-8122-4644-5.

In his latest book, D. KRUEGER investigates the history of the concept of self in the Byzantine empire. He bases his study mainly on liturgical texts as they can, more than other kinds of literary texts, express and influence interior life. The reader too, who is unfamiliar with Orthodox liturgy or Byzantine literary tradition, will benefit from the impressive amount of research conducted by KRUEGER and from the lucid and clear analysis carried out on the primary sources, and will appreciate the author’s limpid and captivating style.

The book consists of seven chapters and concerns middle Byzantine liturgy, from the VIth to XIth c., with particular focus on the VIth and VIIth c. Valuably enough, KRUEGER selects the texts of his study from different genres, ranging from hymns