different storytelling collections produced in the thirteenth and fourteenth
centuries, updating Landau’s discussion of Boccaccio’s sources, whilst remaining
appropriately cautious about the direction of influence between eastern collections
and the organization of western collections. It is only the fabliaux manuscripts,
Brown argues, which model the thematic and generic diversity that will come
to define Boccaccio’s Decameron, founded on the bringing together of eastern
frames and western compilations. The final chapter argues that the lexical and
syntactical connections between individual fabliaux and Decameron novelle
strongly suggest that Boccaccio had access to fabliaux manuscripts, including the
work of Jean de Condé, via the female networks connecting the French court
with Naples.

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Joanna Mühlemann, Artus in Gold. Der Erec-Zyklus auf dem Krakauer Kronenkreuz,
Studien zur internationalen Architektur- und Kunstgeschichte 104 (Petersberg: Imhof, 2013). 367 pp. including 30 plates and more than 70 figures. ISBN 
978-3-86568-838-5. €79.95.

One of the key pieces in the treasury of Kraków Cathedral is a large golden
cross decorated with motifs from Arthurian romance, namely the tale of Erec
and Enite: two courtly crowns from the second quarter of the thirteenth century
were transformed into a cross some time before 1471, the beginning of Jan
Rzeszowski’s episcopacy. He probably played an important role in the donation
of the object as a reliquary cross to the cathedral (more precisely, the Chapel of
the Holy Cross), later attributed exclusively to Casimir IV Jagiellon. Since then
the cross has belonged to the ornamenta of Kraków Cathedral. Today, it still
functions as a venerated liturgical object, and it has gained national importance.

Joanna Mühlemann’s fundamental study of the cross does justice to the
complex history of the extraordinary object, also discussing the transformation
from secular to sacred objects more generally. Starting from a comprehensive
research report (introduction, pp. 10–19; more detailed: ch. 3), she reconstructs
the changing shape and functions of the object by a thorough study of the
structure of the cross as well as inventories of the cathedral treasury (chs 1 and 2).
The second part of the book (chs 4–6) focuses on the thirteenth-century crowns
by reconstructing their original structure, comparing them to other goldworks,
and analysing the Erec cycle depicted on one of them. The book closes with an
appendix, including a helpful index.

Mühlemann’s well-researched interdisciplinary study has huge merits: from
the careful analysis of the goldwork to the research report, which makes research
in Polish language accessible in German and documents nationalistic modes of argument in earlier studies. She always provides ample evidence, is cautious in her reasoning, and extensively discusses alternative positions. At the same time these qualities make it sometimes difficult to follow the line of the argument, despite summarizing sections at the end of each chapter.

Given the breadth of Mühlemann’s study, the focus on King Arthur in the title might be misleading. All the same, the Erec chapters are most relevant for literary scholars. As in earlier essays on the cross, Mühlemann confirms the hypothesis first put forward by Rainer Sachs in 1983 (cf. pp. 185–91) that the crown segments now forming the horizontal arm of the cross display a narrative Erec cycle referring to the initial sparrowhawk adventure. That this pictorial cycle is an early document of the reception of Erec by Hartmann von Aue cannot be proven, as Mühlemann rightly argues, taking into account that the only nearly complete Erec version in the sixteenth-century Ambraser Heldenbuch might not represent Hartmann’s text and that an alleged second German Erec romance (Central German Erec) only survives in small fragments (pp. 262–5). Still, she opts for the Ambraser Erec, not Chrétien’s Erec et Enide, as the closest parallel (pp. 300f.). Her argument is convincing though some scenes are not unambiguous: Does the fact that the dwarf tears his beard really point to his punishment?

Drawing on studies by Michael Curschmann and Norbert H. Ott, Mühlemann interprets the pictorial narrative as a version in its own right (pp. 304f.). She stresses (pp. 307; 330) that the crown will have provoked verbal discussion in the exclusive circle of persons allowed to view the object, though she also states that the tiny figures in the scroll ornaments are not the dominating element of the precious object (p. 330). One might also consider that the pictorial cycle with its complex direction of reading, already in its original arrangement on the crown (see the schema on p. 273), might not have been studied at all; instead, its function might have consisted simply in the fact that it existed. This could also be a means of dignifying the Erec narrative; for narrative cycles that are not so much created to be viewed, but simply so that ‘they are there’, are typically found in sacred contexts. Mühlemann’s study provides the basis for further discussions of such questions in a material way as well. The book is equipped with outstanding photographs taken under her direction (p. 9). For the first time these details make it possible for those who have not seen the object to review the arguments. Since the object is not easily accessible, this is in itself a great achievement not to be disregarded.

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