

Janika Bischof. *Testaments, Donations, and the Values of Books as Gifts: A Study of Records from Medieval England before 1450.* Münsteraner Monographien zur englischen Literatur 36. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2013, 354 pp., 8 tables, 31 figures, € 67.95.

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The aim of this study – originally a Dr. phil. thesis written and submitted at the University of Münster in Westphalia – is to show that descriptions of book gifts contain information on the values associated with books in the Middle Ages. The author intends to answer the question how such values can be inferred from the surviving records of book gifts; accordingly, she has to find out which aspects of a book were considered to be most valuable and therefore worthy of a specific mention. The methodical basis for this investigation is provided by the theory and study of semantic fields, and by the study of theoretical concepts of values and value indication.

The material basis for the author's work are not original manuscript sources, but printed editions and abstracts of wills and donation records of medieval England: for the Anglo-Saxon period Dorothy Whitelock's *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, and Michael Lapidge's collected edition and discussion of "Surviving Booklists" (not in the revised version of 1994); for the later medieval period, especially for the years from 1300 to 1450, supplying the main source for the present book, Susan Cavanaugh's University of Pennsylvania PhD dissertation of 1980, "A Study of Books Privately Owned in England 1300–1450", which unfortunately remains unpublished (plans for a printed edition, announced c. 1990 by a British publisher, appear to have been shelved). Cavanaugh's repertory, today still the only work of its kind, is extremely useful but has its limitations, of which Janika Bischof is well aware. As for donations, the volumes of the excellent Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues (1990–, with eighteen volumes to date) have not been consulted and are not even mentioned, with the exception of the edition of the catalogues of St Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury (with incomplete reference on p. 351), but even the items from this house are quoted with references to Cavanaugh.

After an Introduction (chapter 1), the author in the second chapter deals with the theoretical background to her work, with the concepts and the social history of gifts and giving, the concept of value, and value judgements, and with semantic fields. She defines such fields as "groups of words that have similar meaning

or belong to a similar concept” (24) and employs them as the basis for organising her data and so for providing a system of indications of values. Research in this field of semantics (*Wortfeldforschung*) had its origins in the 1930s in the University of Münster, and so Bischof appropriately notes that her methodical approach is indebted to the study of semantic fields in the tradition of Jost Trier (who taught at Münster since 1932).

Chapter 3 treats five book bequests in Anglo-Saxon England in some detail, followed by a survey and discussion of English testaments in the periods 1250–1349, 1350–1399, and 1400–1499. Here, the study of cases where a testament *and* an inventory of privately owned books survive for the same person is of special interest. The chapter concludes with a section on donations; here again, four Anglo-Saxon donation lists (including that of Bishop Leofric of Exeter) and the record of William of St Carilef’s donation to Durham Cathedral in the late eleventh century are dealt with in some detail.

Although it is headed “Appendix A”, the “Description of Books in Testaments” (217–322), followed by the shorter “Description of Books in Donation Records” (323–331), is the actual foundation of the author’s investigation of the values of manuscripts as seen by their donors, and as interpreted by her in chapter 4, “Indications of Value”. In Appendix A, which is exclusively based on Susan Cavanaugh’s study and quotations (and so is limited to the period 1300–1450), all items in testaments containing descriptive terms of any kind, in addition to the mere recording of authors and titles, are quoted, with date (year) of testament, testator’s name, his or her description of the individual book, and page reference to Cavanaugh. All items are classified according to their descriptions in nine semantic fields, especially ‘size’, ‘decoration and binding’, ‘material’, ‘contents’, ‘language’, and ‘age’, and within these classes the items are sorted into subclasses or “lexical fields” (really semantic fields, too; the distinctive terminology is the author’s; p. 73). In the subclasses, the entries are arranged under headings indicating text or author, or both. Some examples: under ‘size’ we find the subclasses ‘large’ and ‘small’, under ‘material’, we have ‘writing surface’, ‘binding materials’, and ‘colour descriptions’, each of these again subdivided, like ‘paper’, ‘parchment’, and ‘vellum’ for ‘writing surface’. The choice of the subclasses under the main class ‘contents’ appears especially problematic to me.

The recording and classifying of items in Appendix A have, on the whole, been carefully and competently planned and executed, and the Appendix provides rewarding and entertaining reading and information for all interested in books and handwriting in the English Middle Ages. It is e.g. instructive to see what type of book (contents, authors) was included with some kind of description in testaments. But some problematic aspects of Janika Bischof’s book cannot be ignored.

Towards the end of her “Conclusion” (215), the author claims that “it can be stated that testaments especially contain details that allow us to draw conclusions about the aspects of the book that were considered particularly valuable”. Nevertheless, it seems clear that her methods as well as her materials pose problems (some of them serious) and limitations of which she is no doubt acutely aware. Thus she observes with regard to certain descriptive elements, “it is equally possible, maybe even more likely, that these adjectives are intended simply to identify the bequeathed books out of a large collection that is not bequeathed, or bequeathed as a ‘lump sum’” (99), while she notes that “statements concerning the values of books in Anglo-Saxon England are impossible to make” (88). Also, I think, her results, and the statistic evidence in her numerous figures, should always be seen in relation to the total number of the more than 2500 book items in testaments, as listed in Cavanaugh’s thesis. Thus of 260 missals recorded by Cavanaugh, Bischof has nine ‘with music’ and three ‘without music’ (i.e., the occurrence or lack is expressly mentioned in the testaments). Of only six missals it is stated that they follow Sarum use (as most others in Cavanaugh without this qualification probably do), and five that of York; one is a monastic missal. Do such identifications represent value judgments? Four graduals are recorded as being ‘with music’; how many graduals Cavanaugh lists we are not told, but it can be assumed that most or all of them had musical notation.

There are other problems. A copy of *Vitas Patrum* is classed as ‘Liber’ (219), a work by Richard Rolle as ‘Quaternus’ (299); a copy of Gregory the Great’s *Moralia* is placed in the field ‘Contents’, subclass ‘Plenus’, but in the respective entry the adjective only refers to a *tabula* in the book (279). What can descriptive terms like *scriptus* (318) and *verus* (321; really the adverb *vero*) tell us about values? It is stated that none of the books described as being in English are bibles (177), but that is only true of books expressly described as *in Anglicis* etc.; yet even in the class of English books we find two gospel-books, one with the gospels (i.e. the mass pericopes) for Sundays, a gospel commentary and a psalter (281–282). Some authors and titles of books might have been helpfully identified; readers not specialising in manuscript studies might have appreciated explanations of terms like *baudekyn*, *ex accomodato*, *apparitatus*.

The author is no doubt widely read in her field, e.g. in the literature on medieval book prices, and her bibliography is impressive. The eleven manuscripts there listed (333, including one from the “Königliche” Bibliothek in Berlin, and most from printed sources) should have been referred to their occurrence in the book. There are recent critical standard editions of the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* (ed. South) and of William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (ed. Mynors et al.). A general index might have been considered useful. The footnote references throughout the book are uneconomical, especially those to Cavanaugh.

This is a wide-ranging study whose author, in spite of the difficulties and problems of her subject and methods, has succeeded in drawing our attention to an important aspect of medieval book culture, and in demonstrating that more work in the field of medieval manuscript studies remains to be done.

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