

MICHEL SCOT, *LIBER PARTICULARIS, LIBER PHYSONOMIE*, ED. OLEG VOSKOBOYNIKOV, SISMEL–EDIZIONI DEL GALLUZZO, FIRENZE 2019 (MICROLOGUS LIBRARY, 93), PP. VIII + 416, ISBN 9788884509062.

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« Scientia cuius est preciosa et multum tenenda in secreto, pro eo quod est magne efficacie, continens secreta artis nature que sufficiunt omni astrologo » (p. 271, *prohemium libri physonomie*). With the volume under review, which presents the critical edition of Michael Scot's *Liber particularis* and *Liber physonomie*, respectively the second and the third book of his *Liber introductorius*, the editor Oleg Voskoboynikov went to great lengths to let the modern reader into the secrets of nature. He started working on this edition almost twenty years ago, and contributes with this volume to a new understanding of Michael Scot's original works. The lengthy edition of 322 pages is preceded by an instructive introduction, which firstly discusses the author Michael Scot, secondly the *Liber introductorius*, and finally the edition and the manuscript tradition.

In the first part of the introduction, the editor reconstructs the career of Michael Scot, both as a translator of Arabic texts and as an author of original treatises. On the life and figure of Scot, several conflicting rumours and doubtful and false facts were already circulating during his lifetime. Due to the lack of objective knowledge on this complex person, the editor recreates and reconstructs Scot's life by chronologically discussing his works. Through the paragraphs discussing Scot's methods of translating Arabic texts into Latin, his intended public, his style and characteristic features, the editor creates a vivid image of Michael Scot's goals, interests, and preferences (we learn, among other things, that Scot is not interested in arithmetic and geometry, that he omits references to the Koran in his translations, and that he shortens calculations because he doesn't understand them or does not consider them interesting, see p. 12). Not only his literary output is discussed; by connecting him with the court of Frederick II, with the Curia, and with other contemporary scholars, the editor positions Michael Scot within the intellectual and religious milieu of the late twelfth and the first half of the thirteenth century. The clearly written introduction is accompanied by ample references to further literature, which makes it an accessible introduction to Michael Scot's life and works.

The second part of the introduction focuses on the doctrinal and literary aspect of the *Liber introductorius*, a work which – according to the colophon – is intended as an introduction to astronomy. It consists of three books: the *Liber quattuor distinctionum*, the *Liber particularis*, and the *Liber physonomie*, but due to its large volume the three books never circulated together in one manuscript. The date of the work is unclear, but the intertextual references in the three books indicate that it was meant as one homogeneous project. The editor of the present volume, in which book two and three are edited, is not interested in a textual study concerning content, but places the collection of the three books against its background, the environment in which it originated, its intentions and its role towards the emperor Frederick II, to whom the work is dedicated. Even though the editor states on the first page of the introduction that it is not his intention to offer a comprehensive study on Scot or an analysis of the doctrinal content of the work (p. 5), the volume could have profited from a summary of the central ideas of books two and three, as well as some clues on its reception history, its originality, and its importance in the tradition of astronomical and physiognomical works. This second part of the introduction gives insight into the author of the work, but not so much on the work itself.

The manuscripts are discussed in the third chapter of the introduction, which shows that the tradition of the *Liber introductorius* is very complex. Two versions, with many interpolations, of the text circulate, and it is uncertain whether a finished version of the text even existed. The many interpolations in the first book, together with its size, seem to be the implicit reasons why only book two and three are edited in this volume. In addition, the editor has opted to edit an approximation to the original text, rather than to make a codicological stemma of all the manuscripts and search for the archetype (p. 53). However, what exactly this approximation entails and how it was established, is not specified.

The presentation of the manuscripts in a continuous text makes it a bit unclear to grasp which manuscripts contain which books and which particular version of that book. A schematic representation could have been useful. Three different categories of manuscripts are mentioned: (a) two manuscripts that contain the short version of book 1 and the short version of book 2; (b) four manuscripts that contain the long version of book 2 and book 3, that are of Italian origin and present a homogeneous text; and (c) three manuscripts that contain book 2 and 3, but are of a later date. Here, a small inaccuracy crept into the text: there are only three manuscripts mentioned, while the editor wrote four (p. 54: « il y a enfin quatre autres manuscrits plus tardifs »). Moreover, it is unclear whether they transmit the long or the short version of book 2. The manuscripts containing book 1 are not mentioned, since they have no value for the present edition.

The editor declares that he edits « la version qui circula en Italie du Nord après 1300 » (p. 56), as a result of which he follows the four manuscripts with the Italian

origin (our category 'b'). However, it is unclear why the three later manuscripts (our category 'c') are not taken into account. They may contain a qualitatively better text and could be a copy of an Italian manuscript (all the more because of the absence of manuscripts made in France and elsewhere, cf. p. 53), and they cannot be excluded based on their date alone. However, no additional information on these three manuscripts is given.

Concerning the third book, the *Liber physonomie*, it is stated that « le troisième livre se retrouve tout seul pour la première fois seulement dans l'incunable vénitien de 1477, dans un état assez corrompu » (p. 39). However, it is possible that this statement be not entirely correct. Johannes Thomann, who studied Michele Savonarola's physiognomic treatise *Speculum physionomie* (1442), listed in his book physiognomic treatises written before the year 1500.¹ Besides the ones mentioned by Voskoboynikov, Thomann mentions three more manuscripts containing Michael Scot's *Liber physonomie*, that are not discussed in the present volume and that are possibly as old as, or even older than, the incunable. The first manuscript is Città del Vaticano, BAV, Reg. Lat. 1151, fols. 1r–22v, which dates from the fifteenth century.² The second manuscript is Paris, BnF, lat. 3660A, fols. 154r–189v. Although the manuscript is not yet digitized, the website of the Bibliothèque nationale de France mentions the incipit and explicit of the (incomplete) work: « Imperator, inter caetera circa quae te oportet [...] » – « [...] et per consequens gravior efficitur. Et in hoc est finis libri secretorum mulierum ». According to the same website, the manuscript dates from the fifteenth and sixteenth century, and it actually consists of twelve manuscripts or fragments of manuscripts of Italian origin bound together.³ The third additional manuscript mentioned by Thomann is from the seventeenth century (Padova, Bibl. Antoniana, 616 Scaff. XXIII, fols. 51v–116r).⁴ These manuscripts were probably unknown to the editor.

Despite these few critical remarks, this first critical edition of Michael Scot's *Liber particularis* and *Liber physonomie*, preceded by a rich introduction, is a very important contribution to the field of medieval natural philosophy. As for the *Liber physonomie*, it is considered as the first original contribution to the discipline of physiognomy in the Middle Ages. It is not a compilation of older sources, but an original text with a wide variety of sources, taken from anatomy, zoology, astrology, ethics, etc. With his encyclopaedic project on the philosophy of nature,

¹ JOHANNES THOMANN, *Studien zum 'Speculum physionomie' des Michele Savonarola*, Copy Quick, Zürich 1997.

² To be consulted online at: <https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Reg.lat.1151>. Last accessed on August 20th, 2020.

³ <<https://archivesetmanuscripts.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc616104>>. Last accessed on August 20th, 2020.

⁴ LUIGI MARIA MINICOTTI, *Catalogo dei codici manoscritti esistenti nella Biblioteca di Sant'Antonio di Padova*, Tipi della Minerva, Padova 1842, p. 153.

Michael Scot was situating physiognomy as a natural philosophical science.⁵ To be finally able to consult and study this text in a modern critical edition is a major achievement, which will stimulate and facilitate research on Michael Scot, medieval astronomy, and physiognomy.

⁵ DANIELLE JACQUART, « La Physiognomonie à l'époque de Frédéric II: Le traité de Michael Scot », *Micrologus*, 2 (1994) (= *Le scienze alla corte di Federico II / Sciences at the Court of Frederick II*), p. 19–37; JOLE AGRIMI, 'Ingeniosa scientia nature'. *Studi sulla fisiognomica medievale*, SISMELE-Edizioni del Galluzzo Firenze 2002 (*Millennio Medievale*, 36), p. 23–29, 101–106. JOSEPH ZIEGLER, « The Beginning of Medieval Physiognomy. The Case of Michael Scotus », in GUNDULA GREBNER, JOHANNES FRIED (eds.), *Kulturtransfer und Hofgesellschaft im Mittelalter: Wissenskultur am sizilianischen und kastilianischen Hof im 13. Jahrhundert*, de Gruyter, Berlin 2008, p. 299–319.