

four large sections (introduction; editions and individual analyses; typological investigation; use and function of ‘Beichten’ in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries) means that much material is repeated.

Nonetheless, Bruchhold’s achievement cannot be overstated, and this book should be welcomed with open arms by medievalists across a range of disciplines. It highlights the often ignored presence and complexity of a broadly defined type of devotional, ritual, or manual vernacular text, and forms a firm basis for further study on confession and penance in medieval – particularly vernacular – religious life.

King’s College London

SARAH BOWDEN

Balázs J. Nemes, *Von der Schrift zum Buch – vom Ich zum Autor. Zur Text- und Autorkonstitution in Überlieferung und Rezeption des ‘Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit’ Mechthilds von Magdeburg*, Bibliotheca Germanica 55 (Tübingen/Basel: Francke Verlag, 2010). X + 555 pp. ISBN 978-3-7720-8362-4. €98.00.

The study deals with two major aspects of the modern scholarship on Mechthild von Magdeburg, the northern German mystic and visionary whose writings were composed over the period from c.1250 to the 1280–90s: the sorting out of the growing evidence and a revision of some fundamental concepts of interpretation. Task 1 is realized by thorough examination of all available evidence, namely the manuscript sources of the work and documents relating to the history of its origin and transmission. The book offers a complete overview of all Latin and German manuscripts known at the moment. This remark is significant, since the book was going into print when the thirteenth-century Moscow MS was published (Natalia Ganina and Catherine Squires 2009, 2010). Nemes duly mentions the fact, but the new evidence could only be briefly treated in his study; later discoveries of his own (excerpts in the Berlin State Library) were not used either. Apart from this, the book gives an updated inventory of textual sources, a detailed analysis of content and textual variation, and an account of research on text identity and the hypothetical original. As such, it is a milestone in Mechthild research and a reliable support for followers. Useful information on manuscripts is supplied in two indexes (listing current locations and sigla) and there is also a general index. The well-known problem of Mechthild’s *Fließendes Licht* is the late date of the manuscripts and their Alemannic provenance (far removed from her native region). This vacuum, surrounding the origin of the *Fließendes Licht* and its Latin version, together with the loose text structure, allows doubts about its original form and Mechthild’s authorship.

Textual variation, a critique of the evidence about the author’s person, and the plausibility of the idea of an ‘original’ are the main focus of the study. Nemes introduces this second task with a survey of approaches to medieval authorship. The model ‘one text – one author’ with its aim to produce an ‘ideal text’ of a documented and proven author is criticized as methodically outdated.

Instead, Nemes refers to the New Philology and calls for a discussion about textuality as developed in the recent decades in *Nibelungenlied* research (Bumke 1996). He sees the editorial method employed by Hans Neumann as belonging to the ‘old school’ and opposes this position to that of Gisela Vollman-Profe, who documents a tradition rather than a text (Neumann 1990, 1993); he rejects the efforts by scholars to discover Mechthild’s personal language and their conjectures based on ‘authorial style’. Nemes concludes with a list of ten points, stating his theoretical position and results. In his opinion ‘authorial intention’ is a creation of later researchers, who connected it to a place (Magdeburg/Helfta), a date (late thirteenth century), and to Mechthild’s person. Instead, the study shifts the problem in the opposite direction, ascribing the idea of Mechthild’s authorship to her audience and defining it as a phenomenon of reception. In the absence of ‘the original’ Nemes doubts that the Latin text was translated from a German original, and instead considers the possibility of two originals (‘zwei materialiter vorliegende “Originale”’, p. 383) to explain the two versions. One wonders how this combines with the book’s basic ideas.

Readers will find the book stimulating. For example, one cannot help noticing that the attempt to oppose ‘initial’ authorship and later attribution through reception does not apply here as easily as it worked for the scholars Nemes quotes. Unlike the *Nibelungenlied*, the *Fließendes Licht* is not a narrative, it was meant to convey a mystical state (not a story!). This experience, personal by definition, was meant to be recorded and communicated to other souls. As with other records of a religious nature, the witnessing person is inseparable from the message, though not in our sense of authorship. However vague the historical person may appear to the analysing mind, revelations, accounts of miracles, etc. are inevitably personalized, and yet this is not ‘authorization through later reception’. Similarly, arguing against ‘authorial intention’ (‘einer von Mechthild intendierten Form’, p. 382) in connection with the ‘Ich’ of mystical revelations seems to miss the point. The ‘intention’ (the presence and nature of which was apparent in her time) was not supposed to be human. I am trying to say that the scholarly ideas of ‘author’ and ‘intention’, as implemented in this study, blend with the intentional and the personal as inherent elements of Mechthild’s visions, obstructing analysis rather than helping it. Far from wanting to be critical, I believe that further thinking along these lines could prove useful to sharpen the methodology.

Lomonosov University, Moscow

CATHERINE SQUIRES

Joost van Driel, *Meesters van het woord. Middelnederlandse schrijvers en hun kunst*, *Middeleeuwse Studies en Bronnen* 138 (Hilversum: Verloren, 2012). 182 pp.; illustrated. ISBN 978-90-8704-277-6. €19.00.

Medieval authors can be something of a mystery to modern readers and scholars. As a rule we have little information about their identity, the circumstances in which they worked, and the circles in which they moved. Sometimes we