



Irene O'Daly. *John of Salisbury and the Medieval Roman Renaissance.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018. x + 244 pp. \$115.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-5261-0949-1.

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John of Salisbury, one of the best-known scholars of the so-called Renaissance of the Twelfth Century, is presently undergoing a renaissance all his own. Work on John has increased substantially since the 1980s. A slew of new research has appeared in monographs, essays, and new editions and translations of John's extensive and diverse corpus, which includes three books (including the massive *Policraticus*), two *Lives*, two works in verse, and 325 letters. The present book under review is Irene O'Daly's contribution to this dynamic conversation. It seeks to examine John's writings in a new context: leaving behind the old lenses of medieval humanism, scholasticism, or Aristotelianism, she instead employs the concept of "Roman Renaissance," through which the reception of Roman philosophy, "particularly the works of Cicero and Seneca, shaped philosophical theorizing in the Middle Ages" (p. 4). John's writings are cast as epitomizing the educational trends of the twelfth century, shaped as they were by these Roman texts. In particular, O'Daly argues for the influence of Stoicism upon him, a topic she asserts has not been adequately addressed in the broad array of John of Salisbury scholarship.

O'Daly approaches her subject in eight parts: an introduction, six chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction outlines the major elements of

John of Salisbury's life, education, and career; the principal historiographical approaches taken by modern scholars thus far; and her guiding methodology, which is the "Cambridge school" model that investigates political thought in the context that produced it. Chapter 1, "The Roman Inheritance," addresses John of Salisbury's attitudes towards antiquity, seeking to explore why, on the one hand, he was so interested in its texts, but on the other, why he seemingly cared little about its material culture. It contains a survey of John's ancient sources, where and when he may have encountered them, and in what form. The topic has been explored before by Janet Martin and Anne Duggan, among others, but this is a nice summary that includes two concentrated subsections on Seneca and Cicero. For the latter, I was surprised to see no reference to the work of James J. Murphy on Cicero's *De inventione* and *Rhetorica ad herrenium* (which was erroneously attributed to Cicero) and the role of John's teacher, Thierry of Chartres, in propagating them (although Thierry is briefly mentioned elsewhere in the book).[1] This chapter can be read profitably alongside Laure Hermand-Schebat's recent excursus on the subject, which likewise emphasizes Cicero but only briefly discusses Seneca.[2]

The next three chapters work together to present a coherent picture of John of Salisbury's

political philosophy. In a short second chapter, “Nature and Reason,” O’Daly explores John’s commentary on “the value of nature and reason (informed by grace)”: what is nature, and how is acting in accord with it not only valuable but, indeed, rational (pp. 67-68)? Chapter 3, “Defining Duties: the Cooperative Model of the Polity,” links his view of nature with the body politic: there are duties “derived from natural conventions” and therefore applicable to all (p. 92). In both chapters, the influence of the Stoics on John’s thought is thoroughly demonstrated. Finally, chapter 4, “Political Relationships in Context: The Body Politic,” centers on John’s famous anthropomorphic metaphor in which various elements of governing and military institutions are represented as parts of a human frame. This chapter focuses on three main elements: John’s sources for the metaphor, the role of similar metaphors in pagan and Christian contexts, and finally, John’s own use of it. For the latter, O’Daly sees it as a prescriptive tool, through which John can instruct princes on proper modes of behavior and rule, guided by his aforementioned beliefs about nature and duty.

The last two chapters follow the political strands further. Chapter 5, “Moderation and the Virtuous Life,” examines John of Salisbury’s views on virtue, moderation, and his preferred personal qualities in political figures; again, O’Daly argues strenuously for the influence of Stoicism on his writings, as opposed to Aristotelianism. Chapter 6, “The Princely Head,” examines the importance John places on fortitude and justice and how they benefit the body politic. It revisits his famous discourse on tyrannicide and finds his exemplars for virtuous rulers in, once again, the works of Cicero and Seneca. The book’s conclusion ties its thematic strands together well and, while agreeing with the well-known depiction of John as a cosmopolitan scholar with influences from ancient and Christian texts, ends with a coherent argument for the preeminence of the Stoics in his work.

There is another thread running throughout O’Daly’s book, however, that will be immediately noticeable to anyone who has seriously studied John of Salisbury over the years: a sustained critique of the world’s foremost scholar on the subject, Cary J. Nederman at Texas A&M University. Over the course of three decades, Nederman has pointed to various Aristotelian influences across John’s corpus. By privileging the Stoic over the Aristotelian, O’Daly’s research naturally falls into opposition with his. Such differences in perspective must be sorted out, but as this book demonstrates, such a critical scholarly task is often easier said than done. The most concerted critique appears in chapter 5, where O’Daly questions Nederman’s take on John’s Aristotelian influences. Per Aristotle, she writes, virtue is “acquired through application; it is a gradual process facilitated by the exercise of virtuous conduct”—in other words, a habit (Greek *hexis*, Latin *habitus*) gained through a person’s own activity (p. 153). Nederman sees John as having transmitted this notion of *habitus*, despite his not having been exposed to the text in which Aristotle had propagated it in the first place, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, via some sort of “underground tradition of learning” (Nederman’s words, quoted p. 153). O’Daly attacks this line of thought by pointing to the existence of *habitus* in other sources. Cicero’s *De inventione* contains Aristotle’s position but is married to the Stoic notion of conformity with reason; it may have been from Cicero, then, that John of Salisbury actually received the notion of *habitus*. She then goes on to question Nederman’s readings and translations of salient passages in *Policraticus*. Her conclusion, essentially, is that he reads more Aristotle into John’s writings than is warranted. The strength of this argument, however, is undermined once one realizes that Nederman himself made this same point about Cicero in two articles in 1983 and 1987, respectively, while also acknowledging Cicero’s debt to Stoic thought. Neither article is listed in O’Daly’s bibliography.[3] If I am reading this debate correctly, it appears that

Nederman admits John of Salisbury's other influences but feels the Aristotelian is primary, while O'Daly argues for the reverse. What, exactly, is at stake? As she puts it, "the under-appreciation of other, more accessible, streams of influence" (p. 7), which better frame the intellectual context in which John wrote. That seems logical enough, although these positions appear more complementary than antagonistic to me. As a military historian who is chiefly knowledgeable on John of Salisbury's martial influences and ideas, I have no dog in this hunt of political philosophy, but it does seem that O'Daly's neglect of salient pieces of Nederman's scholarship precludes a complete revision.

Critiques appear in other places but are likewise strained. O'Daly challenges Nederman's notion that John of Salisbury wrote in what she calls "a near-vacuum, in which classical models of political writing were almost absent" (p. 21). Responding to his claim that John did not have access to "major political writings of classical antiquity," she argues that Cicero's *De officiis* is actually just that (p. 20n6). But Nederman himself—in the same essay she cites—points to John's following of Cicero's definition of justice in *De officiis*.^[4] Another gripe over Nederman's study of John's assessment of King Stephen reads like a literature review, the type usually found in a dissertation (pp. 200-02). The Manchester editors ought to have relegated it to the endnotes; regardless, it is not informed at all by the last three decades of scholarship on the history of Stephen's reign. Yet another argument with Nederman over the proper dating for a fable of Marie de France, and whether or not John might have heard an early oral version of it at Henry II's court, seems like fruitless nitpicking over something that is essentially unknowable (p. 115n84) and, again, is conducted without recourse to salient historical scholarship.^[5] To use a martial metaphor, as is my wont, O'Daly's collective critiques amount to the firing of a broadside at Nederman's ship. Her cannonballs fly in the main text and the appa-

rus, and not just in one place but throughout the book, from the introduction into chapter 6. Does any of the shot penetrate the hull? I don't think so. I do find her arguments interesting and, more importantly, well-grounded in John of Salisbury's sources and writings, but her incomplete assessment of pertinent scholarship ensures only a glancing barrage.

That said, I would still recommend Irene O'Daly's book. The case made for John of Salisbury's Stoic influences is forceful throughout, and she makes a strong case that that topic has been understudied. If not a conclusive revision, it nonetheless complicates notions of John as essentially Aristotelian in outlook. It adds richly to the conversation on this important writer in general; going further, scholars concerned with the broader subjects of classical reception and the place of Cicero and Seneca in medieval intellectual history will appreciate its learned content. But the book must also serve as a cautionary tale for enterprising scholars wishing to demolish long-standing interpretations. For, as John himself warned, Aristotle's work "conducts a vigorous offensive, and, like Caesar, allows no alternative save that of surrender."^[6]

Notes

[1]. J. J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: a History of Rhetorical Theory from St. Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 117-23.

[2]. L. Hermand-Schebat, "John of Salisbury and Classical Antiquity," in *A Companion to John of Salisbury*, ed. C. Gallard and F. Lachaud (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 195-202.

[3]. C. J. Nederman and J. Brückmann, "Aristotelianism in John of Salisbury's Policraticus," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 21, no. 2 (1983): 213 and 219-20; C. J. Nederman, "Aristotelian Ethics and John of Salisbury's Letters," *Viator* 18 (1987): 163.

[4]. C. J. Nederman, “John of Salisbury’s Political Theory,” in *Companion to John of Salisbury*, 276.

[5]. For example, I. Short, “Literary Culture at the Court of Henry II,” in *Henry II: New Interpretations*, ed. C. Harper-Bill and N. Vincent (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), 354.

[6]. John of Salisbury, *The Metalogicon: A Twelfth-Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts of the Trivium*, trans. D. D. McGarry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), 4.2.

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