

Organizationally, subsections that grouped thematically similar chapters might have been helpful in further illustrating how the chapters fit together. A short overview on how Christianity came to Denmark, where it was practiced, and how it was spread, would also give context and ground the reader in the religious history, particularly one unfamiliar with medieval Denmark. Nonetheless, the anthology admirably explores “the crucial role of material culture in connecting the lived reality of medieval people with the sacred reality of their faith” (20).

Maria R.D. Corsi

University of Houston, Houston, TX, USA

doi:10.1017/S0009640723000744

***Illuminated Manuscript Production in Medieval Iceland: Literary and Artistic Activities of the Monastery of Helgafell in the Fourteenth Century.* By Stefan Drechsler. Turnhout: Brepols, 2021. 275 pp. €120.**

Stefan Drechsler’s book studies a group of sixteen manuscripts dated to the fourteenth century that have been associated with the Augustinian monastery at Helgafell, Iceland. These manuscripts have been identified as a group, on the basis of their common palaeographical and iconographical features, since the middle of the twentieth century; this scholarship is meticulously attested in the footnotes of this book. Drechsler proposes to corroborate that evidence, and to show that these manuscripts were produced in a workshop where scribes and illuminators relied more on interregional and international networks than has been previously recognized.

Chapter 1 introduces the methodological premises of the book; it relies, as is common in such studies, on palaeography (text and paratext) and art history. Drechsler begins by dividing the sixteen manuscripts into an internal group (those produced by two main scribes) and an external one (those that acted as textual, iconographic, or stylistic models for internal manuscripts but were not produced by the two main scribes). He argues that the illuminators applied their material with great innovation, deviating from classical iconography, and claims that his analysis of the use and reuse of images in different contexts (*interpicturality*, as he puts it) will allow him to identify the techniques applied in the creation of the Helgafell iconography. Finally, he will reconstruct the social network of the manuscripts, to “combine and visualise the art-historical and philological data of all the internal and external manuscripts and their various stages of production” (39).

Chapter 2 outlines the history of the Helgafell site, with special interest in the fourteenth century, the time when the manuscripts were produced. Drechsler glosses over Icelandic sources that show Helgafell (“Holy Mountain”) as a place of worship already in the ninth century and a possible connection to the Augustinian canons regular of St Victor in the twelfth century (this connection is later dismissed in Chapter 5). But the chapter’s focus is on the connections between Helgafell and other secular and religious centers in Iceland in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when the flourishing of literary production in Iceland is also reflected in Helgafell. By the end of the fourteenth century, Helgafell had grown considerably, both in number of canons and in owned

land, due to the development of fishing activities in the area. Drechsler's discussion is helped by a map of the monasteries and dioceses in medieval Iceland, a table listing the abbots of Helgafell from 1217 to 1403, and a map of the farms and monasteries near Helgafell.

Students of Christian iconography will find in Chapter 3 a treasury of information on Icelandic scribes and practices—and a study of continental influences in Chapter 4. Chapter 3 is the longest and the most technical chapter in the book. Drechsler describes each of the sixteen manuscripts in very close detail, including the connections between the Helgafell scribes and illuminators and other groups of medieval Icelandic manuscripts (the social network of the manuscript). The discussion is aided by several pictures of initials, rubrics, and illuminations; tables of textual and paratextual information; and diagrams of networks (a visual aid to explain the connections between manuscripts and scribes/illuminators). Chapter 4 looks outside Iceland for models and inspirations for the Helgafell scribes, and offers detailed comparisons with works produced in three artistic centres in medieval Europe: western Norway, East Anglia, and northern France. The discussion also includes manuscripts outside the Helgafell group, which are discussed and schematized in illustration and tables.

Chapter 5 returns to Iceland and the working, politics, and methods of the Helgafell scriptorium, building from the material of the previous chapters; it requires great concentration from the reader, with its constant references to previous textual and iconographical descriptions and details. Drechsler also retrospectively examines the arguments for Helgafell being the site of the manuscript production, and argues that the best evidence for the existence of the Helgafell scriptorium is that the manuscript production coincides with the time of the monastery's economic growth. It also concludes that there were three workshops in Western Iceland in the fourteenth century that worked in closed and creative collaboration—Helgafell being the primary workshop—and that one of the two main Helgafell scribes worked on a secular estate close to Helgafell, but not in the monastery itself.

Most readers will need some time to digest all of this technical information before engaging with Drechsler's arguments in chapters 4 and 5. Iconographic interpretation can be highly subjective, especially when not presented alongside other interpretations. Perhaps it would have been helpful to the argumentation of his book as a whole, if Drechsler had engaged more directly with the arguments of other scholars and had not consigned their voices to the footnotes. With the exception of chapter 1 and some rare mentions here and there, the voices of this scholarship are rarely heard. It may be a question of style, but the dynamic of dialectical, critical thinking would have been a welcome counterpoint to the technical parts of the book and to Drechsler's own arguments. This, however, does not diminish the merits of Drechsler's impressive research.

There are five indexes to help the reader navigate the book: General; Manuscripts and Archival Sources; Personal Names and Titles; Place Names; Scriptoria, Manuscript Groups, Scribes, and Illuminators; and Texts. The book is also published online as a Gold Open Access publication and can be downloaded for free.

Patricia Pires Boulhosa
University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK
doi:10.1017/S000964072300080X