
Book review:
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Constant J. Mews, Kathleen B. Neal (eds.), *Addressing Injustice in the Medieval Body Politic*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023; 402 pp.

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Justice as a polysemic concept encompassing notions of 'personal virtue, legal value, social ideal, political imperative, divine attribute' (p. 21) is at the centre of this collective volume edited by two medievalists from Monash University, Australia. The common thread of the eleven essays that constitute it is, more specifically, the fact that they discuss the 7th-century Irish treatise *De XII abusivis seculi* (henceforth DDAS), which enjoyed great popularity throughout the Middle Ages, as evidenced by its textual tradition counting more than four hundred manuscripts from the 8th to the 16th century. In the introduction, the editors make a very convincing case for the relevance of DDAS as a starting point for a broader reflection on medieval conceptions of justice. Famous among medievalists as one of the foundations of the 'Mirror for Princes' genre (thanks to its treatment, in the ninth abuse, of unjust kings), this text has much more to offer when attention is decentred from its description of royal justice and the abuses of other categories mentioned in the text (e.g., bishops, entire communities) are also taken into account. The descriptions that the DDAS provides of their 'abuses' (i.e., failures to live up to their callings) have inspired reflections on justice just as much as its lines about kings, as it emerges from the contributions presented in the volume. As a consequence, the editors highlight how this broader exploration of the DDAS and its legacy can allow medievalists to track the development of ideas of *iustitia* not only as a royal duty, but also as a personal virtue and as a collective responsibility to achieve balance in the body politics.

After the introduction, three essays analyse the main themes of DDAS itself and the context in which it was produced. Mews and Joyce establish the main influences of this text, in particular the Pauline injunction to all Christians to each follow their own calling; the author of DDAS borrows the term *abusio* from the language of grammarians, where it signified misuse of a word, to indicate precisely the abusive behaviour that stems from a failure to do so. The essay also discusses how the fact that the text was often attributed to either Cyprian or Augustine became an important circumstance of its transmission. Joyce's essay on the position of each social category mentioned by DDAS in its overall structure highlights the importance of considering the intersectionality of such categories. That is to say, the abuses of different social groups, although discussed separately in the text, are presented as being interlinked in the overarching structure of the treatise. This lends even more credibility to the claim, established in the introduction, that an almost exclusive focus on the ninth abuse discussing kings is a limiting perspective through which to analyse DDAS. Finally, Ó Cróinín's contribution provides an in-depth assessment of the Irish background of DDAS, discussing parallels between the treatise and Irish sources from the same period, and concluding that all points to an origin for this text in 7th-century Ireland.

The rest of the volume consists of essays analysing the legacy of DDAS from Carolingian times to the 15th century, with a geographical focus on Germany, France, England, and Italy. Wassenaar's essay describes Carolingian literature as a turning point in the reception of the treatise as primarily concerned with the role of kings, since this was the main way in which Carolingian rulers made use of this text. Kemp assesses the influence of DDAS during the Investiture Controversy, and concludes that the references previously identified to this text in this period's sources are often too vague to claim that DDAS deeply shaped concepts of kingship between the 11th and the 12th century. The question of the extent to which DDAS can be considered an actual source for later medieval authors rather than a generic (and not always conscious) source of inspiration is an important point of discussion throughout the volume, but Kemp treats it in a particularly clear and methodologically sound way. The following essay (by Mews) analyses the new lease of life offered to DDAS in the 12th century by Hugh of Fouilloy's

works describing the 'twelve abuses of the cloister'. The Augustinian canon applies the model of DDAS to religious life, depicting justice as personal moral righteousness. Neal's contribution then brings us to the 13th-century *Communiloquium* of the Franciscan John of Wales, another turning point in the reception of DDAS, since the friar minor recovers the social emphasis of the Irish treatise and focuses on justice as a responsibility of the whole body politic rather than of the king. However, the essays by Nederman and Lahav show how the focus on royal justice remains central in other 13th-century English and French works that took inspiration from DDAS (although, admittedly, some of the oeuvres they analyse have a much weaker connection to DDAS than the *Communiloquium*). The two final essays by Briggs and Piron focus on northern Italy as a partial outlier in the reception of the Irish treatise. The political theorists of the 14th-century Italian city-states did not seem to utilize it in their discussions of justice, probably on account of the significant differences between their kingless society and the model offered by DDAS. On the other hand, though, both the 14th-century *Fraticelli* movement and the 15th-century Spiritual Franciscans produced their own adaptations of the twelve abuses, focusing as one might expect on the failings of the papacy in the first case, and on female immorality in the second.

The volume, which provides a useful translated version of DDAS as an appendix, contains occasional repetitions in the description of the twelve abuses (especially the ninth, on kings, which maintains a central role in the discussion after all) provided by its contributors. This is inevitable, since the book is designed to allow readers to be able to peruse just the single chapters they might be interested in, and it becomes noticeable only when it is read as a whole. Despite this minor inconvenience, the value of *Addressing Injustice in the Medieval Body Politic* and its success in delivering what promised in the introduction fully emerges when it is read from cover to cover: this approach allows readers to properly appreciate its exploration of the many facets of medieval *iustitia*, and of how DDAS, in its long life, had an influence in the elaboration of many of its definitions.