

REVIEWS

Sylwia Konarska-Zimnicka, Review: *Prognostication in the Medieval World. A Handbook*, edited by Matthias Heiduk, Klaus Herbers and Hans-Christian Lehner, in collaboration with Avriel Bar-Levav, Charles Burnett, Michael Grünbart and Petra G. Schmidl, vols 1-2, De Gruyter, Berlin-Boston 2021, pp. 1027; ISBN 978-3-11-050120-9.

Throughout our history, humans have always strived to look ‘behind the curtain’ which separates the present from the future. To catch just a glimpse, in order to reveal what was to come in the near or distant future. Various prognostic techniques were developed and deployed in the hope that, armed with foresight, we may avoid misfortune and prepare for the inevitable. This excellent monograph is intended as a comprehensive guide to the forms of divination practiced across the medieval period. It comprises a review of current historical research, and examines prognostication from the perspective of Christian, Jewish, Islamic and non-monotheistic communities, while addressing the issues of mutual influence and interpenetration. This fascinating paper is the collaborative work of an international and multi-disciplined team of sixty-three academic researchers, operating within the International Consortium for Research in the Humanities, on a project entitled *Fate, Freedom and Prognostication. Strategies for Coping with the Future in East Asia and Europe*. It grants the reader detailed analysis of the topics addressed, utilises a diverse range of source material, and includes the latest literature on the subject.

This work has been divided into three sections; parts one and two have been published in Volume One, and part three forms the entirety of Volume Two. Its creation, including the initial outline, thematic scope, and logistical management, was thanks to the main coordinators of this project: Matthias Heiduk, Klaus Herbers and

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Hans-Christian Lehner. The intentions and hypotheses of the writers and editors are presented in the introduction to Volume One (pp. 1-12). The first section of the monograph is titled 'Introductory Surveys' and consists of nine articles (pp. 15-265). These concern the legacy of antiquity and the development of the pagan world and provide a comprehensive overview of the continuity and innovations of the early modern period. They examine prognostication within the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Judaic and Arabic Muslim traditions.

The second section, "Traditions and Practices of Prognostication in the Middle Ages" (pp. 269-710), comprises thirty-two articles, considered by the editors to be 'the core of the handbook' (p. 10). This section includes nine principal themes, which are mostly (though not exclusively) explored through the lenses of the four religious traditions mentioned above. The themes include: 'Eschatology and Millenarism' (pp. 269-328), 'Prophecy and Visions' (pp. 329-369), 'Dream Interpretations' (pp. 371-427), 'Mantic Arts' (pp. 429-484), 'Astral Sciences' (pp. 485-550), 'Medical Prognostication' (pp. 551-603), 'Calendar Calculations' (pp. 605-649), 'Weather Forecasting' (pp. 651-695), and 'Quantifying Risk' (pp. 697-710). The articles are structured around the following format: definitions and terminology; written sources and artifacts; techniques and manifestations; developments, historical and social contexts; medieval classifications and discussions. Each contributor made every effort to ensure that the results of their work reflect the current state of research and present the latest literature on the subject, the titles of which are listed (although, unfortunately, in shortened form) at the end of the respective article.

The third section, titled "Repertoire of Written Sources and Artefacts" (pp. 711-1027), is a collection of 47 articles featuring textual analysis encompassing different genres of both stand-alone texts and entire bodies of work. Due to the specificity of the content examined in this volume, the framework of the four religious traditions used in Volume One has been largely abandoned. A very useful index to the monograph can be found at the end of Volume Two (pp. 1033-1027).

The goal of this unique and ambitious project was ‘to provide a comprehensive view of prognostication, to shed light on its functions and structures in the social fabric, its significance for customs and the social order, but also to examine the concepts of prognostication prevalent in the medieval world and their practical application’ (p. 6). This has definitely been achieved in this extensive, extremely informative monograph offering not only erudite scientific reasoning but also current state of research and the index of the latest literature on the subject. The main areas of research include: divination as a specific phenomenon that has no temporal, territorial, religious, national or cultural boundaries; a comparative study of various methods of prediction; and performers and recipients of prognostic practices, as well as the motives that guided them both. The subject matter has been handled sensitively and presented effectively. Although there is an impressive abundance of sources on prognostication preserved in library, archival, and museum collections around the world, the nature of the topic itself – its association with mysticism and witchcraft – has meant that this area has been relatively under-researched. The Authors managed to go beyond the traditional perception of prognostics which is strongly associated with prophecies, oracles, beliefs in deities, dream interpretation, astrology or broadly understood magic, and demystify what was automatically associated with witchcraft. The creators of this monograph employ a scientific approach to the source material, thus significantly expanding the scope of research and providing a successful model for future academic works. It demonstrates the potential relevance and impact of these demanding yet fascinating sources within fields such as history, anthropology, sociology, medicine, astronomy, and many others. This two-volume textbook, written to the highest editorial standard, and released by the renowned publishing house De Gruyter, will forever enter the canon of required reading for students of myriad disciplines.