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**Book review: Peter Orton, Writing in a Speaking World: The Pragmatics of Literacy in Anglo-Saxon Inscriptions and Old English Poetry. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 445. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2014**

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with an emphasis on practice more than piety. For the most part the grammar teachers themselves engender respect, and sometimes fear. There is a veneer of moralizing in these exercises and a consistent concern for good manners and appropriate speech; they describe the appeal of family and the push and pull of sometimes rocky relations among the schoolboys themselves. All in all, this is a collection of documents worth absorbing for the insight it provides into late medieval English life and Latin learning in a largely prehumanist context.

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PETER ORTON, *Writing in a Speaking World: The Pragmatics of Literacy in Anglo-Saxon Inscriptions and Old English Poetry*. (Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 445.) Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2014. Pp. xiv, 266. \$68. ISBN: 978-0-86698-493-5. doi:10.1086/692270

In *Writing in a Speaking World* Peter Orton investigates the ways in which literacy is conceptualized in Anglo-Saxon inscriptions and in Old English poetry. His analysis focuses on how the first-person pronoun “I” is employed in terms of its deictic reference and what this implies about the state of Anglo-Saxon literacy. In addition, Orton is interested in the interrelationship of runes and roman script. A pragmatic difference between speech and writing serves as a starting point (chapter 2). The two modes differ fundamentally in how they function in communicative acts: spoken communication relies on the simultaneous presence of both speaker and listener; writing, on the other hand, extends communication over space and time. This has consequences for deixis: while we can immediately identify the referents of words like “I” and “here” in speech, they are no longer unambiguously identifiable in writing. With the change from an oral to a literate society, Anglo-Saxon writers had to bridge this “deictic gap.” Viewed in this light, first-person “speaking” inscriptions, like the scribal colophon *Wulfwi me wrat* (Wulfwi wrote me, 46–47) represent one way of bridging the gap using “the inscribed medium as surrogate ‘speaker’” (43). In fact, many Anglo-Saxon inscriptions—both in runes and in roman—turn out to be self-referential and often use first-person pronouns or other kinds of deixis to refer to the artifact on which the inscription is engraved or to its material (95). Orton reaches this conclusion via a classification of Anglo-Saxon inscriptions in chapter 3. He establishes sixteen categories (some with various subtypes) based on whether an inscription is deictic or not, as well as on a variety of other criteria, such as the pronouns or formulae used in inscriptions, their functions, the different types of deixis, and so forth. While the criteria are relevant, the sheer number of categories makes the classification as a whole rather inaccessible. The question of self-deixis is carried over into manuscript writing in chapter 4, in which a group of four Old English poetic prefaces is compared to inscriptions. The prefaces all use “I” to refer to the text to which they are attached and thus represent a parallel to “speaking” inscriptions. Yet Orton shows that two of the examples are work-deictic rather than text-deictic and hence can be seen as a “more modern conception of the text as an abstraction” (110). The chapter moves on to an investigation of Cynewulf’s runic signatures, which resemble inscriptions, as they mirror the act of inscribing the craftsman’s name into an artifact—except that in this case, the artifact is a poem and not a material object (cf. 233). The use of runes is attributed to “their original association with inscriptions” (131). Chapter 5 investigates the use of “I” in the *Riddles* from the Exeter Book. The homodiegetic type (i.e., those with a first-person speaking object rather than a first-person subject describing the object) “hide” the identity of the speaking “I” in the text and thus make playful use of the deictic gap created by writing. Those *Riddles* that employ runes to spell out the solution are comparable to Cynewulf’s signed texts (159–62). Concerning the intended audience, Orton concludes that the way in which runes are

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used implies a literate readership, since the runes need to be seen, not just heard—this applies to Cynewulf’s signatures as well as to the runic *Riddles* (159–62). In chapter 6, the “disembodied” speakers of the Old English elegies (or lyrics) and their internal monologues come into play. Orton attributes the development of this subjective use of the first-person “I” to the advent of literacy, since “oral speakers who have no one to talk to are logically prevented from expressing the actual fact of their isolation directly to anyone else. If an audience can be found, they are no longer isolated” (210). While I perceive the general logic of this statement, I think Orton is pushing this point too far. The final chapter, 7, concludes with observations on the intersecting themes of the book: runes and roman, literacy and orality, inscriptions and manuscripts, and so on.

The strength of Orton’s study lies in its clear focus and detailed account of the different uses of the first-person pronoun “I” in inscriptions and Old English poetry. Furthermore, the overarching theme of an increasingly sophisticated conception of literacy in Anglo-Saxon England is well developed throughout the book. Close readings of the text passages combined with a fine-grained analysis of deictic reference result in an insightful discussion of the rich material. On the downside, a more thorough engagement with recent (and sometimes not-so-recent) research on literacy/orality would have allowed for a more differentiated approach to the concept of literacy and to what it may encompass. Work that should have informed the book includes Thomas Bredehoft’s analysis of “First-Person Inscriptions and Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England,” *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 9 (1996): 103–10, especially as it would have been interesting to know what Orton makes of Bredehoft’s reception-oriented approach to speaking inscriptions and his diametrically opposed conclusion. Concerning the interrelationship of runic and roman-alphabet literacy, Derolez’s work should have been referenced more extensively (only the classic *Runica manuscripta* is cited in a footnote in chapter 7, p. 232; but compare also “Epigraphical versus Manuscript English Runes: One or Two Worlds?,” *Academia Analecta* 45 [1983]: 69–93; “Runic Literacy among the Anglo-Saxons,” in *Britain 400–600: Language and History*, ed. A. Bammesberger and A. Wollmann [Heidelberg, 1990], 397–436). In addition, Terje Spurkland’s paper on “Literacy and ‘Runacy’ in Medieval Scandinavia: Contact, Conflict and Coexistence,” in *Scandinavia and Europe 800–1350*, ed. J. Adams and K. Holman (Turnhout, 2004), 333–44, would have supported Orton’s analysis of runes as an essentially silent script (232–33). In his chapter on deixis, Orton regrets that “linguists have not taken much interest in [the effect of incipient literacy on the usage of deictic terms]” (50). This strikes me as not being quite fair to the linguistic community: after all, Konrad Ehlich (“Funktion und Struktur schriftlicher Kommunikation,” in *Schrift und Schriftlichkeit / Writing and Its Use*, ed. H. Günther and O. Ludwig, *Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft / Handbooks of Linguistics and Communication Science [HSK]* 10/1 [1994]: 18–41, esp. 22–23); Peter Koch and Wulf Oesterreicher (“Schriftlichkeit und Sprache,” in *HSK* 10/1 [1994]: 587–604); Ursula Schaefer (“Spoken and Written English—Orality and Literacy,” in *English Historical Linguistics: An International Handbook*, ed. A. Bergs and L. J. Brinton, *HSK* 34/2 [Berlin, 2012]: 1274–88); and others have addressed this issue in various publications. More recently, Brita Wårvik has investigated first-person pronouns (among other features) using corpus-linguistic methodology in a paper entitled “When You Read or Hear This Story Read’: Issues of Orality and Literacy in Old English Texts” (in *Discourse Perspectives on English: Medieval to Modern*, ed. R. Hiltunen and J. Kaffari [Amsterdam, 2003]: 13–55); some of her findings are clearly relevant to Orton’s topic. Looking beyond the Germanic languages, Doris Meyer’s book-length study discussing deixis in Greek epigrams (16–22) might have deserved some attention, too (*Inszeniertes Lesevergnügen: Das inschriftliche Epigramm und seine Rezeption bei Kallimachos* [Stuttgart, 2005]).

Despite these gaps in the bibliography, Orton’s book is a profitable read for scholars from various fields. His interdisciplinary approach, applying pragmatic insights to literary

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studies, contributes to our understanding of the earliest period of literacy in the English language.

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ARIETTA PAPACONSTANTINO, with NEIL MCLYNN and DANIEL L. SCHWARTZ, eds., *Conversion in Late Antiquity: Christianity, Islam, and Beyond; Papers from the Andrew W. Mellon Sawyer Seminar (University of Oxford, 2009–2010)*. Farnham, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015. Pp. xxxviii, 398; 2 black-and-white figures. \$139.95. ISBN: 978-1-4094-5738-1.  
doi:10.1086/692451

Religious conversion in late antiquity is a vast and knotty subject. In a matter of a few centuries, the populations of Europe, North Africa, and much of Western Asia began trading old creeds for new ones. The two greatest magnets of converts were, of course, Christianity and Islam—missionary monotheisms backed by imperial powers—though the church and the mosque were not the only beneficiaries of religious change at this time. Indeed, individual conversions to Judaism were not uncommon, and states are even known to have embraced Judaism as a way of setting themselves apart in the monotheist rat race (such as the Ḥimyarites of South Arabia and the Khazars of Central Asia).

Given the geographic and chronological reach of this process, it is no surprise that few historians have endeavored to write a synthetic or comparative study of conversion in late antiquity. What we have instead are a number of rich and authoritative collections of essays on the subject, of which the present volume is the latest example. *Conversion in Late Antiquity* represents the fruits of a seminar that took place at Oxford between 2009 and 2010. Framed by a superb methodological essay by Arietta Papaconstantinou—which deserves a wide readership beyond just specialists in this period (see also the article by Averil Cameron)—the book draws together an array of specialists to consider religious change in the late ancient world in comparative perspective. Indeed, the greatest strength of the book is that it presents the Christian and Islamic cases alongside examples from Judaism, Manichaeism, and even Buddhism. These, in turn, invite us to consider whether the standard scholarly models for conversion indeed apply across cultures and times.

In the case of Judaism (Moshe Lavee) and Manichaeism (Samuel N. C. Lieu), for instance, we see religions that defied the dominant model of religious change in late antiquity: with few exceptions, both managed to thrive in the absence of imperial patrons and in the face of occasional and intense persecution. The book draws an even sharper contrast with examples of conversion in East Asia (Max Deeg, also Vesna A. Wallace). Here, the reader must confront the thorny question of whether “conversion” is even the appropriate term for describing the spread and dissemination of Buddhism between the first and ninth centuries. Conversion, we are reminded frequently in these pages, is a scholarly concept hatched in Christian (and to a lesser extent Muslim) contexts. It sits somewhat uneasily in worlds like China that lacked comparable rites of religious initiation, which did not emphasize the interior change of the convert in similar ways, and in which theological distinctions between faiths operated differently than in the Abrahamic arena of the Mediterranean and Middle East.

Comparisons among late antique religions can also illuminate their similarities. One of the most provocative essays in the book argues that rulers in India, Rome, and China exercised an indirect influence on one another in spurring imperial conversions to Buddhism and Christianity (Antonella Palumbo). Another theme to emerge is how religious change tends to sharpen distinctions among competing faiths: that is, the fight for converts often led to a mutual process of self-definition, whereby opposing belief systems come to ever greater sense of themselves through rivalry with the religious other. Daniel Boyarin famously argued

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The Anglo-Saxon or Old English period goes from the invasion of Celtic England by the Angles, Saxons and Jutes in the first half of the fifth century up till the conquest in 1066 by William of Normandy. Many Anglo-Saxon poems, in the form they are extant, were not written down until perhaps two and one-half centuries after their compositions, since scribal effort had been spent on Latin, the new language of culture. Anglo-Saxon England is thought to have been rich in poetry, but very little of it survives. Most of the available corpus of Anglo-Saxon literature, little more than 30,000 lines in all, survives in just four manuscript books. From the Anglo-Saxon period dates what is known as Old English literature, composed in the vernacular Anglo-Saxon. Extant manuscripts Old English Poetry Old English Prose Historiography Renaissance Literature. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle otherwise proves significant to study of the era, preserving a chronology of early English history, while the poem *Cædmon's Hymn* from the 7th century survives as the oldest extant work of literature in English. Anglo-Saxon literature has gone through different periods of research—in the 19th and early 20th centuries the focus was on the Germanic roots of English, later the literary merits were emphasized, and today the focus is upon paleography and the physical manuscripts themselves more generally: scholars debate such issues as dating, place of origin, authorship. The transition from medieval to Renaissance. The Renaissance period: 1550–1660. Literature and the age. Social conditions. Anglo-American Modernism: Pound, Lewis, Lawrence, and Eliot. Celtic Modernism: Yeats, Joyce, Jones, and MacDiarmid. Behind the Elizabethan vogue for pastoral poetry lies the fact of the prosperity of the enclosing sheep farmer, who sought to increase pasture at the expense of the peasantry. Tudor platitudes about order and degree could neither combat nor survive the challenge posed to rank by these arrivistes. The position of the crown, politically dominant yet financially insecure, had always been potentially unstable, and, when Charles I lost the confidence of his greater subjects in the 1640s, his authority crumbled.