

Lena Liepe: *Studies in Fourteenth Century Book Painting*

REVIEWED BY STEFAN DRECHSLER

Lena Liepe's monograph "Studies in Fourteenth Century Book Painting" provides a long overdue and newly developed interdisciplinary approach to the overlapping fields of medieval art history and Old Norse-Icelandic philology. The author provides two in-depth articles on two separate illuminated manuscript groups from 14th century Iceland and shows in detail and with great success that the multidisciplinary research of the stated fields is indeed able to give new insights into the production and general cultural background of the investigated illuminated manuscripts. Liepe states at the beginning of her book that the work is supposed to be used by art historians and philologists alike. She also assumes that both groups do not necessarily have great knowledge of the other's field of research. Thus, in the introduction chapter "the prerequisites" modern approaches to the complex meaning of style are explained with help of stylistic concepts developed by art historians Schapiro, Sauerländer, von Aachen and Davis. Following from this are the important philological characteristics for the grouping of illuminated manuscripts on philological grounds presented, giving not only room to the historical circumstances of production and a short introduction to the paleographic research between manuscripts and also for the well-received methodological theory of Karl G. Johansson on the Icelandic AM 242 fol. Codex Wormianus. Johansson mainly discusses the occurrence of palaeographic and orthographic variation in the manuscript in light of the specific situation of production. By dividing the written signs by their position and function both in regards to a strict linguistic system and its actual realization on the written parchment, the author reflects Johansson's philological methodology in detail and tentatively discusses the possibility of transferring this method to the presented concept of style.

The first article, "The making of Icelandic illuminated manuscripts", discusses the stylistic similarities of eleven illuminated 14th century Icelandic manuscripts, many of which are part of the so-called Helgafell-group. This group consists of 16 manuscripts and fragments in total that were located by palaeographic characteristics and orthographic attributes to the named monastery in northern Snæfellsnes by the philologists Ólafur Halldórsson and Stefán Karlsson. Both discovered that these manuscripts and fragments were mainly written by two different writers. In Liepe's work only six manuscripts of the Helgafell-group are presented. These are AM 233 a fol.,

AM 350 fol. Skarðsbók, AM 347 fol. Belgsdalsbók, AM 226 fol. Stjórn, SÁM 1 fol. Codex Scardensis and Holm perg. 5 fol., while further added manuscripts include GKS 1005 fol. Flateyjarbók, GKS 3270 4to, GKS 3268 4to, AM 343 fol. Svalbarðsbók and AM 225 fol. Stjórn. Liepe mainly investigates by way of one-on-one comparison by looking for the stylistic resemblances in the ornamentation and figural style on most illuminated folio leaves found in the named manuscripts. Each codex is introduced by naming the philological background as well as historical peculiarities. The comparison is made on a very logical scale: once a manuscript is introduced it is often referred to later. Previous art historical (and likewise philological) research on the connections between the manuscripts is considered where appropriate. An example is the hitherto suggested stylistic connection between AM 226 fol. Stjórn and GKS 1005 fol. Flateyjarbók that is investigated and confirmed by the author. Both manuscripts were suggested to have been painted by the second scribe and illuminator of GKS 1005 fol. Flateyjarbók, Magnús Þórhallsson. In other comparisons the author comes to the conclusion that earlier research needs to be updated, or even ignored, among others in the comparison between AM 343 fol. Svalbarðsbók and AM 347 fol. Belgsdalsbók (and, later, also GKS 1154 I 4to Codex Hardenbergensis). Both Jónsbók-copies indeed share several model motifs but ultimately show different styles and thus could not be considered to be products of a single workshop. In the closing discussion, the author concludes that eight of the named eleven manuscripts are considered to have been illuminated at the Helgafell-workshop. The remaining three (GKS 3270 4to, GKS 3268 4to and AM 343 fol. Svalbarðsbók) are excluded. In the following chapter, entitled “The Institutional Frame”, Liepe strengthens the practice of a sharing of motifs amongst several workshops and follows the theoretical concept of a “constant of place”. This concept was originally invented by English art historian M. A. Michael in 1988 by looking at stylistic peculiarities and shared features in several illuminated 14th century manuscripts from East Anglia. Michael’s approach gives without doubt a very convincing answer to the visible use of common motifs and styles of Icelandic illuminators, independent of the writers and their time of writing. It allows the concept of Johansson’s suggested “scribal milieu” also on art historical terms and explains groupings of illuminated manuscripts made exclusively by art historical research. The author strengthens these ideas in the previously discussed Icelandic context by including two contemporary illuminated Icelandic Jónsbók-copies to the Helgafell-group. Thus, AM 168 a-b 4to (considered as a single manuscript) and GKS 3269 b 4to share, according to the author, partially the same models as the Helgafell-group and should be considered to be part of that milieu, even if palaeographic ties between these manuscripts are unverifiable. In the conclusion and the following postscriptum the author widens this topic to a European scale and provides

a comment on the previously assumed English stylistic influence in the discussed Helgafell-group. Liepe comes to the conclusion that only in the ornamentation of GKS 1005 fol. Flateyjarbók and, in parts, also in AM 350 fol. Skarðsbók is this feature vaguely visible. The often claimed 14th century East Anglian influence in particular is only indirectly detectable in the Icelandic material and must have gone through several stages of successive copying.

The second article named “The Árstíðaskrá Vestfirðinga calvary group: An Icelandic miniature from the fourteenth century” deals with several forms of illuminations in a North Icelandic manuscript group of in total five illuminated codices, written by two separate scribes in the 14th century: Add. 1 fol., AM 249 b fol., AM 249 c fol., AM 249 d fol. and AM 249 e fol. At the beginning the Latin calendar Add. 1 fol. is introduced and its only illumination, the Calvary group miniature on f. 7va, compared in stylistic terms with the French MS fr. 403 Paris Apocalypse as well as with the calendars AM 249 d fol. and AM 249 e fol., both belonging to the same manuscript group as Add. 1 fol. and sharing the same motif. Then, the philologically related psaltery manuscript AM 241 a I fol. is presented, showing eight scenes of the Hours of the Passion. All scenes are presented in iconographic terms, representing a common decorative style of this widespread topic (exceptions are, however, also discovered and described in detail). The author concludes that both Add. 1 fol. and AM 241 a I fol. originate from the same artistic workshop while several variations found in Add. 1 fol., especially with regard to the dotted nimbi on f. 7v, supports the specific intention of the employed style and furthermore speaks for a strong stylistic influence from several British 13th century manuscripts. This particular influence is also visible in several other Icelandic miniatures such as in AM 679 4to and in AM 68 fol. In the following chapter, the author provides a further comparative investigation. Five purely Romanesque ornamented initials in AM 241 a I fol. are presented and compared with those in a number of other manuscripts from the Árstíðaskrá Vestfirðinga Calvary group as well as to a number of other 14th century illuminated manuscripts from Iceland. The closest affinity to AM 241 a I fol., however, is found in the previously discussed SÁM 1 fol. Codex Scardensis and further supports the presented sharing of models between different workshops. The place of production of the Árstíðaskrá Vestfirðinga Calvary group, however, is not further explained with this approach. Liepe only suggests a general explanation (by pointing out that only very limited positive evidence exists) and mentions that a workshop must indeed have been responsible for the presented illuminations; no further attribution is possible from an art historical point of view. In previous research it has been suggested that the Árstíðaskrá Vestfirðinga Calvary group was a product of the farm of Vatnsfjörður in the West fjords.

Through both extensive and profound articles the author provides two fresh and in-depth approaches to the stylistic aspects of selected 14th century Icelandic book paintings. By using Michael's method of a "constant of place", important and new impulses for further research on the circumstances of the manuscripts' production are given. Thus, the present studies should be considered as a modern standard work in interdisciplinary research on art history and Old Norse-Icelandic philology, both concerning the solid methods presented and the innovative investigations provided.