

1999

Review of *A Legend and Its Image: The Aerial Flight of Alexander the Great in Medieval Art*, by Victor M. Schmidt

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Kinney, Dale. Review of *A Legend and Its Image: The Aerial Flight of Alexander the Great in Medieval Art*, by Victor M. Schmidt. *Speculum* 74, no. 2 (1999): 498-500.

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1445. Ten years later, after a visit by the highest officials of the Windesheim Congregation, her leadership was cut short: she was removed from office in 1455 and banned to another cloister, where she died in October of that year, though not before she had written her "Letter from Exile," an entirely unapologetic and spirited defense of the mystical road she had herself traveled and encouraged in others. As a further reaction to her perceived mystical excesses, the Windesheim Congregation placed a ban on writing initiated by individual sisters, and no further major texts are extant from these circles until well into the sixteenth century. Bake has often been the focal point of attention among the women of the *Devotio Moderna*; Scheepsma's study is all the richer because it incorporates Bake into the larger context rather than building the context around this fascinating, but somewhat anomalous, personality.

Scheepsma combines meticulous philological spadework of neglected or unknown primary sources with interpretive acumen informed by a thorough knowledge of all relevant secondary literature. Very useful are the succinct descriptions of the thirteen cloisters (appendix 1) that constituted the women's presence in the Windesheim Congregation up to 1559 and the clear overview of extant sources and such modern editions of them as do exist (appendix 2), a usefulness enhanced because Scheepsma teases out links among and between the institutions as well as writings. A wealth of information and impetus for further study may be found in the sixty pages of endnotes, many of them mini-essays with their own intrinsic merit, and in the commensurately comprehensive bibliography. Accessibility to this dense study is aided by a detailed table of contents and excellent indices, one of contemporary names and titles, one of place-names (there is no list of illustrations); there are general summaries of the book in English and German.

There are not many quarrels to be had with this study. One might be that it is too narrowly focused: it concentrates on the thirteen women's institutions that belonged officially to the Windesheim Congregation without venturing comment on the influence these might have had on the many institutions outside of the congregation proper but still clearly within the sphere of the *Devotio Moderna*. Another might be that not enough comparison with male counterparts is provided to suggest whether and how women's piety differed from men's. But such would not be legitimate criticisms, for Scheepsma has set as his task first of all the detailed study of the core, and our understanding of the larger movement will depend in the first instance on a comprehensive understanding of that core. This study provides a superb point of departure from which to continue the work.

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VICTOR M. SCHMIDT, *A Legend and Its Image: The Aerial Flight of Alexander the Great in Medieval Art*. Trans. Xandra Bardet. (*Mediaevalia Groningana*, 17.) Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995. Paper. Pp. xiv, 293; 121 black-and-white figures. Hfl 95.

"Where there is a crossroads . . . there may yet be traffic." So, in his contribution to a conference on the current state of iconography, Irving Lavin expressed his surprise that iconography had not already perished, run down or off the road by the aggressive vehicles of contemporary art history (*Iconography at the Crossroads*, ed. Brendan Cassidy [Princeton, N.J., 1993], p. 35). Victor Schmidt's study of the imagery of the flight of Alexander the Great is part of that persistent traffic. Like a vintage sedan, it glides along the highway, not too fast, unconcerned with the trendier, sometimes peppier vehicles that noisily demand the right-of-way.

The book comes from the author's dissertation (Groningen, 1988); and although it has been "translated, revised and updated" (p. vii), it is still close to a dissertation in presentation and content. There are three substantial chapters (pp. 1–165) and a ninety-four-item

catalogue of all known Western representations of the subject, including two that are doubtful. The first chapter surveys prior scholarship, literary sources, the origins of the theme in art, modern interpretations of it, and “the meaning of Alexander’s Flight in Romanesque art.” The second chapter treats representations of the subject in manuscripts of French and Latin texts, and the third covers illustrations of the flight in manuscripts of German works. The catalogue is also organized by media but in a slightly unparallel way (sculpture and mosaic, manuscripts and early printed editions, “other”); and since the catalogue is almost never referred to in the text or in the captions to the illustrations, it is easy to forget that it is there.

The author’s ambition is to offer interpretations, or guidelines to interpretation, of the image of Alexander the Great seated between two winged creatures, griffins or eagles, which pull him skyward as they chase the bait that he holds at the ends of two sticks above their heads. This is the only one of Alexander’s fabulous exploits that was represented in art autonomously, hence the presumption that it had topical or metaphorical significance. As he is by no means the first to consider this issue, Schmidt is forced to affirm or revise existing explanations, which makes his work de facto a study in method: by what criteria will the author accept or reject interpretations already put forward, and by what criteria should the reader prefer his explanations to those of his predecessors? These questions are not addressed overtly, but answers to them can be inferred from the author’s presentation of his conclusions.

Those conclusions are as follows. The imagery of Alexander’s flight in the art of western Europe was not derived from a Byzantine tradition, nor from textual representations, but was “independent” (pp. 24, 28). “Romanesque” depictions of the subject (the term encompasses church sculpture and decorative pavements of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries) did not, as maintained by earlier interpreters, show Alexander as a negative exemplum of pride (p. 37) but positively, as an allegory of the salvation of the soul or of the desire for heaven or, in a secular vein, as an “allegory of force” (pp. 65–68). This tradition ended in the thirteenth century with the relief on the north facade of San Marco in Venice (cat. 27), paradoxically considered “[last] in the series of Western Flights” (p. 68) even though it was made in Constantinople in the eleventh century.

Just when they disappeared from architectural decoration, images of Alexander’s flight began to appear in illuminated manuscripts. Illustrations in Latin manuscripts (mostly versions of the *Historia de preliis*) are relatively rare and were borrowed from the earlier monumental imagery because, pace D. J. A. Ross, there were no earlier manuscript illustrations to use as models (p. 85). Illuminations in the French *Roman d’Alexandre* show a new departure, “a completely new type of Flight” (p. 95). This new type is distinguished especially by the three-quarters view of Alexander, which turns the Romanesque frontal “theme of state” into a “theme of action” (p. 96). Illustrations of the *Roman d’Alexandre en prose* are again different, showing Alexander rising above a crowd of onlookers. This type was modeled on the convention for the ascension of Christ and therefore partakes of its meaning: “By analogy with Christ’s Ascension, the Flight has been designed so as to make clear both Alexander’s world rulership and the wonder of it all” (p. 107). In the fifteenth century newly realistic means of representation accompanied, or shaped, a newly literal imagination: “the Flight has become a ‘mere’ Flight—a very literal rendering of the text” (p. 111).

It is only in German manuscripts, specifically of the *Weltchronik* of the Viennese Jans Enikel, written ca. 1272, and its fourteenth-century illustrations, that one finds Alexander’s flight presented as an example of hubristic error (pp. 129–30). In the fifteenth century this moralizing vision was supplanted by more realistic images, in conjunction with the same broad changes in the style of painting that occurred in France (p. 150). The fifteenth century also saw the emergence of a new “critical attitude” (p. 156) on the part of readers, which

condemned stories like that of Alexander's flight as worthless fables; this led to the subject's disappearance from art altogether after the second decade of the sixteenth century.

These generalizations rest on dozens of interpretations of single images, which take up the rest of the book. The author describes his approach to realizing those interpretations as "function-oriented" and contextual, defining context very narrowly as synonymous with "iconographic programme" (p. 46). Yet he also maintains that certain compositional structures had essential, invariable meanings, a position justified with reference—principally by means of the borrowed terms "theme of state" and "theme of action"—to Meyer Schapiro. Returning to Schapiro's own exposition of these concepts (*Words and Pictures: On the Literal and the Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text* [The Hague, 1973]), I found that it is in many ways an apt model for Schmidt's endeavor and that he has taken over from it much more than the identification of two fundamentally different kinds of picture. But there are significant discrepancies. In Schapiro's much pithier explication (63 pp.), the two types of theme are distinguished by frontal and profile, not by frontal and three-quarters, views, and these binary terms signify, in accordance with Saussurean principles, not absolutely but by their difference. I am not convinced that Schapiro would have recognized Schmidt's "themes of action" as sufficiently different from his "themes of state," visually, to perform this semiotic function. Moreover, the one depiction of Alexander's flight that even approximates a profile view (cat. 88) cannot readily be adapted to Schapiro's analysis, according to which profiles belong to the realm of the empirical. Schmidt interprets the image as an "allegory of force," albeit "secular" (pp. 66–67). Finally, Schapiro's stress on the inconsistency of symbolic meanings seems incompatible with Schmidt's position that the themes are constant in their connotations, to the extent that depictions of Alexander's flight as a theme of state, precisely (and only) because they have that form, cannot express a negative evaluation of the subject (pp. 46, 55, 60–61, 68). No allowance at all is made for tone; the possibility of parody or another kind of subversive imitation is never entertained.

Despite the precariousness and vulnerability of at least some of its conclusions, Schmidt's study does its job, providing a diachronic panorama of the possibilities and conventions that constitute a representational tradition. This is what iconographic surveys are for. By definition, they are auxiliary undertakings, and to his credit Schmidt does not claim much more than that (p. 5). His book will be useful to other scholars who investigate individual representations—including textual representations—of this remarkable subject. Unfortunately, such scholars will be tortured, as I was, by the many indecipherable illustrations, the result of unsuitable photographs and bad layout (figs. 5, 8, 10, 12, 19, 24, 25, 30, 47, 60, 65, 66), and by errors in matching illustrations with the text (figs. 110–11 on p. 148, figs. 114–15 on pp. 152, 163). Otherwise the production is decent, and the translation is readable, even colloquial in places.

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JAMES A. SCHULTZ, *The Knowledge of Childhood in the German Middle Ages, 1100–1350*. (Middle Ages Series.) Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995. Pp. xx, 318. \$38.95.

Awarded the Modern Language Association's 1996 Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for Studies in Germanic Languages and Literatures, this engaging interdisciplinary study succeeds well in its ambition of interpreting texts from the distant past through the lens of cultural studies. Schultz's topic is medieval childhood, or as his title more carefully puts it, "the knowledge of childhood" represented in the two-hundred-odd Middle High German (MHG) texts he investigates. The book does not purport to speak about the reality of