

Godefroid de CALLATAÏ – Mattia CAVAGNA – Baudouin VAN DEN ABEELE (eds.), *Speculum arabicum. Intersecting perspectives on medieval encyclopaedism. Proceedings of the International Conference at Louvain-la-Neuve and Cambron-Casteau, 22–24 May 2017, Turnhout – Louvain-la-Neuve, Brepols – Centre d'études médiévales 2023, 352 pp. ISBN 978-94-6451-922-8.*

The development of medieval science has long fascinated researchers who have been exploring this subject along many avenues. The impact of Arab-Muslim scholarship on Europe in the Middle Ages has long been recognised, and cannot be overstated. ‘The extent of Europe’s debt to the scholars of medieval Islam’ (p. 6) is enormous and evidenced by developments in mathematics, astronomy, physics, medicine, philosophy, art, alchemy, astrology, and the natural sciences as a whole, and it is also impossible not to see their influence on the development of technology. Although medieval European encyclopaedism has been studied in the context of its Arab-Muslim influences, there has been little in the way of symbiosis in research on Arab-Muslim, Byzantine, and Latin encyclopaedism. This gap, and the potential benefits to sharing research, were noticed by the initiators of a project implemented and financed by ARC (Actions de Recherche Concertées) at the Université Catholique de Louvain in 2012–2017, titled *Speculum Arabicum: Objectifying the contribution of the Arab-Muslim world to the history of sciences and ideas: the sources and resources of medieval encyclopaedism*. Academics from research centres based in France, Italy, and the UK participated in the study, which resulted in an excellent joint scientific publication consisting of 13 articles, originally presented at the international symposium that closed the project.

This monograph truly deserves recommendation. The collaborative approach provides a multifaceted examination of medieval encyclopaedism. The 13 papers of the monograph are divided into three unnumbered parts. The publication is preceded by an introduction by Godefroid de Callatay, Mattia Cavagna, and Baudouin Van den Abeele (pp. 5–17), in which the authors present the parameters of the international project, as well as the current state of research and knowledge on medieval Arab-Muslim, Byzantine, and Latin encyclopaedism, thus outlining a specific background for the papers presented later. A similar introductory role is played by the next paper by Van den Abeele, *Encyclopédies latines du Moyen Âge: acquis et perspectives de la recherche* [Latin Encyclopaedias of the Middle Ages: Achievements and Research Perspectives] (pp. 19–64). This paper begins with a detailed discussion of the literary genre of the medieval encyclopaedia, and presents individual works of key importance for the era chronologically. It discusses research perspectives, and conveniently includes a tabular summary of Latin encyclopaedias from

approximately 600–1490 A.D. (Annex, pp. 62–64). Together, these papers prime the reader thoroughly for the topics discussed in the subsequent, titled but unnumbered, chapters.

The first set of papers in the monograph appears under the heading *Knowing Heaven and Earth* (pp. 65–140). This includes: *Astrological and Prophetic Cycles in the Pseudo-Aristotelian Hermetica and Other Islamic Esoterica* by Godefroid de Callatay and Liana Saif (pp. 67–82); Charles Burnett's *The Astrological Liber novem iudicum. A Kind of Encyclopedia* (pp. 83–96); *La géographie dans les encyclopédies mameloukes (XIIIe–XIVe s.): entre vision figée du monde et mise à jour* [Geography in Mamluk encyclopaedias (XIII–XIV centuries): between an established and updating vision of the world] by Jean-Charles Ducène (pp. 97–111), and *The Manipulation of Ancient and Medieval Knowledge in the Ottonian Court* by Fatma Sinem Eryilmaz (pp. 113–140). As the title of this section suggests, each of these texts concerns the study of both the celestial and terrestrial, as well as the relationship between the two.

The second (unnumbered) section of the publication is titled *Studying and Using the Animal World* (pp. 141–220). This comprises: *De la source au confluent: les citations de médecins arabes par les compilateurs latins du XIIIe siècle* [From source to outlet: quotations from Arab physicians in 13th-century Latin compilers] by Grégory Clesse (pp. 143–161); *Le Thesaurus pauperum et l'encyclopédisme médiéval* ['Thesaurus pauperum' and medieval encyclopaedism], by Giuseppe Zarra (pp. 163–178); *Spécificité du discours naturaliste d'al-Gazih (776–868): quelle influence sur la zoologie arabe médiévale?* [The specificity of al-Gazih's (776–868) natural discourse and its influence on medieval Arab zoology] by Meys Ben Saad (pp. 179–200), and *La faune exotique dans le Liber de natura rerum de Thomas de Cantimpré. Quels nouveaux apports?* [Exotic fauna in 'Liber de natura rerum' by Thomas of Cantimpré: new additions] by Thierry Buquet (pp. 201–220). These papers are centred on the analysis of natural subjects – the world of plants, animals, and minerals. The fact that these play an important role in the life of every human was recognised by the authors of medieval encyclopaedias, who devoted significant attention to them in their works.

Diffusing Knowledge (pp. 221–328) is the third and final segment of the work. It contains: *L'encyclopédisme au carrefour des langues: l'exemple du De proprietatibus rerum de Barthélemy l'Anglais* [Encyclopaedism at the crossroads of languages: the example of 'De proprietatibus rerum' by Bartholomaeus Anglicus] by Joëlle Ducos (pp. 223–248); *Secundum fratrem Vicentium: qu'ont retenu les lecteurs du Speculumhistoriale au sujet de l'Islam? Le cas de Giovanni Colonna et de Laurent de Premierfait* ['Secundum fratrem Vicentium': What did readers of 'Speculum Historiale' learn about Islam? The case of Giovanni Colonna and Laurent de Premierfait] by Florence Ninitte (pp. 243–269); *"Il Dizionario enciclopedico politico-scientifico-filosofica". Pratique des textes et théorie de la culture, des «volgarizzamenti» jusqu'à Dante* ['Il Dizionario enciclopedico

politico-scientifico-filosofica': Textual practice and cultural theory, from 'volgarizzamenti' to Dante] by Lorenzo Mainini (pp. 271–285), and *Traduire, écrire et imprimer la science. Notes sur quelques manuscrits et imprimés encyclopédiques et scientifiques conservés à la Bibliothèque royale de Belgique (XIVe-XVIe siècles)* [The translation, writing, and printing of science. Notes on encyclopaedic and scientific manuscripts and prints from the Royal Library of Belgium (14th–16th centuries)] by Mattio Cavagna (pp. 287–328). The papers focus on the 'diffusion of knowledge' precipitated by the translation of medieval encyclopaedias into vernacular languages. These encyclopaedias contained information from various branches of scientific and cultural study. Their translation rendered them more accessible and allowed for the further dissemination of knowledge through references to, and quotations from, well-known and respected authorities of the world of science of the time.

The monograph features a list of the works created as part of this project (*Publications of the ARC Project 'Speculum Arabicum'*, pp. 329–338). It also includes an *Index of authors and works* (pp. 339–346) and *Index of manuscripts* (pp. 347–349). The table of contents can be found near the end of the text (pp. 351–352), and is followed by a three-page list of articles from the series *Textes, Études, Congrès* published by the Institute of Medieval Studies at the Catholic University of Louvain.

In these content-rich introductory pieces and the fascinating papers which make up the body of the monograph, the reader is exposed to a wealth of information on medieval encyclopaedism. We learn of its development and reception and its multifaceted nature, which includes the study of history, culture, language, literature, science, daily life, and much more. This is placed within the context of the interpenetration of Arab-Muslim, Byzantine, and Latin influences. The process is reflected in the numerous sources used by the authors, the majority of which are encyclopaedias. Encyclopaedias reflect the needs and intellectual interests of a society, as well as the personal interests and level of erudition of their creators. They organise the surrounding world, albeit to varying degrees, depending on the subjective choices of the author. In medieval examples, subjects are arranged thematically, rather than alphabetically (as in a modern encyclopaedia).

Speculum Arabicum contends that medieval encyclopaedism presents 'a 'bridge' – or rather, considering its multiplicity of faces – 'bridges' between Aristotle and Pliny and the great humanists of the European Renaissance, such as Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola. The authors assert that it is difficult to overestimate the importance of works such as *Ihsa' al-'ulum* by Al-Farabi, *The Suda*, or *De proprietatibus rerum* by Bartholomaeus. 'But those texts were in fact far more than bridges offering to the modern scholar an image of the *Bildungsideal* of a given society at a given epoch. In a sharp contrast to the supposed lack of originality of the encyclopaedic genre, their authors frequently provided new methods or structures for apprehending the world around them' (p. 10).

Medieval encyclopaedias presented a means by which contemporary readers could order and understand their surroundings. This monograph grants us the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the forms and functions of Latin, Byzantine, and Arab-Muslim encyclopaedias of the period. Multi-thematic, eloquent, and based on a wealth of source material articles, this monograph has a substantive value which allows us to rediscover medieval encyclopaedias. Brepols has once again published an excellent joint work which should be considered a 'must-read' for all those interested in the subject of medieval encyclopaedism.

Dr hab. Sylwia Konarska-Zimnicka, prof. UJK

Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach

zimnicka@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-8337-1637