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Book Review: Education in Twelfth-Century Art and Architecture: Images of Learning in Europe, c. 1100-1220. By Laura Cleaver. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2016. xii + 229 pp. \$90.00 cloth.

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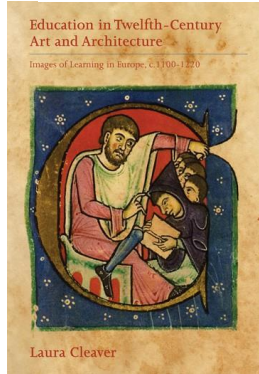


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***Education in Twelfth-Century Art and Architecture: Images of Learning in Europe, c. 1100-1220.* By Laura Cleaver. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2016. xii + 229 pp. \$90.00 cloth.**

By Joseph W. Koterski, S.J., Fordham University

This charming volume is a richly illustrated study of the relationship between twelfth-century ideas about education and actual practices, as manifested in the images of learning found in that era's art and architecture. Much of the evidence used for the study comes from northern France where there are good records from the cathedral schools of Laon, Reims, Chartres, and Tours and from the nascent universities of the day that drew scholars and students from across Europe.

At the heart of this book is a study of the artistic representations given to the seven liberal arts in their traditional groupings as the *trivium* (the set of arts associated with communication: grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and the *quadrivium* (the set of arts concerned with quantitative reasoning: arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy). There are large numbers of representations of these disciplines in the windows and sculptures of buildings like churches and monasteries as well as in illuminated manuscripts from this period.

How should we understand this artwork in relation to educational theory and practices in this period? Do these representations have any special significance for the changing patterns in education in the course of that era? Do the frequent personifications of these disciplines amount

to a kind of a celebration of the era's institutions of learning and their practices? Are they meant somehow to encourage onlookers to pursue a liberal education? Is their focus only on book learning, or do they also somehow bear on efforts to acquire the practical skills that these arts involve? Might they inadvertently show us some sort of intellectual myopia on the part of a cultural elite who tend to exaggerate the importance of formal learning? Do they perhaps provide artistic comments on the self-importance that the intellectual elite assigned to themselves and their learning? Questions like these fill Cleaver's pages.

Readily conversant with the research published by medieval historians and specialists in such fields as the history of education and iconography, the author provides her readers with an insightful account of the basic patterns of symbolism that medieval artists recurrently employed for depicting each of these disciplines. Her explanation for the animals and the objects that are regularly linked to particular arts in the sculptures and the stained glass is revealing. What makes her case for the interpretation of these figures -- especially where there is something out of the norm -- so compelling is her thorough understanding of the educational theory of the age.

Cleaver devotes separate chapters to each of the arts. By reviewing what is known of the educational practices associated with the cathedral schools and the early universities, she shows how the instruction in these arts had practical dimensions as well as the intention to form minds and hearts through book learning. For each of the disciplines of the trivium she reviews the ways in which the patterns of teaching provided a literary and humanistic education as well as the development of skills in communication and argumentation. Likewise, she reviews the considerable amount of book knowledge that a student would gain from pursuing the quadrivium and the acquaintance (but to a lesser extent) with practical skills that they would have gained in the various kinds of quantitative reasoning. Her account is thus not blind to the gaps that appear

to have existed in the education provided by the cathedral schools. In particular, she notes the predominance of book learning over practical ability in the actual practices associated with the *quadrivium*, with the result that the education often concentrated on learning about the skills (rather than learning the skills themselves). She shows that this tendency was especially prominent in the patterns of learning related to the mathematics needed for astronomical calculations and for musical composition.

A considerable portion of the separate chapters that Cleaver dedicates to each of the seven liberal arts records the vast changes that were taking place in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. What had been largely an apprentice model for learning yielded to the kinds of classroom experience found in the cathedral school model. Later the cathedral school curriculum ceased to be considered enough to complete one's education and took on the role of providing practical preparation for the dialectical type of education that was typical of the universities. Although this book is not primarily about university-level education, Cleaver does show at length how educational theorists of the day saw certain theoretical and practical relationships between the study of disciplines like philosophy and theology and the study of the arts. This was especially the case in the trivium, where grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic were seen as crucial for making progress in the grammatical and rhetorical analysis of biblical texts that were central to theology. The study of dialectic came to be regarded as a crucial propaedeutic to the study of philosophy in the arts faculties of the universities and proved indispensable across the philosophy curriculum, which often had as its component parts the Aristotelian triad of logic, physics, and ethics.

Another aspect of the synthesis that Cleaver achieves in this volume is her fine use of the research of such modern scholars of the Middle Ages as Richard Southern and A.T. Clanchy,

G.R. Evans, and P.J. Mews. She demonstrates a comparable control of the texts of the great medieval theorists of the liberal arts, and especially Thierry of Chartres's *Heptateuchon*, John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon*, and Hugh of St. Victor's *Didascalion*. (Fig. 1)

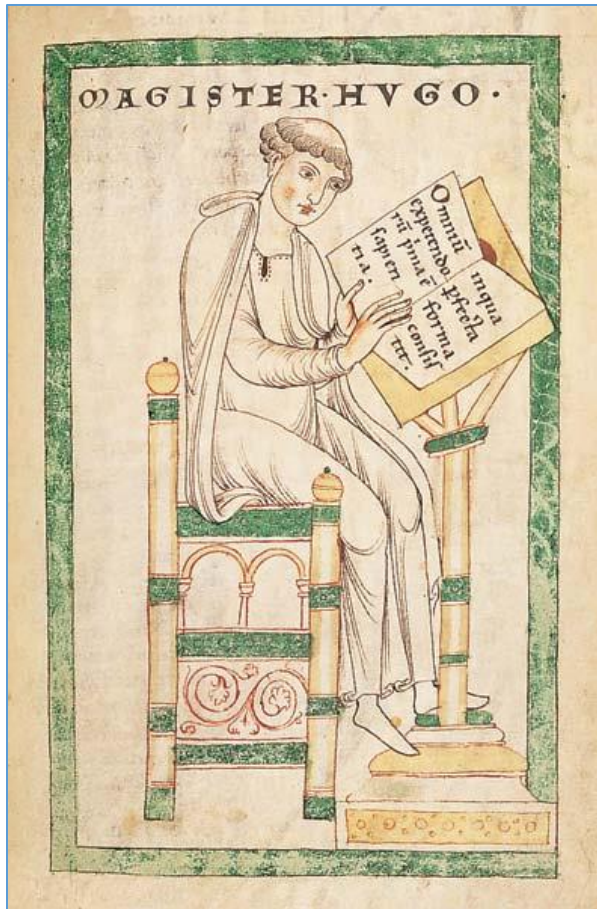


Figure 1 Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalion*, Vucanius 45, f° 130. Leyde, Bibliothek der Rijkuniversiteit. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

Cleaver's most creative work, it seems to me, is in evidence in her mastery of the various images used to represent the liberal arts in stained glass, sculpture, and illuminated manuscripts. She situates her accounts of this artwork within the framework of contemporary scholarship in the area of art history. Again and again she shows that the particular allegorical figures chosen by the artists and their patrons to represent specific liberal arts were based on

important texts from late antiquity, and especially Martianus Capella's *The Marriage of Mercury and Philology*. (Fig. 2)

It is not uncommon, of course, to hear it said that the stained-glass windows of medieval cathedrals were the books of the illiterate. Cleaver's wonderful chapter on how images, and especially the images of animals, were a way of telling tales for the literate and the illiterate alike

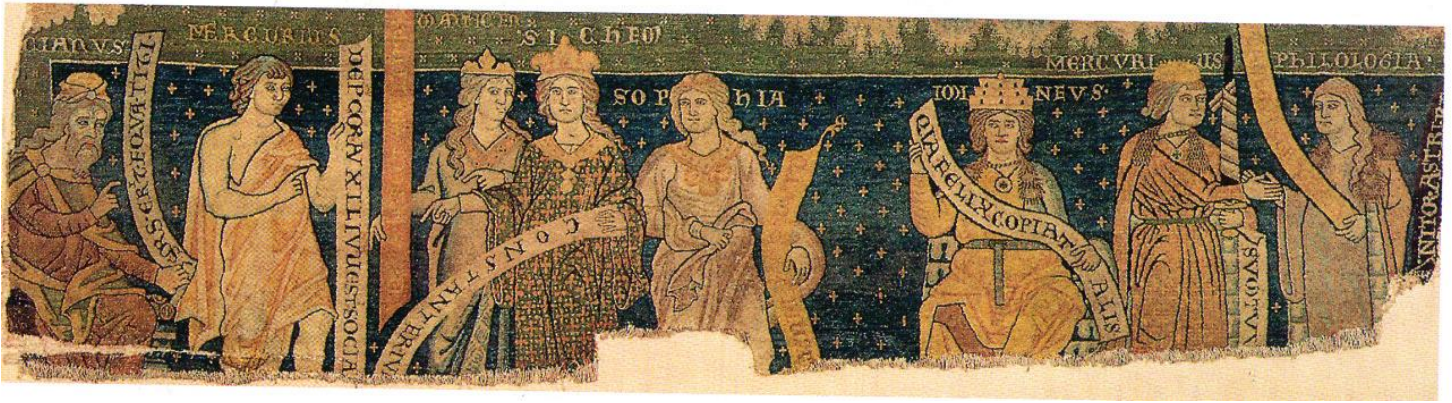


Figure 2 Martianus Capella's *The Marriage of Mercury and Philology*, Quedlinburg Tapestry, 12th century. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

is worth the price of the book. She shows in considerable detail that animals were given human traits so as to emphasize particular (usually negative) qualities of students and teachers. In many cases she traces the animal images back to fables that originated with figures from antiquity like Aesop. The chapter covers not only the playfulness of the artists in envisioning memorable ways of telling their tales, but also the serious nature of the messages they wanted to convey, such as the need to use one's learning responsibly and to admit that some individuals have no mind for oratory or no ear for music. Anyone who loves medieval bestiaries will enjoy Cleaver's anecdotes about the portrayal of dim-witted pupils as bears trying to play musical instruments that are upside down and equally absurd representations of dragons clutching rods and books so as to suggest insensitive and overly demanding teachers.

The delightful attention that Cleaver gives throughout this book to the humor of medieval artistry and pedagogy only enhances the steady and reliable scholarship that marks this volume from cover to cover. I particularly enjoyed the explanation of details from the windows of Chartres and the sculptures of Toulouse. We can now examine with all the more profit mages that many of us have admired for years but never fully appreciated, thanks to the explanations offered by the meticulous analysis present in this volume. 🐼