

Peter Kidd, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Medieval Manuscripts of the Queen's College, Oxford*. Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 2016. 302pp., plus 48 colour plates. £90. ISBN 978 0 901420 60 2

Peter Kidd's catalogue is the first in a new Special Series of Manuscript Catalogues produced under the auspices of the Oxford Bibliographical Society. It covers fifty-nine volumes (two housed in the College Archives) and three collections of fragments dating from the tenth to the sixteenth century, the majority of them English, a significant number French, with Italian, Netherlandish, German, and Scottish material also represented. Each one is thoughtfully illustrated by a black and white image embedded within the text and in a separate section of colour plates. Its meticulous scholarship and generous production values set the bar for further catalogues in the series very high indeed.

The Introduction is a highly informative historical survey of the development of the collection from the earliest record of a library there (1378) through significant medieval and later bequests. It describes the detailed but unpublished mid-seventeenth-century catalogue of The Queen's College Provost Gerald Langbaine (1609-58), the first to impose some order on the collection; and the published mid-nineteenth century catalogue of Henry Octavius Coxe (1811-81) 'the greatest cataloguer of Oxford's manuscripts' (p.33) whose number sequence for the collection still pertains. Kidd also discusses bindings (including 'Henry VIII' bindings on seven manuscripts) and the chaining of some of the books, noting that fewer than twenty of the manuscripts currently at Queen's have chain-staple marks. A description of the Form of Entry helpfully restates the convention for noting estimations of date in the form s. xiii<sup>in</sup>, while reserving the use of arabic numerals for manuscripts which are more precisely dated or datable (c. 1305), a distinction increasingly ignored but surely worth preserving.

All catalogues are situated on a spectrum from summary to descriptive, and this is very definitely a descriptive work where the information provided under each of the essential, long-established headings is detailed and at times fulsome. But whatever the level of detail, the overriding obligations in any catalogue must be accuracy and clarity, and this catalogue fulfils those obligations admirably. For accuracy, it is necessary only to cite the entry for MS 305, a densely illustrated southern French legendary of the third quarter of the fifteenth century, previously described by Coxe and then by Paul Meyer in the early twentieth century. Kidd uses the emergence of a related manuscript, formerly in private hands but now London, British Library, Add. MS 41179, to identify each of the one hundred and twenty-four saint's lives correctly, and therefore describe the related iconography in one hundred and fifteen painted scenes accurately, for the first time. Similarly, the work of identifying the texts of well over a hundred fragments in two guard books, and reconnecting them accordingly (MS 389 and MS 389B) is exemplary. As for clarity, the practice adopted of numbering each item under Textual Contents and the sequential numbering of the discrete elements under Provenance, are extremely welcome. Equally, the use of Roman numerals to distinguish self-contained codicological units or booklets goes some way to answering recent concerns that formalised manuscript descriptions labour under an alien conception of unified book production modelled on the printed book (Ralph Hanna, 'Manuscript Catalogues and Book History', *The Library*, 7<sup>th</sup> series, 18.1 (March 2017)).

However, there are moments when the balance between admirable detail and its necessary counterpart – concision – is lost. Is it really necessary to list the folio numbers after *every* element of an unproblematic collation? Similarly, while completeness of coverage is important, so is economy, and it is perhaps to be regretted that rather than having a consolidated Bibliography allied to a

system of abbreviated references (whether short-title or author-date) within entries, each entry is encumbered with full references, sometimes repeated, in very full form, again and again. It seems strange that a volume blessed with an impressive, and unusually comprehensive, range of carefully prepared indices (General, Authors and Texts, Iconography, Incipits, Manuscripts Cited, 'Secundo Folio' Readings), falls short at a measure that could have considerably improved the legibility of the entries themselves.

If accuracy and clarity are the fundamental obligations of a catalogue, ease of reference is certainly a very welcome virtue. It is not consistently present here, notably in the handling of previous scholarship. According to the Introduction, the Bibliography at the end of each entry (p. 40) 'provides a list of published sources that refer to the manuscript being described', but this standard is not reliably observed, and in many entries, important references, even to editions in which the manuscript is a vital textual witness, can only be found embedded within the descriptions (the entry for MS 319, a twelfth-century English compilation of the works of Cassiodorus, Isidore of Seville, and Hugh of St-Victor is a case in point). Furthermore, a seemingly minor editorial quirk - namely the use of inverted commas to frame widely-accepted, conventional elements of descriptive terminology including 'modern', 'vertical', 'puzzle' initials, 'crayon', 'above top line' and 'below top line', 'Paris' Bible, 'quartered' ground, and 'learned annotator' - jars. This practice seems to hint unnecessarily at an implied scepticism about the value of these terms or about the status of the information they frame, and it is to be hoped editors of future volumes in the series will eliminate it.

These minor matters apart, the depth and range of Kidd's scholarship serves this interesting and varied historical collection extremely well. Manuscripts are reconnected to their lost medieval context on the basis of script and punctuation (MS 386, an Augustine from a Cistercian house, possibly Meaux), and dates and early provenances are secured (MS 357, a pilgrimage guide written after the fall of Otranto in 1480). Peter Kidd and the Oxford Bibliographical Society are to be congratulated for commencing this new series of long-awaited and – to members at least – keenly-priced catalogues with this authoritative survey.

*Cambridge*

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