as the factors that facilitated (or indeed hindered) a given text’s success, this chapter will prove useful to experienced scholars as well as university students. Discussing the role of multilingualism in late medieval manuscripts culture alongside the political implications of this culture in modern, nationalistic contexts of reception, Doležalová (chapter 9, pp. 160–80) offers a keen and compelling piece of research that serves as a powerful reminder that it is often ‘impossible to assume that the texts that came down to us were successful acts of communication’ (p. 175). Finally, Kerby-Fulton’s afterword (chapter 13, pp. 243–54) sketches the possibilities (as well as the risks) of future scholarship on the subject by unravelling the history of one ‘wholly neglected medieval literary term, originalia’ (p. 244).

As Kerby-Fulton’s contribution makes clear, there is still work to be done, but it must be said that the present volume makes a commendable start that will benefit generations of scholars to come. Some editorial slips aside (for example, the somewhat unexpected occurrence of contractions such as ‘it’s’ and ‘he’ll’ instead of ‘it is’ and ‘he will’, pp. 40f. et al.), there is very little to criticize. One critical observation concerns the fact that, whilst some chapters succeed beautifully in bridging the gap between Europe’s Latin and vernacular cultures, others focus much more explicitly on the latter. Some readers, including the reviewer, might wish for a little more balance and specificity concerning medieval European Latinity, both alongside vernacular culture and as a historical/literary vehicle in its own right. All in all, this is an important and innovative book, which manages to impress in many ways. Its field-shaping potential will be recognized widely by scholars (and their students) from various academic fields (historians, literary scholars, palaeographers/codicologists, art historians, bibliographers, archivists, etc.). Indeed, the fact that the book was declared out of stock by Cambridge University Press within months of its original publication in August 2015, thus requiring a reprint as early as January 2016, is surely testimony that just such a warm reception is already widely being offered, and rightfully so.

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It is greatly to the credit of the two main authors of this study that in the 1990s they uncovered the small (approx. 13 × 9 cm) and unpretentious illustrated prayer-book that forms the subject of this investigation, and over the next decade and
more urged and won its conservation, now publishing it to the highest standards of scholarly investigation imaginable. An original and visually understated work of 195 folios, Cod. 801 in the Burgerbibliothek in Bern has been expanded miraculously into a survey in two volumes of 676 and 203 pages respectively. No expense has been spared in providing not just the critical edition (vol. II) with scale facsimile but also an introductory volume with 562 colour reproductions.

The manuscript in question is a prayer-book with partly coloured images, one per opening, joined by a set of specially composed prayers in German, and originating (in the sense of being started) in the area of Strasbourg in the period 1380–1410. The basic remit of the study was that Jeffrey Hamburger would consider the art, and Nigel Palmer the German prayers. The little book eventually became the property of Ursula Begerin (d. 1531), a Penitent nun of the Reuerinnenkloster in Strasbourg. But, as M. R. James once remarked, it is often the little books that pose the biggest problems. Professors Hamburger and Palmer uncover a much more complicated earlier history. Begun at some point towards the end of the fourteenth or at the start of the fifteenth centuries, it appears that the images were only subsequently joined by the neatly written prayers which seem ideally suited to them; and further texts and images were added subsequently. Like the images in a Psalter prefatory Bible cycle, the images begin at the beginning with a few pictures from the Fall through Genesis, the Life of the Virgin Mary, the Nativity, Ministry and Passion of Christ, and devotional images of saints and angels. The Ministry and Parables of Christ, together (understandably) with the Passion, receive unusual attention. Basically quite consistent in style, the book nevertheless evolved in a complicated way, ever in flux. The assumption that it had a more or less continuous history of female use is based principally on the image on fol. 174 by the ‘Begerin Master’ (one of several at work) which shows a woman in dark garments kneeling before a fogged image of the Host and praying to St Mechthild. Who or what she was is unknown.

The numerous inner complexities posed by this volume aside, the authors succeed in showing why modest works like this matter to an appraisal of the art and religious life of late medieval women in Alsace, but also beyond. In his introductions to the style, imagery, and texts of the volume, Hamburger establishes how richly referential the implicit visual culture of such apparently modest books really was. No opportunity is lost to frame the object of study with a much wider network of imagery, which will make these volumes useful not just for those interested in prayer-books: ‘high art’ manuscript illumination, panel painting and stained glass all figure in delineating an entire landscape of devotion, and there is an extensive bibliography which will allow scholars to bring their studies of art in the area of the Rhineland and beyond up to date. These volumes, amply funded and beautifully produced, set a remarkable example of exhaustive depth of study.

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