

On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy

The Thirteenth-Century Paris Textbook Edition

by L.M. Harrington

DESCRIPTION:

The medieval fascination with the mysterious language of Dionysius the Areopagite is nowhere more evident than in the thirteenth-century textbook edition of his treatise on liturgical rites. Dionysius employed unfamiliar Greek to describe people, actions, and texts that would have been perfectly familiar to his readers. The Latin translation used in the thirteenth-century textbook strives to preserve this unfamiliarity, but commentaries are introduced between the lines and paragraphs, disrupting its ability to bewilder and surprise. These commentaries make the Dionysian text less mysterious, while also slightly altering its meaning. In the hands of the commentators, Dionysius becomes less interested in the aesthetic mystery of the liturgy, and more interested in credal orthodoxy. To read text and commentary together is to confront seven hundred years of competing voices speaking on the nature and purpose of the Christian church.

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