

Modes of Authorship in the Middle Ages

The articles that make up this volume build on the contributions originally presented at a conference organised by the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Bergen in November 2008. Their aim is to explore different modes of authorship in the Middle Ages, but also to probe the notions of authorship, authority, agency, and creativity in general. In recent years, the thriving culture of the Internet has brought into play new creative opportunities and constraints that elicit new theoretical accounts of the shared, or, more precisely, “distributed authorship” of online projects. These trends might prompt a rethinking of earlier patterns of networked creativity, such as those that underlie oral and orally derived literature, historiography, and communal art. The contributors to this volume hope to show that the products of medieval culture, with their own dynamics of networked authorship and narratives that often precede their tellers, provide a uniquely rich resource for anyone attempting to conceptualise authorship today. The cumulative effect of the articles included in the volume is geared towards reopening the debate concerning who should be credited with creativity – the talented individual, tradition/society, or the creative process itself – a question relevant to the study of agency, creativity, and authority in all texts, but particularly amenable to the study of medieval literature, art, historiography, and culture in general.

The book is organised into five parts, each in its own way engaging with the main topic of interrelation and interdependence between individual and communal authorship. The contributors to the volume focus variously on the ways this relation plays out in literature and art in general, across specific medieval cultures, distinct genres, and a variety of authorial roles, especially where these are indexed in practice or directly reflected upon by individual medieval writers and image-makers. The contributors and editors hope that this book will provide an occasion for a rethinking of the relationship that T.S. Eliot famously identified as being between tradition and the individual talent, not least because the very notions of the individual, talent, and tradition are themselves not static cultural categories, but concepts which continue to evolve.

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Modes of Authorship in the Middle Ages

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with

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Given that the book explores both the communal underpinnings of individual creative acts and individuality of communal art and narratives, it is only appropriate that its own collective authorship is acknowledged here. As the principal editor of the volume, I would like to express my gratitude to everyone responsible for the book’s own individuality and its achievement. In particular, I am grateful to all the authors for their inspiring contributions and their patience during the preparation of the volume. My co-editors Ingvil Brügger Budal, Aidan Conti, Leidulf Melve, and Else Mundal have extended unstinting support at various stages of the project, and I am indebted as well to them for their expertise. An immense vote of thanks is owed Ingvil for her many labours in the technical preparation of the manuscript. Zachary Gagnon and Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough have done their utmost to ensure our English was up to standard as they proofread the manuscript. On behalf of all the contributors and editors I would also like to thank Fred Unwalla, managing editor at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, as well as Nate Dorward, Megan Jones, and other members of the editorial team at PIMS.

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