

Jonathan Adams
Jews in East Norse Literature:
A Study of Othering in Medieval Denmark and Sweden

2 Vols. (Boston and Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023), hard-cover.
Vol. I: A Cultural Investigation. iii + 555 pp.; 51 colored tables and illustrations.
Vol II: Texts and Bibliography. 636 pp.

MIRIAMNE ARA KRUMMEL
mkrummel1@udayton.edu
University of Dayton, Dayton, OH 45469

The subject of medieval Norse studies can invoke fantasies about the legendary Norse gods. Popularized by the Marvel comics that Stan Lee had a hand in creating, the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and Neil Gaiman's *Norse Mythology* (2017), stories of Thor and his hammer and Loki, Thor's adopted brother and the trickster god, have become the subjects of many American households. As one might suspect, there is a lot more to the medieval Norse world than what Marvel and Gaiman have delivered to us. Fortunately, we now have *Jews in East Norse Literature* from Jonathan Adams, an established scholar of medieval Danish and Swedish texts and manuscripts. I strongly recommend Adams's masterful two-volume set for those interested in medieval, early modern, modern, or contemporary periods. It is a text filled with priceless gems likely to fascinate scholars and students of Jewish Studies, Religious Studies, Holocaust Studies, Postcolonial Studies, as well as Norse Studies. In particular, Adams unpacks antisemitic "stereotypes . . . in the East Norse material" (I:20), and readers are likely to gain a deeper understanding of the antisemitism introduced by the forms of Christianity that filled the spaces vacated by the cherished Norse gods.

Adams's two-volume work is the fourth volume in the De Gruyter series, "Religious Minorities in the North: History, Politics, and Culture." He offers a complex text in readable prose with accessible translations. The first volume, "A Cultural Investigation," attempts to situate the reader in "the sequence of absence following presence" (I:12) or a state of "absent presence" (I:550) that Adams describes as "the impulse to write about Jews in an environment where there are not – and never have been – any Jews. Even though there were no Jews in Denmark and Sweden during the Middle Ages, they were apparently everywhere" in the Christian conscience (I:550). This Christian phenomenon of inventing Jewish presence is a topic that has been explored by Lisa Lampert-Wiessig, Steven Kruger, Sylvia Tomasch, and myself, but despite these analyses, Adams has found new ways of looking at

this issue of absent presence. Nevertheless, Adams's work provides us with a new way of looking at the issue. His study is the first scholarly investigation of a set of literary and visual texts, though his results will be relevant to medievalists studying other areas (such as England in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries). Situated behind all this work are two active agendas. First, "the main purpose of this book is to describe, present, and explain the image of 'the Jew' as it appears in East Norse texts . . . until 1515" (I:19). Second, he argues that "what comes before greatly influences what comes after" and thus "there are clear strands of similarity that run between the past and the present" (I:552). The second volume, "Texts and Bibliography," includes a "selection of edited source material in Old Danish and Old Swedish with English translations" (I:19-20). He translates fifty-four texts such as sermons, Marian lyrics, and literary texts into modern English. Volume II thus serves as a scholarly edition that reproduces the Old Norse texts in their original language and includes bibliographic information to aid future study.

The sources of volume II derive from "the beginning of the thirteenth to the beginning of the sixteenth century" (II:20). Readers will move back and forth often between the analysis in volume I and the primary source material in volume II, as Adams directs his readers to the specific source material in Volume II that illustrates the points he makes in both the body and the footnotes of volume I. For instance, Adams writes, "the connection between spiritual blindness and Jews is also expressed in the legend surrounding the Virgin Mary's funeral (see Text 40: "The Jew Who Attacked the Virgin Mary's Bier")" (I:164). Text 40 in volume II opens with information about sources, parallel texts, the original text, and editions. This information about Text 40 (edition A SKB A 34) is followed by a transcription of the 47-line poem, with Adams highlighting its "numerous alliterative couplets in the Old Swedish text that make it suitable for reading aloud" (II:978n1). Adams's modern English translation of Text 40 appears in prose after this transcription. Each of the fifty-four East Norse texts follows the same format.

Another valuable feature of *Jews in East Norse Literature* are the six tables and the forty-five colored illustrations that appear in volume I and provide the reader with a sense of having traveled virtually through art museums and churches in Sweden and Denmark. Having colored reproductions of the church wall paintings by the sixteenth-century Swedish artist Albertus Pictor (Albrikt Immenhusen, c. 1440-1509) is an added benefit of these illustrations. Along with these illustrations, the reader will also find two very helpful pages of expanded abbreviations (I:xxiii-xxiv) and another five pages of Adams's detailed explanation of his "Editorial Procedure and Conventions" (I:xxv-xxix). Jonathan Adams's *Jews in East Norse Literature: A Study of Othering in Medieval Denmark and Sweden* is a work that presents new discoveries about a past world that still impacts us today. It should be found in both academic and non-academic libraries.