

1990

Review of *L'immagine dell'imperatore Ottone III*, by Gerhart B. Ladner

Dale Kinney

Bryn Mawr College, dkinney@brynmawr.edu

[Let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)

Follow this and additional works at: http://repository.brynmawr.edu/hart_pubs

 Part of the [History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#)

Custom Citation

Kinney, Dale. Review of *L'immagine dell'imperatore Ottone III*, by Gerhart B. Ladner. *Speculum* 65, no. 4 (1990): 1007-1008.

This paper is posted at Scholarship, Research, and Creative Work at Bryn Mawr College. http://repository.brynmawr.edu/hart_pubs/33

For more information, please contact repository@brynmawr.edu.

back upon itself with this suggestion of a remedy. He doubly denies all his forms now and indeed makes a form, a poem, of "dreit nien."

Foudatz with its associated sounds, patterns, and openings conveys repression rather than freedom. It is the language of feminization and impotence. For example, the supposedly hypersexual *Farai un vers, pos mi sonelh* develops through the poet-persona's linguistic and physical castration to his wounded/diseased closure, where the power of poetic display counters the bonds of secrecy. The artist is the hero, not the sexual phenomenon; it is a poem as much about the function of poetry and poets as it is about carnal knowledge. For *Ab la dolchor del temps novel* Kendrick argues that Guillaume and his lady have taken the real possession of love as witness, "the piece and the knife." I would argue that this poem works very much as *Farai un vers de dreit nien*, with the final line, "nos n'avem la pessa e-l coutel," functioning as the *contraclau* exposing the turning between form and distinction that is the poetic tour de force.

Acknowledging stylistic differences, Kendrick still undervalues the way troubadours tended to group together via imitation, exchanges of poems, and *tenso* constructions. Indeed, troubadour vocabulary was highly limited, but there are profound differences in the way that narrow semantic field is manipulated in sound and space. Nevertheless, Kendrick's book is a scintillating tour de force. It is rewarding reading for all troubadour specialists and particularly beneficial if it provokes them.

PATRICIA STABLEIN HARRIS, Folger Shakespeare Library

GERHART B. LADNER, *L'immagine dell'imperatore Ottone III*. Preface by Charles Pietri. (Conferenze, 5.) Rome: Unione Internazionale degli Istituti di Archeologia, Storia e Storia dell'Arte in Roma, 1988. Paper. Pp. 56; 6 color plates, 19 black-and-white illustrations.

This brief essay has two distinct parts: a thirty-page biographical review and an eleven-page survey of images of the emperor Otto III (980–1002). The biography emphasizes the emperor's associations with a roll call of famous personalities: his mother, Theophano, and grandmother Adelheid; Gerbert of Aurillac; Heribert of Cologne; Johannes Philagathos; St. Adalbert of Prague; St. Nilus of Rossano; St. Bernward of Hildesheim; St. Romuald of Ravenna et al. These were domineering figures, who variously inspired, cajoled, and hectored the young ruler into espousal of their own preoccupations: the creation of a universal empire based in Rome (*renovatio romana*) and the ascetic, even eremitic, pursuit of individual spiritual improvement. In the end these had become Otto's own most personal aspirations. Ladner firmly rejects the practical suspicion that they were mutually contradictory quests, claiming that the emperor's attraction to both was the sign of an elevated and expansive moral character: "strong and likable, an imperial figure to whom, finally, many submitted themselves with instinctive devotion" (p. 43).

Appended to the biography is a summary account of fifteen images of Otto III in ivory, manuscript illuminations, coins and bulls, beaten gold, and an appropriated antique cameo. All are conveniently reproduced (though one could wish for better color, and there is a critical error — Otto III for Otto II — in the caption to figure 15). Much depends on a detached manuscript leaf in Chantilly, identified by Carl Nordenfalk and others as an image of Otto II, but by Ladner as Otto III. Depicting the emperor enthroned and attended by sweet-demeanored personifications labeled "Italia," "Alemannia," "Francia," and "Germania," this would be the first representation of Otto's idea of universal empire, "the imperial ideology that was his own" (p.

48). To concede that the miniature portrays a previous Otto would be to admit that the imagery of Otto III, and perhaps its underlying ideology, was more conventional and less original, certainly less personal, than Ladner wishes to believe.

The author's aim is to present an "objective image" of his subject, without "yielding to the Scylla of old-style panegyric, [or] to the Charybdis of the new political fashion of arbitrary image-making" (p. 54). In steering his course he stays very far from Charybdis, but this brings him, in my view, perilously close to Scylla. Indeed Scylla seems all but unavoidable given the materials with which the author had to construct his bark. The evidence for an objective image was itself mostly produced by panegyric impulse, and the fact that the "almost ephebic" freshness of the Chantilly portrait is matched by a verbal play of Johannes Canaparius ("pulchri caesaris pulcherrima proles," p. 48) may only reveal a pervasive conventionality, not, as this essay implies, the independent veracity of these testimonies with respect to a unique individual.

But no one should presume to instruct Gerhart Ladner about conventional portraiture. As Charles Pietri reminds the reader in his preface, hardly anyone has contributed more than Ladner to our knowledge of this very topic; this gives his argument a certain *a priori* credibility. In any case, objective or not, his "image" makes a very pleasant hour's read, as it must originally have made a satisfying lecture. Those wishing to pursue the matter further will be well served by the ample footnotes.

DALE KINNEY, Bryn Mawr College

OLIVER LEAMAN, *Averroes and His Philosophy*. New York: Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1988. Pp. xii, 204.

Oliver Leaman's *Averroes and His Philosophy* provides "an introduction to the philosophical thought" of Averroes. He is chiefly interested in Averroes' arguments concerning "the importance of philosophy in acquiring" "an understanding of the world," "the principles behind its structure," and "the language we use to describe it." He divides the text into three main parts: "Metaphysics"; "Practical Philosophy"; "Reason, Religion, and Language." There is an awkwardness which is immediately apparent: the three main divisions of the text and the three major arguments of the book do not correspond.

Leaman's "Introduction: The Cultural Context" touches on the "frontier" character of Muslim Spain and North Africa and the rough-and-ready political setting in which philosophizing occurred, noting Averroes' formation in Malikite jurisprudence and Ash'arite theology. Although it is clear and has some merit, it could quite possibly be abbreviated with little loss to the reader.

Though Leaman's book introduces the reader to some of the main themes in the philosophical thought of Averroes, the text itself seems rather a collection of essays than a unified book. The individual essays are often clear, even to the novice, but the principles of organization are not. Since "Averroes . . . argues that the answers to ethical questions are to be found in a . . . study of metaphysics" (p. 132), part 2 with its ethical questions should have been presented before part 1, and part 1 rewritten to include the corresponding answers. This would provide a more unified treatment in a second edition, since part 1, though philosophically interesting as it stands, consists of essays with no apparent connection to part 2. Also; since the doctrine of *pros hen* equivocation, dealt with in part 3, seems to be the key to Leaman's "non-exotericist" interpretation of Averroes, his presentation might be more persuasive if part 3, in a rewritten form, came at the beginning of the book.

Part 1, "Metaphysics," is divided into an introduction and three main divisions. The