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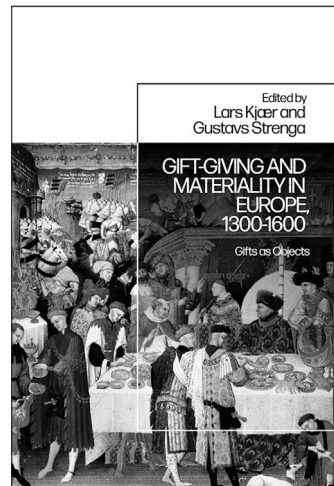
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Lars Kjær, Gustavs Strenga (eds.). *Gift-Giving and Materiality in Europe, 1300–1600: Gifts as Objects*. London; New York; Oxford; New Delhi; Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. 256 pp.

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Ko nozīmē dot, dāvināt un ziedot gan mūsdienu, gan viduslaiku cilvēkam? Stāsti, kuri kā astoņas nodaļas apkopoti grāmatā par dāvināšanu, tās praksēm un iesaistītajiem objektiem vēlo viduslaiku un agro jauno laiku Eiropā, vēsta par dāvanām kā simboliski piesātinātiem objektiem – no laulību gredzenu apmaiņas līdz grezniem relikvārijiem, kuri kā dāvanas kalpoja diplomātisko attiecību uzsākšanai vai nostiprināšanai. Piemēram, Gustavs Strenga, fokusējoties uz dāvanām, kas tika sagatavotas, pirmoreiz Rīgā sagaidot jauno arhibīskapu Silvestru Stodevešeru, caur dāvanām kā politiski un simboliski piesātinātiem priekšmetiem sniedz vērtīgu ieskatu tā brīža politiskajā situācijā Livonijā. Vairākās nodaļās un tajās ietvertajos stāstos iespējams saskatīt dažādas idejas, kas caurstrāvoja viduslaiku dāvināšanas tradīciju, piemēram, atlīdzinājumu par dāvanu svētajam, pretī sagaidot brīnumainu dziedināšanu. Grāmata iepazīstina ar dāvināšanas tradīcijām, kas bija cieši saistītas ar ikdienas reliģiskajām praksēm, kā arī

objektiem un ziedošanas tradīcijām, kas vienoja un veidoja kopienas un cilvēku savstarpējās attiecības.

The book *The Medieval Gift and the Classical Tradition: Ideals and the Performance of Generosity in Medieval England, 1100–1300* published by Lars Kjær in 2019 can almost be seen as an unexpected prelude to the collective edition *Gift-Giving and Materiality in Europe, 1300–1600: Gifts as Objects*, where Kjær is joined by Gustavs Strenga as a co-editor and other authors who each contribute with exciting histories and case studies of late medieval gifts, donations, and trophies. As the editors point out in the introduction, the book resulted from a workshop on gift-giving at Tallinn University, therefore it is especially exciting to welcome the physical result of it in the form of a book back in Tallinn University.

Telling of the stories of objects is an element that is shared by different chapters throughout the book. Some ideas and concepts of gift-giving appear in several chapters and the reader can explore the presence of the same or similar idea throughout different times, places, situations, and levels of society. One such concept is reciprocity, which can be spotted in almost every story told in the book chapters. Reciprocity seems to be most important for the givers and receivers of gifts on the highest levels of society – especially in political relations and among the nobility. The gifts were as noble as the actors behind them – Sabine Sommerer in her chapter introduces gifts “of ivory, gold, and elephants” in the form of chairs that were gifted among the elite and, as she suggests, kept the memory of the giver and made them present for the receiver. And although chairs suggest a mainly practical use of them, from the presented examples it seems that the grandiosity of a chair made it a lot less meant for sitting, but rather for viewing.

Several types of the gifts looked at in the volume lived not only one but several lives – as gifts, or already as practical objects of function and/or memory. Despite their oft impracticability, even the chairs described by Sommerer were passed on – either by memorialising the earlier giver and their agenda, or giving it a new one, when passed forward. The life cycle of the medieval marriage ring is one of the questions in the chapter by Anna Boeles Rowland. When thinking about the marital ring, we might mainly associate it with the beginning of its life – it becomes densely infused with a social role for the bearers and with particular spiritual potential, especially during the marriage liturgy. However, as it happens in life in any historical period, marriages come to an end, spouses pass away, and the marital ring loses a big part of its meaning. There, Rowland highlights several sources that tell of the afterlife of the marriage ring – either with the same bearer, or by gifting the ring further, infusing it with a new meaning.

Medieval gifts, whether small or expensive, honest or with an agenda behind them, almost always seem to carry a rather strong social message with them. They created connections between reigns, people, and the divine; gifts strengthened the relations and could create bonds that had to be seriously considered – like the ring that promises marriage if accepted, created a strong tie. But still, as Strenga mentions in his chapter, “gifts remained gifts even if they were never returned” (p. 78). The idea of the gift being an object that does not necessarily need to be reciprocated sparks when looking into the chapter by Mads Vedel Heilskov, where the gift-giving happens between “humans and the divine”. Most of the stories told here speak of miracles that have either happened because of the gift to the divine, or miracles that happened after a promise of a donation. What is noticeable in the chapter, is the constant talk about exchange and return, the donation returned with health, luck, or another agenda. Therefore, I can’t help but ask – in what circumstances is a gift so genuine that it does not await anything in return? I would expect that a donation encompasses such genuineness, but it does depend on the actors, and more significantly, the age.

The change of ages that we regard as medieval and early modern are defined by the Reformation in large parts of Europe, including Denmark, which is at the centre of attention in the chapter by Poul Grønder-Hansen. By looking at the alms boxes and the tradition of almsgiving both before and after the Lutheran Reformation in Denmark, it is impossible not to expand on the turn of the meaning of the donation. Although the Lutheran agenda, as shown by the inscriptions on or writings near the alms boxes, is to give and donate without expecting reciprocity, some of the sources show that the post-medieval person still had to be motivated in other ways to donate. If the thought of the self as a good person who would then become similar to other good actors and examples of Christianity only would not be enough, at least the alms boxes were located in public space – the church – where public giving of a donation might boost one’s image and social status in the local society. And although after the Reformation it was not as usual to venerate saints as it had been in the medieval Catholic tradition, one of the saints – Saint Laurentius – still appears as one of the role models of practising charity for the parish community.

The importance of saints for the late medieval person was significant not only in the way of role models or guardians, but also as a possibility to live out one’s religion on a more personal level by interacting with the saint. The interactions between people and saints in the form of offerings are looked at by Sari Katajala-Peltomaa. She highlights a particular tradition in offering to a saint in the case of demonic possession, as well as highlighting turning to a saint as a coping mechanism in times of hardship.

The book chapters cover not only the typically widely described western and southern European lands and their histories but also include several case studies of the Baltic region. One such case study is the chapter by Gustavs Strenge, where gifts and material objects used for communication help tell the rather complex and unusual history of Riga Archbishop Silvester Stodewescher, which includes medieval drama, conflict, and even fear of death. It also highlights the political, symbolic, and communicative purposes of gifts during such entries in a wider context. Politics also plays a role in the case presented by Ruth Sargent Noyes where she describes the gift exchange between two very distant lands – Tuscany and Lithuania, which thus presents a particular case of early modern diplomacy. The source descriptions and the preserved objects of this exchange take the reader by surprise, especially the luxury of the objects produced in the Baltic and included in the exchange.

Telling of stories of gifts, donations, reciprocity, and promises is what I would still emphasise when drawing a conclusion about the book. The last chapter of it does not disappoint as it is based on three more histories, but here Philipp Höhn switches the focus from giving to taking, by constructing the possible stories of “communities of violence” from three towns – Hamburg, Gdansk, and Lübeck. In all of the stories, Höhn emphasises the violent history of objects as the cause for creating social bonds inside of a community, be it the whole town or only the elites or merchants. But from another perspective, the threat of violence from the outside and the possible endangering of the coherence of the urban elite might have been an even more crucial reason for strengthening the social bonds of the community.

The collective edition not only is a significant and interesting addition to the study of medieval materiality and gift-giving itself but it also offers valuable case studies of specific towns, types of communities, saints and reigns all around medieval and early modern Europe. Although each author has their own research questions about the objects included in the gift exchange and the tradition of giving, it creates a variety of topics and allows the reader to study the phenomena in diverse settings.

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