

Herbert L. Kessler and Richard G. Newhauser with the assistance of Arthur J. Russell, *Optics, Ethics, and Art in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: Looking into Peter of Limoges's Moral Treatise on the Eye*, Studies and Texts 209; Text Image Context: Studies in Medieval Manuscript Illumination 5, Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2018. xiv + 212 pp., ISBN 9780888442093. Cloth \$95

Reseñado por CHRISTIAN ETHERIDGE  
National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen, DK  
wyvern\_hoo2@hotmail.co.uk

This work is number 5 in the wonderful *Text Image Context: Studies in Medieval Manuscript Illumination* series published by the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies. As can be imagined, this volume rises to the high academic benchmark set by the series and is both beautifully set out and richly illustrated. The subject matter is interesting, to say the least, covering the interface of optics, ethics and art in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The interplay between optics and art has been much discussed in the context of the Renaissance, but sparsely covered in a medieval framework. Adding ethics into this mix only increases the anticipation of what this book might contain. In this volume Herbert L. Kessler and Richard G. Newhauser, two distinguished scholars on the senses, optics and medieval art, have assembled nine essays in total. The essays were selected by the editors for their relevance in examining afresh the introduction of «ancient and Arabic optical theories» and how these transformed thirteenth century thinking about vision. These papers look at how such apparently conflicting subjects as science and theology could be reconciled at the University of Paris and elsewhere. Finally, they look at the effect that these developments had on preaching and sermons and those who learned about optics through these mediums.

The editor's note that the essays «complicate the accepted understanding of the impact that science had on thirteenth-century visual culture». They attempt to show that Greek optical science was known earlier than assumed, back to *The Commentary on Timaeus* by Calcidius and was also used by artists a least a century before the Italian Renaissance. They also emphasize Christian theories of vision, especially Augustine's three modes of seeing and how these conditioned the way Greek and Arabic theories of optics were received and utilised.

Peter of Limoges and his treatise *The Moral Treatise on the Eye* is a current that runs through this volume (henceforth known as the *Moral Treatise*). This treatise was very well known in the middle ages but is not widely known today in academia. It is a very important treatise as it uses science to explain theology and uses narratives to explain treatises on perspective for an audience who was not educated in the sciences. The editors

push forward the idea that the work of Peter of Limoges underpins the volume. This is in some ways an accompaniment to Richard G. Newhauser's translation of *The Moral Treatise of the Eye* (Toronto, 2012) that has opened up this important work to scholarship.

Appropriately it is Richard G. Newhauser who begins the series of contributions with his chapter *Morals, Science, and the Edification of the Senses*. He begins with Giles of Rome and his treatise, *De regimine principum*, that covers the importance of the senses for educating children, following the medieval practice that sensation was to be both guarded and guided. Vision played an important role in the ethics of sensation and sight was an important tool for gathering information as well as being morally fragile. This is emphasized in pastoral works on the moral tradition of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries such as the *Summa de virtutibus* of William Peraldus which Newhauser gives as an example. This is furthermore emphasized in the parallel growth of scientific texts in this period on optics and here Newhauser uses the example of Roger Bacon's *Perspectiva*. Newhauser stresses that no thinker was more important in this marriage of the scientific and the moral during this period than Peter of Limoges. Here he discusses his life, career and his major work the *Moral Treatise*. Peter of Limoges is here shown as both compiler and preacher of sermons as well as being extensively book learned in theology and the sciences. Newhauser notes that the edification of the senses is central to the *Moral Treatise*. He also notes the influences on Peter such as Roger Bacon, Vincent of Beauvais and possibly Richard de Fournival which he describes further in his chapter. Newhauser finishes with a discussion of the use of the amorous senses by Richard de Fournival and Peter's filtering of this stimuli to avoid the erotic.

The next chapter is Carolyn Muessig's *Can't Take My Eyes Off of You»: Mutual Gazing Between the Divine and Humanity in Late Medieval Preaching* which begins with an examination of the beatific vision. The chapter considers sermons that explain how humans could look at the divine. The examples begin with the Augustinian canon Jacques de Vitry. Here Muessig takes us through a series of Jacques de Vitry's sermons covering aspects of sight, concluding an interaction of the divine and mortal through a mutual loving gaze. The Franciscan minister general, Bonaventure and his sermons are referred to as another example. Here Bonaventure also uses the concept of mutual gazing through the example of the stigmatization of St Francis. One prominent example Muessig uses is that of Peter of Limoges and the *Moral Treatise*. Here Muessig shows the use by Peter of Limoges of using scientific explanation of optics as a way to understand theological meaning. This is seen by Muessig as a strengthening of the concept of human beings being able to see God. Muessig concludes by saying that all the accounts above should be looked into further to uncover more about the relation between the medieval self and the divine.

Following from this is a chapter by Donal Cooper titled *Preaching amidst Pictures: Visual Contexts for Sermons in Late Medieval Tuscany*. Cooper notes here that the *Moral Treatise* is useful in offering new possibilities into understanding the reception of optical theory by the wider medieval lay public. In the connection between optics, preaching and the visual arts, Cooper draws on examples from Tuscany at the turn of the fourteenth century and

introduces sermons as a vehicle for disseminating ideas of visions and optics pointing out that Tuscan mendicant sermons are understudied and very rarely published. Acknowledging the fundamental research needed for further studies, Cooper proceeds to build up a preliminary survey of the accessible material. In this he finds that preachers used exempla and themes from writers on optics including those of Aristotle, Albertus Magnus and Aquinas. Cooper then notes the backdrop of the mendicant church interior and its imagery to back up the sermon material. Here he uses the example of the San Domenico, Arezzo where the Dominican preacher Ambrogio Sansedoni is pictured in a fresco. Frater Giordano da Pisa in Florence is used as another example who used expositions of the physiology and theology of vision in his sermons. Cooper sums up that there was neither primacy of word or image in the sermons but an integration of preaching and painting in a mendicant church.

The next chapter is Aden Kumler's *Seeing the Worldly with a Moral Eye: Illuminated Observation as Introspection*. Here Kumler focuses on the tradition of *speculatio* and focuses on two fourteenth century French manuscripts here to see a third speculative mode that is neither speculative introspection nor observation. The first manuscript focuses on three innovations or novelties that seem outwardly beautiful but are inwardly corrupt and wicked. These being hocketed songs, buttoned robes and colored stockings. These are condemned in both the text and illuminations of the manuscript. The second manuscript is a Dominican treatise on the qualities of John the Evangelist. This also shows the perils of the flesh that John ignores in the shape of beautiful women. Kumler concludes that the seductive appeal of the manuscript images was part of the manuscript's campaign against worldly pleasures.

Jacques Berlioz's *Eyes in the Back of the Head: Exempla and Vision in The Moral Treatise on the Eye by Peter of Limoges* is the next chapter. Here Berlioz focuses on the *Moral Treatise* and the relationship between the eye, vision and exempla in this work. Berlioz furthermore addresses the use of exempla in the middle ages. In his detailed survey of the *Moral Treatise*, Berlioz breaks down the number of exempla to 110. These are then subdivided into sections such as the natural world and staged quotations. The exempla are then divided again into those that focus on eye and those that don't. These are supplemented with a series of tables and charts. This is then followed by examples of the different type of exempla and where they are sourced from such as the *Physiologus* and Valerius Maximus. This builds up into a very interesting insight into the inner workings of Peter of Limoges and his narrative choices and emphasizes the richness and diversity of the *Moral Treatise* and its interaction with optical theory.

Keeping the focus on exempla is Larry Scanlon and his chapter, titled *Is the Exemplum a Mirror?* In this chapter Scanlon works with literary theory on the contrast between the narrative and the visual in the *Moral Treatise*, especially with use of exempla by Peter of Limoges. Scanlon begins with an investigation narrativity in light of the hostility of modern literary thought to moralization and didacticism and then turns to a comparison of the *Moral Treatise* to the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury. Scanlon is keen to show the

complexity of didactic works such as *Policraticus* and the *Moral Treatise*, that they are didactic and also contain narrativity. The moralization of the text is therefore defined by its narrative instantiation. Scanlon believes that the exempla within can be seen as a mirror that reflects the transcendent sequences of Christian salvation.

Turning from literary theory to science, A. Mark Smith writes on *Skating on Thin Eyes: Hans Belting on the Optics of Arabic and Western Art*. In this chapter Smith analyses Hans Belting's recent work *Florence and Baghdad: Renaissance Art and Arab Science* (2011). Smith notes that Belting claims that Islamic art is non-pictorial or aniconic while Western art is pictorial or iconic; especially after the invention of linear perspective in fifteenth century Florence. Belting claims that Western art allows the viewer to gaze through the surface, rather than on the surface and that the painting also returns the viewer's gaze. In contrast Belting claims that Islamic art is rooted in cultural norms that is based on a form of Arabic optics. This is exemplified in Ibn al-Haytham's 'Book of Optics' that reduced the eye to a light projector rather than an image selector. Belting states that visual images, created by the imagination are not involved in Ibn al-Haytham's optical theories. Smith goes on to analyse Ibn al-Haytham's optical theories. His detailed exploration of Ibn al-Haytham's work is accompanied by some excellent and clear diagrams. These diagrams of the brain and eyes are then used with the example of the twelfth century mosaic of Christ Pantokrator from the apse of Cefalú Cathedral in Sicily. This is accompanied by a detailed argument and explanation of Ibn al-Haytham's visual theory to contradict Belting's theory.

The last two chapters focus on medieval art, the first of these is Christopher R. Lakey with «*To See Clearly*»: *The Place of Relief in Medieval Visual Culture*. In this chapter Lakey investigates relief sculpture in the history of perspective by examining its role in Erwin Panofsky's 1924 essay *Perspective as Symbolic Form*. Lakey follows that medieval sculpture was more complex than Panofsky gave credit for. Lakey works through Panofsky's conception of perspective and that he gestured towards medieval sculptures relationship with the history of perspective in his essay. He first draws on the example of the statues on the West Façade of Ferrara Cathedral from 1135. Here the sculptor Niccolò drew on practical geometry, such as Hugh of St Victor's *Practica geometriae*. Another example Lakey gives is Nicola and Giovanni Pisano's optical naturalism on pulpits in Tuscany at the turn of the fourteenth century. A further example is Arnolfo di Cambio and his thirteenth century sepulchral monuments. These are finally drawn together with the ideas of the Perspectivists and the art of Giotto to take a new view of Panofsky's work.

The final chapter is *Fenestra Obliqua: Art and Peter of Limoges's Modes of Seeing* by Herbert L. Kessler. Here Kessler focuses on the *Moral Treatise* and fourteenth century art. Kessler points out that Peter of Limoges shows virtually no awareness of art, however the *Moral Treatise* is of great importance to understand medieval art, with its concept of the triple eye of contemplation, reason and of the flesh. Kessler follows this with two examples of paintings produced in the court circle of Charles IV in Prague. The Evangelary of Jan Opava depicts Luke the Evangelist as a doctor, an artist and an author. Therefore, Luke is

corporeal healer, spiritual healer and intellectual healer, which correspond to the three ways of seeing in the *Moral Treatise*. Kessler also focuses on the framework of the vignettes as mullions in trompe-l'oeil perspective. This brings to mind reliquaries of which Kessler brings some examples to the chapter. This framing is also used for the geometric forms God used to create the world as described in Calcidius' commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*. The second image is the reverse of the Madonna of Most from the Convent of St Agnes in Prague. This is a trompe l'oeil lattice of imitation stone. Kessler concludes that the Madonna of Most was supposed to be seen from both sides on an altar table and the trompe l'oeil panes were to be infused with light and providing a prelude to the image made flesh on the other side.

*Optics, Ethics and Art in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* is an ambitious work that covers several academic disciplines; art history, history of science, theology and history of literature. The premise of the volume is to see the interconnected way how optics, in the form of Perspectivist theories, ethics in the form of theology, morals, sermons and exempla, and art in a variety of media such as manuscript illumination, sculpture and murals interacted with each other. Such a work could easily be lost in a depth of material if it did not have a connecting thread, in this case provided by *The Moral Treatise on the Eye* of Peter of Limoges. Although some essays focused on the work just briefly and maybe could have focused more on this treatise, it does not detract from the depth and quality of work here. It is a perfect accompaniment to Richard G. Newhauser's translation, which should be read together with this volume. *Optics, Ethics and Art in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* will appeal primarily to those working with medieval optics, preaching and medieval art. Its appeal is certainly broader though and will appeal to all who have an interest in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. I heartily recommend this volume and hope it will encourage more scholarly debate in the years to come on the interface between optics, ethics and art in the middle ages.