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G. Binding & A. Speer, (eds.), *Mittelalterliches Kunsterleben nach Quellen des 11. bis 13. Jahrhunderts*, Friedrich Fromman Verlag — Günther Holzboog GmbH & Co., Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1993, 346 p. ISBN 3 7728 1538 3

Again and again one has tried to find formulations of “aesthetics” in medieval treatises on the beautiful. Though it is generally known that aesthetics as such did not exist in the Middle Ages, Panofsky (*Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism; Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and its Art Treasures*), Eco (*Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*) and Assunto (*Die Theorie des Schönen im Mittelalter*), to name only three authors, succeeded in finding some sentences or words that, in their opinion, could prove that something aesthetic existed at the time. To judge from the several editions these books enjoyed the idea of medieval aesthetics have stayed in the minds of the general public. Yet more specialistic medievalists have always felt somewhat uneasy about this, stressing instead the theological and ontological interpretation of medieval art objects in the Middle Ages.

The book here announced contains eight essays on medieval authors, mostly philosophers, that, in the course of their treatises, come to speak of objects of art and architecture. Two of the chapters also contain new translations of an important specific text. A general chapter on the understanding of medieval art opens the book. It is the result of a symposium held in 1990/1 at Cologne University between members of the Philosophical and Architectural Institutes there. Their uneasiness concerned the fact that relevant medieval sources are mostly not read and interpreted in their actual context. They stress the need to read the texts in their integrity, not just in order to find something on aesthetics. Such an approach asks for philosophical and theological insight and also a great expertise in textual interpretation. And that is what is offered here. In most chapters it is concluded somewhere that a medieval aesthetic theory does not exist and that the real meaning of the relevant texts must be sought somewhere else. Thus also the word “aesthetic(s)” is left out of the title of the book, in its place we find “Kunsterleben”, something like “art reception”.

The two last chapters deal with less philosophical texts, Gervasius’ description of the fire and restoration of Canterbury Cathedral and the 11th-century description of the newly finished abbey church of Saint-Benigne. We have here exceptional texts and the most striking thing about them is the fact that the authors have great difficulties in finding words and phrases for the new things they saw. It is in such texts, rather than in philosophical treatises that we may begin to find something people in the Middle Ages experienced when they saw man-made objects they thought were beautiful. In the field of fine art this has recently been confirmed by the stimulating article by Andrew Martindale, “‘There is neither speech nor language but their voices are heard among them’ (Psalm 19, Verse 3, 16th century translation from the English Book of Common Prayer). The enigma of discourse concerning art and artists in the 12th and 13th centuries”, in: H. Beck & K. Hengevoss-Dürkop, *Studien zur Geschichte der europäischen Skulptur im 12./13. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt am Main 1994, 205-18.<sup>1</sup>

The book here reviewed is certainly to be recommended. It is a collection of closely argued, intricate, and in the end convincing essays on philosophical texts that deal with the beautiful. The best a reviewer can do in this case is to give the separate chapter headings: A. Speer, “Vom Verstehen mittelalterlicher Kunst”; N. Senger, “Der Ort der ‘Kunst’ im *Didascalicon* des Hugo von St. Viktor”; R. Kämmerlings, “*Mystica arca*. Zur Erkenntnislehre Richards von St. Viktor in *De gratia contemplationis*” followed by a translation of *De gratia contemplationis sive: Benjamin maior* I, 3-6; H.P. Neuheuser, “Die Kirchenweihbeschreibungen von Saint-Denis und ihre Aussagefähigkeit für das Schönheitsempfinden des Abtes Suger”; G. Binding “Beiträge zum Architekturverständnis bei Abt Suger von Saint-Denis”; N. Senger, “Der Begriff ‘*architector*’ bei Thomas von Aquin”; F. Hentschel, “Robert

Grossetestes Brief *De unica forma omnium* im Spiegel kunsttheoretischer Interpretationen" followed by a translation of *De unica forma omnium*; B. Tammen, "Gervasius von Canterbury und sein *Tractatus de combustione et reparatione Cantuariensis ecclesiae*"; and L. Keller, "Die Abteikirche Saint-Benigne in Dijon. Untersuchung der Baubeschreibung aus dem 11. Jahrhundert".

Nijmegen

H. TUMMERS

<sup>1</sup> See also very recently, *Gesta*, 34 (1995) with six articles on "The history of medieval art without 'Art'?".