

VERN L. BULLOUGH and JAMES A. BRUNDAGE, eds. *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, vol. 1696. New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1996. Pp. xviii, 441. ISBN: 0-8153-1287-3. cloth \$68.

In the exploration of medieval sexualities we have indeed come a long way since Leopold von Ranke's squeamish morality regarding issues of late-medieval 'pederasty' (his catch-all term for weakness, both personal and social). Present inquiry into the formation, representation, and practice of medieval sexual identities has been crucially enabled by a series of breakthroughs, the broad genealogy of which we might trace from the Annales School to the pioneering work of historians of sexuality such as Michel Foucault, Peter Brown, and James Brundage.

What these historians demonstrate above all is a commitment to the past ('the way it really was,' in Ranke's famous formulation), but a past always considered *in relation to the present*. Whereas Ranke's moralism effectively collapsed the distance between past and present, in order to diagnose culture, contemporary historical and literary scholarship endeavors to delineate the critical spaces opened up by the differentness of the past. The provocation of the word 'handbook' (instruction manual? reference book?) in the title of the present collection of essays signals, I believe, just such a willingness to place in momentary suspension the practices of everyday life ('how-toness') and the knowledge of an alien past. This suspension allows for the questioning of one's own historical position, assumptions, and methods, as well as for history's receptivity to multiple disciplinary perspectives. The present volume represents above all a willingness to acknowledge inquiry as open-ended.

This open-endedness is reflected in the predominance of essays in the collection that treat the current state of scholarship in a particular field of history or literature. Nearly every essay offers a thorough overview of past and current research, as well as an indication of the direction inquiry is heading. Most of the essays are explanatory rather than polemical, and aim at providing a historical framework within which students and scholars may pursue their own lines of investigation. Particularly helpful in this regard are the excellent bibliographies that conclude every essay. Each is an important invitation to plot out, both in the primary and secondary sources, future intellectual activity. The bibliographies offered here, along with Joyce Salisbury's *Medieval Sexuality: A Research Guide* (Garland, 1990), are now the indispensable starting points for research on sexuality in the medieval period.

Space militates against evaluating, let alone synopsisizing, the eighteen essays that comprise the *Handbook*. Organized generally around the problem of boundary definitions, the essays are grouped into three sections. The first section, 'Sexual Norms,' examines the ways in which sexual subjectivity is established by canon law, by medicine, and by theories of sex roles. It includes essays on chaste marriage, on penitentials and their later incarnation as *summae confessorum*, and on masculinity. The second section, 'Variance from Norms,' explores representations and historical practices of homosexuality, lesbianism, cross-dressing, prostitution, contraception and abortion, and castration. The final section, 'Cultural Issues,' takes up the problem of national, linguistic, and religious boundaries as it bears upon the formation of

sexual identities. Research notes are included on Jewish and Muslim sexuality, and sexualities in the Eastern Orthodox, vernacular French, Old Norse, and English traditions are surveyed with the clarity and erudition to which the reader has by this point in the *Handbook* become quite accustomed.

A magisterial survey, a vade mecum for the foreseeable future, the *Handbook* will serve its users well, particularly students, advanced undergraduate and graduate, who are launching projects dealing with sexual identity and practice in the medieval period.

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