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Nina Rowe, *The Illuminated World Chronicle: Tales from the Late Medieval City* (Yale University Press, New Haven & London), 2020.

Chronicles charting world history are familiar to historians of medieval and early renaissance Europe. Of these perhaps the best known is the *Liber Chronicarum* (also known as the *Nuremberg Chronicle* or *Die Schedelsche Weltchronik*): a richly decorated World Chronicle produced in 1490s Nuremberg by Hartman Schedel). Less well-known were the manuscript world histories – *Weltchroniken* - of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, and these are the focus of Nina Rowe's delightful book. Blending biblical stories, classical myth, and popular histories, the *Weltchroniken* were often richly decorated and it is these images which form the focus of Rowe's analysis. As Rowe notes in her introduction, the majority of medieval sources available for art historians are devotional, but the *Weltchroniken* offer an insight into secular concerns. While the *Weltchroniken* do use scriptural stories (and Rowe argues that one 15<sup>th</sup>-century reader classified her *Weltchronik* as a bible), their focus is rather more temporal, casting the stories of Adam & Eve, Moses, and Achilles as an expression of late-medieval urban life.

The most enjoyable aspect of this magnificently illustrated book is that Nina Rowe uses her close reading of different *Weltchroniken* to explore the cities and towns of late medieval Bavaria and Austria where these chronicles were produced, particularly focussing on Regensburg, Vienna, Salzburg, and Nuremberg. This means that Rowe's work is significant for anyone studying late-medieval urban life as well as those interested in manuscript production and circulation.

Rowe draws together these different elements – production, readership, and textual influences – to produce a rich analysis of 24 *Welchroniken*, all produced between 1330 and 1430. With each chapter she addresses the production of the illuminated manuscripts; the source material for different *Welchroniken*; any evidence of who owned or read the chronicles; and finally, what this can tell us about the late-medieval towns and cities of Bavaria and Austria.

Rowe provides an illuminating analysis of the illustrations. She notes when images in the *Weltchroniken* were produced in a traditional method - painted in tempura and enclosed in frames - and when illustrators experimented with techniques made possible by the newly available paper (in particular the use of washes). She explores the production of each different *Weltchronik*, showing an increased reliance on urban ateliers consisting of a range of different specialists. Sometimes, time or money prevented a chronicle being fully illustrated. (as in the *Weltchronik* now known as Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm 11): the result, empty spaces in the text. In another chronicle, also in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, the illustrator was frustrated by the amount of space left for his image of 'The Slaughter of the Midianites'. Turning the manuscript on its side, he produced an expansive horizontal picture of bloodletting which spilled into the margins. Rowe also highlights 'iconographic affinities' between the different manuscripts, which help her to locate clusters of *Weltchroniken* production, even when their texts diverge.

Rowe also examines textual influences behind the manuscripts, demonstrating the particular impact of Peter Comester's *Historica Scholastica* and, through him, Josephus

Flavius's *Antiquitates Judaicae*. A further source of inspiration were the 'universal' chronicles' produced by 12<sup>th</sup>-century monastic authors, particularly the *Kaiserchronik*, another Middle High German chronicle. Rowe demonstrates the wide range of material drawn on to compose a *Welchronik*, including material by the Christherre-Poet, Rudolf von Ems and Jans der Enikel. Rowe also shows the connections between different *Welchroniken*, comparing content and production of the manuscripts in order to suggest where and when they might have been produced.

The contextual and historical reading of the *Welchroniken* is perhaps the most enjoyable aspect of this work. Rowe draws on often-repeated stories and clusters of images (many of which are beautifully reproduced in the book) to explore different aspects of life in a late-medieval city, particularly focussing on the emerging urban elite who were the patrons of these *Welchroniken*. For example, the stories of Adam, Eve and their descendants are seen as being commentaries of the urban world that produced the *Welchroniken*. Cain was recast as a proud builder of the first city; Enoch was portrayed as a medieval scribe; while Tubel-Cain was the founder of smithing. Particular care was taken over depictions of Neoma, and Rowe argues that interest in this figure reflected the increasing importance of the textile trade, particularly in fustian, in the area.

The most engaging analyses are those where Rowe is able to link the text, image, and urban politics most closely. In her discussion of a *Weltchronik* produced in early 15<sup>th</sup>-century Regensburg, she examines depictions of Moses in Egypt in particular his marriage to Tharbis, to explore contemporary attitudes towards Jewish and African people in the region. In another chapter, she examines late-medieval anxieties about idolatry and the Waldensian threat through the analysis of various images in a selection of the *Weltchroniken*, including some delightful pictures of Alexander the Great in a diving bell.

The images are the star of this book. They make Rowe's close analysis accessible, while demonstrating why the *Weltchroniken* are such engaging manuscripts. Rowe is at pains to point out that the *Weltchroniken* should not be seen merely as a forerunner to the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, and indeed she shows that the *Weltchroniken* are more expansive, more rambling (and often more risqué) in comparison to the *Nuremberg Chronicle*. While the *Nuremberg Chronicle* came out of the same intellectual and political milieu as these earlier *Weltchroniken*, Nina Rowe makes a compelling case for reading and enjoying these sumptuous histories as unique expressions of late-medieval urban life in Bavaria and Austria.