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**Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400-1400. Marcia L. Colish
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Published in:
Speculum-A journal of medieval studies

DOI:
[10.2307/2886988](https://doi.org/10.2307/2886988)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
1999

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Roest, B. (1999). Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400-1400. Marcia L. Colish. *Speculum-A journal of medieval studies*, 74(4), 1047-1049. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2886988>

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400-1400.
by Marcia L. Colish

Review by: Bert Roest

Source: *Speculum*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (Oct., 1999), pp. 1047-1049

Published by: The University of Chicago Press on behalf of the Medieval Academy of
America

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2886988>

Accessed: 11-12-2018 08:36 UTC

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excursuses: the first devoted to a close reading of carnival in the time of Lorenzo the Magnificent, the second to the reform of carnival under Savonarola. Taken together, the excursuses argue that Lorenzo made few innovations to carnival ceremonies, while Savonarola tried to Christianize carnival rather than eradicate it. Ciappelli directs his analysis primarily against Richard Trexler's view that a "ritual revolution" occurred in late-fifteenth-century Florence. Despite the author's careful handling of evidence that throws Trexler's claim in doubt, Ciappelli focuses narrowly on the particularities of Laurentian carnival and fails to engage the broader argument.

The book closes with a chapter devoted to the "age groups" of the young and the dead, then doubles back in a separate conclusion to the arguments proposed in the excursuses. Ciappelli claims that the moral tone of Florentine society became more relaxed by 1500, that the real ritual revolution of late-fifteenth-century Florence lay in Savonarola's attempt to Christianize carnival while respecting its traditions, and that in the sixteenth century carnival ceased to be a mixed social rite and became more elitist. Given Ciappelli's pronounced emphasis on structure rather than process throughout the book, these conclusions seem disconnected from the evidence presented. Moreover, since the author isolates the particularities of the Laurentian and Savonarolan years, one is left with little sense of the pace, dynamics, or drivers of change over two centuries to support his larger conclusions. On balance, then, this book offers an array of interesting, well-documented snapshots of Florentine society without binding them into a cohesive historical album.

SHARON T. STROCCHIA, Emory University

MARCIA L. COLISH, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400–1400*. (The Yale Intellectual History of the West.) New Haven, Conn., and London: Yale University Press, 1997. Pp. xii, 388 plus 21 black-and-white plates. \$40.

This book is the first volume of what is meant to be a seven-volume authoritative intellectual history of "the West," aiming at an in-depth presentation of what in the American history of ideas since Arthur Lovejoy is coined "the Western intellectual tradition." In line with this approach, which, ever since the late 1960s, has repeatedly come under attack by historians such as Quentin Skinner, this and subsequent volumes focus on those elements in the intellectual world throughout the ages that have had a lasting impact on Western thought.

That overall objective notwithstanding, the editorial board of the series has chosen an experienced medievalist as author for this first volume. Marcia Colish is known in the world of medieval studies as the author of stimulating and, at the same time, controversial books, such as *The Mirror of Language* (1968) and *Peter Lombard* (1994). In these books she has proven herself to be a specialist in twelfth- and thirteenth-century semantics and theology, not afraid of defending strong interpretative positions. Now she casts her nets wider and aims to depict the medieval intellectual endeavor from an encompassing teleological perspective.

Colish's main thesis is that the foundations of the Western intellectual tradition were laid in the medieval period and not in classical Greece, Rome, or the Judeo-Christian tradition. Whatever one wants to think about such a blunt dichotomy of influences, the thesis ties in with an age-old medievalist's instinct to uphold the importance of the medieval period over and against the many detractors who, from the fifteenth century onwards, have tried to portray the medieval period as a dark interlude without much significance for those interested in the constitutive elements of the Western intellectual tradition. In a series like the Yale Intellectual History of the West such a thesis still serves a purpose, insofar as the work is meant to reach a larger audience than the specialized medievalist. The many references

throughout this book to Aristotle, Roman law, the Bible, and Christianity show at the same time that Colish's thesis should not be taken *ad litteram*.

The overall aim of the series, the main thesis of the book, and the reputation of the author promise a narrative that will surpass the textbook level and that will offer a perspective challenging enough to entice further discussion. The structure of the book confirms this: in twenty-six well-written chapters divided over seven parts the author deals with the emergence of the early-medieval world (part 1), the rise of vernacular cultures (part 2), differences and parallels between early- and high-medieval Byzantine, Muslim, Jewish, and Christian cultures and thought (part 3), the development of Latin and vernacular literatures (part 4), the unfolding of mysticism, devotional traditions, and heretical movements (part 5), the development of high- and late-medieval speculative (Scholastic) thought (part 6), and the legacy of Scholasticism for natural science, political thought, and economics (part 7). The book ends with a brief conclusion (pp. 350–59), which highlights areas of discontinuity (“markers of medieval modes of thought and sensibility that end with the period”) and so-called areas of continuity (“markers of ideas and attitudes that make the Middle Ages the first chapter of the western intellectual tradition”).

The wide-ranging expertise of the author, which is shown through fascinating close readings of a large number of medieval Latin texts, makes this book, and in particular the chapters of parts 1, 3, 6, and 7, well worth reading by anybody interested in medieval intellectual history and its significance for Western culture. Readers will find in this book with its densely printed pages an enormous amount of information (more than the actual number of pages would suggest) and many suggestive interpretations, especially concerning the Latin tradition with which the author undoubtedly is well acquainted.

At the same time, there are some disappointments, in particular with regard to the presentation of later medieval mysticism, devotional movements, and later medieval vernacular literature. The flyleaf of the book promises “astute descriptions of the vernacular and oral culture of each country of Europe.” With regard to the high-medieval period, the author seems to fulfill this promise: due attention is paid to the emergence of Celtic, Old French, Old Norse, Old High German, and Old English literature (chaps. 7 and 8), and a rather well balanced picture is sketched of the development of, and the interaction between, Latin and vernacular courtly and noncourtly literary traditions in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (chaps. 12–14). The presentation of the late-medieval vernacular traditions (chap. 15), however, is very much a shallow adaptation of the traditional “classics of Western literature” approach. On page 213 the author states that the Germanic, French, and Iberian languages did not produce a single major masterpiece during the later Middle Ages and that the Germanic and Iberian languages in particular did not gain the “lexical and syntactical maturity” that would have enabled them to express abstract and sophisticated ideas. Scholars knowledgeable in such later medieval vernaculars will be very surprised to hear this. This unwarranted portrayal of several non-English literatures suggests that the author simply is not very well informed on these topics, a suspicion borne out by a look at the literature cited in the bibliographical note. This impression is further confirmed by the way in which Colish portrays in three short paragraphs the literary heritage of Dante, Boccaccio, and Chaucer. The same can be said about her treatment of late-medieval (mendicant and lay) mysticism and devotional literature, which focuses too much on the traditional highlights and ignores many of the new insights in late-medieval passion devotion and the manifold liturgical practices that helped to shape late-medieval lay piety. Here, too, the author seems not to be aware of the work by Italian and German scholars in particular.

Partly because of such gaps, but probably more because of editorial pressures, the bibliographical note at the end is virtually devoid of scholarship not available in English. Important studies by authors such as André Vauchez, Paul Zumthor, Kurt Ruh, Arnold Angenendt, Henri de Lubac, Dieter Berg, Georg Steer, Kaspar Elm, Grado Maria Merlo, and

many, many others are simply left out, as if the interpretations put forward in such works do not count. Also surprising is the absence of English and translated classics like Malcom Lambert's and Norman Cohn's works on medieval heresies and prophetic movements, M.-D. Chenu's works on early Scholasticism, and the works of Hastings Rashdall and Hilde de Ridder-Symoens on the medieval universities. Some of these works no doubt will be found in the *American Historical Association's Guide to Historical Literature* (3rd ed.), to which the author refers for further bibliographical information. It would have been preferable, however, if at least some of these works had been present in the bibliographical note itself.

It is extremely difficult to write a well-balanced book on the medieval foundations of the Western intellectual tradition. It asks for a generalist who knows how to tap the work of specialists without losing sight of the larger picture. Aside from a definite Anglo-American bias and the above-mentioned weaknesses, Marcia Colish has made a commendable effort.

BERT ROEST, University of Groningen

MARIA COLOMBO TIMELLI, *Traductions françaises de l' "Ars minor" de Donat au moyen âge (XIIIe–XVe siècles)*. (Pubblicazioni della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università degli Studi di Milano, 169; Sezione di Lingua e Letteratura Francese e dei Paesi Francofoni, 1.) Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1996. Paper. Pp. x, 245; tables. L 42,000.

Maria Colombo Timelli has made a career of studying the medieval reception of the works of Aelius Donatus, a grammarian of the fourth century and teacher of St. Jerome. The text reviewed here on medieval French translations of the *Ars minor* is a revised version of a work originally published in 1966; in 1988 she published an edition of Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 14095 (an Old French translation of the *Ars minor*) and in 1997 an annotated edition of an allegorized Donatus by Colard Mansion. The current volume benefits from this intensity of focus without sacrificing a sense of the larger picture.

The bulk of the work consists of ten medieval French editions of the *Ars minor*, each supplemented by complete bibliographic information, a brief introductory essay, and an *apparatus criticus*. In her introductory remarks Colombo Timelli focuses on a comparison of the ten editions; this, then, serves to undergird the larger purpose of this work: the relative linguistic structure and function of French and Latin. It is a fascinating topic, the relationship between private and public languages, and using the *Ars minor* to approach it proves to be extremely effective. In the introduction she notes that the *Ars minor*, which employs a question-and-answer format to define the eight parts of speech, was used to teach the rudiments of Latin to young French students under Philip Augustus and Louis XI (p. 5). She adds that this text clearly not only taught Latin but also taught the technical terminology for analyzing other languages (p. 8). This last point is particularly interesting since these translations offer a unique glimpse into the relationship between Latin and French: "où la réflexion sur le latin est proposée dans la langue maternelle des élèves, et où le français constitue la langue de référence" (p. 9). From this perspective, as she points out, the question of whether Latin is a living or a dead language becomes particularly thorny. On the one hand, it is a language that must be taught by rules (and, fortunately, can be); on the other, it is the language that permits communication in most fields of knowledge (p. 9).

Colombo Timelli makes a further refinement to this complex point in acknowledging that for the audience of these texts, Latin was not really a foreign language. At least for the teacher, the movement from Latin to French was not so much that of foreign to mother tongue but rather "d'un registre soutenu au registre familier" (p. 10). As she explains, this