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3

BOOKS AND MATERIALITY

J. R. Mattison and Alexandra Gillespie

Introduction

In a prison cell in Genoa in 1298, remembering his family's travels across Eurasia, Marco Polo recalled the mountains of Badakhshan (in present-day Afghanistan) where 'lapis lazuli, the finest and best in the world', or 'lazure le plus fine du monde' as one manuscript reads, was mined along with silver, gold, rubies, copper, and lead (Polo 2016: 38). Lapis lazuli is found predominantly in Central Asia. When it is ground up and mixed with wax and oils, it forms a rich blue pigment, one prized by artists for millennia. The Buddhist artists who created wall paintings and sculptures during the first millennium CE, at sites such as the Ajanta Caves in Maharashtra, India and Longxing Temple in Qingzhou, China, made use of the blue of Badakhshan lapis lazuli. Traders carried lapis lazuli west, to the Mediterranean and Venice, where it was ground into pigments and sold throughout Europe.¹ Christian artists used this precious blue paint sparingly, for the colours of the Virgin Mary's robes or blue and gold initials in copies of holy texts (Sharma and Singh 2021; Schmidt *et al.* 2016; Song *et al.* 2021). Lapis lazuli reached as far as medieval Britain, where it was used to decorate the twelfth-century Bury and Dover Bibles, now MSS 2 and 3 in the Parker Library at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. In the Dover Bible, some of the blue pigment has been removed by a damp brush, probably wielded by an artist who wanted the colour but was unable to afford it (Figure 3.1).² Like the gold leaf also used in manuscripts, lapis lazuli blue was highly valued and prized, largely because its supply depended on the vagaries of the premodern global trade in commodities that gave it its medieval Latin name. It was known in Europe as *ultramarine*, the colour from beyond the seas (Plesters 1966: 62).

The Dover and Bury Bibles are examples of a localised practice of book production: they were designed to meet the immediate needs of those who worked and worshipped at Dover Priory, a dependency of Canterbury Cathedral, and at the great East Anglian monastic house of Bury St Edmunds. Yet – and not only because they contain lapis lazuli pigment – these books are also decidedly transnational objects, famous English examples of the large, lavishly decorated Vulgate Bibles prized in Latin Christendom in the twelfth century (de Hamel 2001: 73–82). The makers of these Bibles were themselves sometimes world travellers, moving from one locale to another to offer their specialised skills. Master Hugo, who illustrated the Bury Bible, 'was influenced by Byzantine painting and may have seen either illuminated manuscripts or wall-paintings, such as those of Asinou in Cyprus' (Mortimer 2008a). The artists who worked on the first volume of the

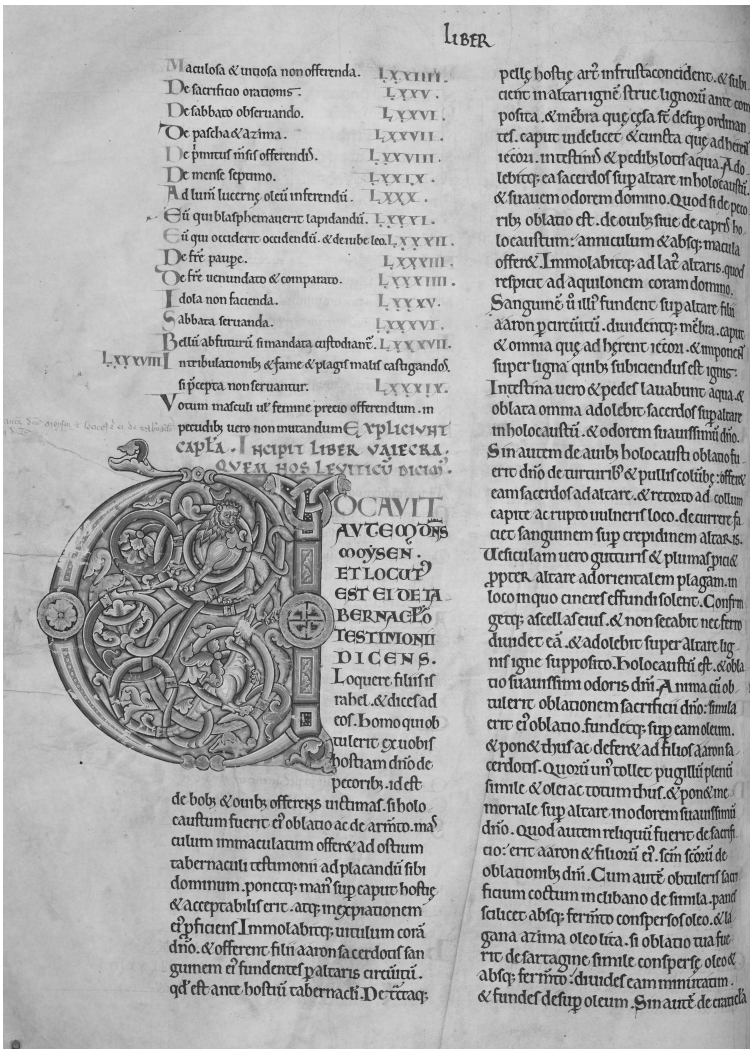


Figure 3.1 Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 3 (Dover Bible), fol. 41v

Dover Bible ‘may have travelled to Sicily and [were] influenced by the style of mosaics such as those of the Cappella Palatina, Palermo’ (Mortimer 2008b). At the very least, these English bookmakers had access to examples of artistic styles from far-off places, just as they had access to globally-traded commodities. According to the Bury *Gesta Sacristarum*, Master Hugo, the maker of the monastery’s great new book, could not find vellum locally, ‘in partibus nostris’ and so he got the parchment from elsewhere, ‘in Scotiae partibus parchamenas comparauit’ (cited in Mortimer 2008b). Making medieval English books – commissioning, procuring parts, copying, painting, and repurposing them – was simultaneously a local and a global business.

From the moment of their composition, the literary texts discussed in this volume had a vibrant, material existence. They were confections of animal skins, pulped rags, and inks made from iron salts and oak galls, bearing the impressions of pens cut from reeds and wing feathers, of type cast from metal alloys, of paints mixed from oils and minerals. The people, objects, goods, crafts, and technologies that produced medieval English books sometimes came from near at hand – from within England – or from elsewhere in the British Isles. Just across the Channel, France played

an especially important role in English bookmaking, as we show later in this chapter. But some bookmakers and bookish materials moved great distances over wider, global networks. While other contributors to this volume situate English literary texts within complex processes of transnational exchange, of *translatio imperii et studii*, we show that old books themselves record medieval English literature's embeddedness in a rich history of international human contact and exchange.³

Medieval English Books as Transnational Objects

The Bury *Gesta Sacristarum* notes the parchment that Master Hugo obtained from abroad precisely because such international procurement was unusual. Parchment was usually made locally, by skilled artisans working within English monastic foundations or by one of the commercial parchmenters to be found in urban England from the twelfth century. A few of these parchmenters are described as foreigners in records, such as the 'Jacobus Parchemyner', who was from Flanders but lived and worked in Fotheringhay, Northamptonshire in 1458.⁴ Men like Jacobus used parchment-making techniques that had spread globally, with varied and, to Master Hugo's chagrin, sometimes uneven results. 'Parchment' takes its name, famously, from the ancient Greek city of Pergamum, now Bergama, Turkey. There, according to Roman author Varro, parchment was invented in the second century BCE (Johnson 1970). In fact, the earliest accounts of writing on skin are much older, from Fourth Dynasty Egypt; the earliest books copied onto leather are also Egyptian. The parchment makers of ancient Greece and Rome soaked skins in chemical baths to depilate and soften them. They then dried them stretched out on frames, which produced a robust but flexible writing substrate. This basic technique was adapted by different communities as it spread across the interconnected world. The Jewish makers of the Dead Sea Scrolls used salts to prepare their parchment (Ryder 1964; Reed 1975; Rabin and Hahn 2013). In Ethiopia, the oldest surviving illustrated Christian text, the Garima Gospels, were copied onto parchment prepared no later than 570 CE (McKenzie and Watson 2016). The makers of this parchment may have used a water-based method still employed by Ethiopian manuscript producers in the present day. Lime was a key ingredient for the preparation of European parchment; the earliest recipe for this method survives in a manuscript from eighth-century Italy (Lucca, Biblioteca Capitolare MS 490, fol. 219^v). By that time, parchment making was an established craft in England too, having travelled across the Continent along the same routes as Christianity itself (Gottscher 1993). The Italian prior who became St Augustine of Canterbury carried a parchment copy of the scriptures when he travelled at the behest of Rome to convert the English. His book may be another that survives in the Parker Library, alongside the Dover and Bury Bibles, as Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 286. This westward and northward movement of new book technologies was typical in medieval Europe, but the transmission of new craft practices was not unidirectional. In the thirteenth century, Paris provided Western Christendom with many newly fashionable pocket-bibles, copied on extremely thin parchment made from uterine calfskin, and there were sites for the production of the same sort of small bibles in England in the same period. Only later did the new technology travel east and south to Spain and Italy (Fiddymment *et al.* 2015).

By the thirteenth century, paper had also arrived in England. An East Asian writing technology that had travelled the ancient silk roads to North Africa, paper came to Christian Europe via Muslim Iberia (Bloom 2001). The twelfth-century cartographer Mohammad al-Idrisi describes Valencia as the source of the best paper in his day. In the mid-thirteenth century, that region fell to Christian crusaders, and historians date the earliest export of paper and paper milling methods into other parts of Spain and then Italy to this period (Burns 1981). The earliest evidence of paper in England survives in letters to and from the court of Henry III, now in the National Archives at Kew, each document a testament to Europe's thriving 'diplomatic correspondence in an established network of high-profile figures'. When Henry corresponded with the count of Toulouse or the queen of Castile, their scribes wrote on Italian paper (da Rold 2020: Table 1.1). By the fifteenth

century, paper was widespread and common in English manuscript production. In 1496, John Tate, a London Mercer, briefly operated a paper mill in Hertford; but after that mill closed in 1507, until much later in the sixteenth century, all the paper in English books was imported, first from Italy and later from France (da Rold 2020: 22–57).

The story of the inks used to copy texts onto the surfaces of books is equally a transnational one. The production of iron gall ink required oak galls and ‘vitriol’, iron (II) sulphate. In the later Middle Ages, much vitriol production occurred in Turkey, where a Genoese syndicate controlled the trade. In 1453 this monopoly collapsed when the Ottomans took Constantinople, driving the Genoese back to Italy and placing ‘prohibitive export duties’ on many goods, including vitriol (Allen *et al.* 2001: 96). It is possible that these far-off, geopolitical forces impacted English copyists, perhaps forcing them to use carbon black (soot and gum) based inks for a time. For comparison, the final collapse of the Byzantine empire had a clearly demonstrable impact on English bookbinders. Alum, another chemical mined in Turkey and exported to Europe via Genoa, was the key ingredient for the ‘whittawing’ of sheepskin. After the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, it was in short supply: records note a ten-fold increase in its price in the 1450s (Fleet 1999: 80–94). Eventually, a well-connected Italian refugee from Constantinople, John de Castro, established a new alum works based in the mountains of Tolfa near Rome under a papal monopoly (Bruscoli 2007: 167–9). But the shock to the global supply chains left a permanent mark on English books. Until 1450, most board-bound English manuscripts were covered with soft, tawed, ‘reverse’ sheepskin. During the 1450s, binderies, unable to get or just afford tawed skins, used tanned leathers, usually from local tanneries rather than from sources further afield (Hadgraft 1998: 69–70, 77–8, 237–8). Indeed, the extremely local nature of such leathers distinguishes yellow leathers made in Oxford from mahogany ones from Cambridge (Hadgraft 1998: 239). English binders often decorated these tanned covers with hot metal stamps, initially impressing them ‘blind’, and from the 1520s onwards sometimes pressing gold leaf into the lines. Leather tooling techniques came to England, just as alum and vitriol had, from abroad. Some bookmakers who fled the Ottomans and set up shop in Italy in the 1450s carried some of these techniques to Europe, spreading their artistic influence, methods, and tools across the Continent (Foot 2008: 117; Szirmai 1999: 4, 84–7).

A medieval ‘English’ book, then, was always more than a witness to local processes of manufacture: it was also an object thickly layered with materials and features that had travelled along medieval routes for crafts and commodities that stretched from China to Spain, from Constantinople to Ireland. Many of those involved in the making of books in England also came from beyond its borders, and these foreign craftspeople participated in all aspects of book production. In a 1373 petition, the Writers of the Court Letter, the guild of legal scribes, singled out foreign scribes as a reason to organise their craft, decrying:

many mischiefs and defaults ... committed in the said craft by those who resort to the said City [London] from divers countries ... who have no knowledge of the customs, franchise and usages of the said City, [yet] who call themselves scribes.

(Christianson 1990: 26)

Like legal scribes, manuscript makers counted so-called ‘alienigene’ or ‘estraunges’ in their ranks. Among the London Stationers, John Gerveys and John Quyntyn arrived in England from Ireland before 1394 (Christianson 1990: 28). The limner Herman Scheere, whose work appears in several manuscripts produced in England, likely came from Germany (Christianson 1990: 157–8). The artist of the Sherbourne Missal, John Siferwas, was likely also German (Christianson 1990: 160–1). Outside of London, records of tax assessments, letters of denization and protection, licenses, grants, and other documents provide evidence for alien craftspeople working in England. For example, John Broun, a stationer in Oxford, John Whyte, a parchmenter in Salisbury, and Gerard Wake, a bookbinder in Cambridge, were from Ireland, while Thomas Amyot was a Wiltshire scrivener from

Normandy.⁵ Surnames, like that of Hamonus Skryvyn, a Spanish servant living in Winterton on Sea, Norfolk, perhaps suggest immigrants' employment specifically.⁶ These people might be known only through their names, rather than any manuscripts that they made. Whether from England's closest neighbours, like Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, or from further afield on the Continent, immigrant artisans working across England contributed to an international culture of bookmaking. Foreign scribes created manuscripts in all of England's languages: in the city of Oxford, William Salamon of León copied Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (London BL MS Harley 3490; see Pearsall 2000: 92–3) and Stefano Surigone of Milan composed and copied his work *De Institutionibus Boni Viri* (Cambridge, Trinity College MS B.14.47; see Rundle 2019: 82–3) (Figure 3.2).

At about the time English scribes and binders were managing the depletion of their vitriol and alum supplies, there occurred another, more famous break with the bookish past. Working from existing technologies including seal and agricultural presses, woodcuts for block printing, and matrices and dies for casting metal stamps and coins, Johannes Gutenberg cobbled together a printing press in Mainz in the late 1440s or early 1450s. It was Europe's first, although block and moveable type

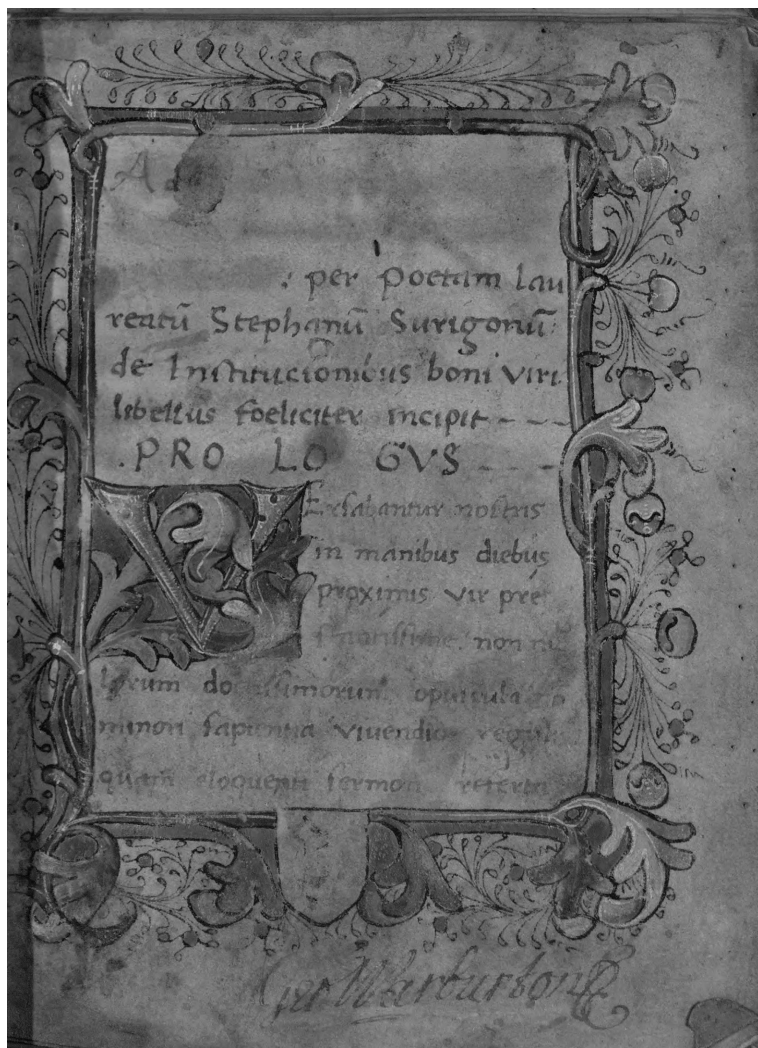


Figure 3.2 Cambridge, Trinity College MS B.14.47, fol. 1r

printing had been in use in China and Korea for centuries. It took another two decades for the new print technology to arrive in England, but surviving books and importation records testify to a brisk trade in printed books from Germany, the Low Countries, Italy, and France throughout the fifteenth century (Ford 2008). The binding and decoration of these books gave new work to existing English bookmakers. Printed books in Syon Abbey Library, for example, came from across the Continent, but a lay brother at Syon, Thomas Raille, was sometimes paid to bind them (Erler 1985). Meanwhile, printing itself was an industry driven by immigrants and travellers from abroad. The first printing press established in England was that of William Caxton, a London Mercer. Caxton spent most of his adult life in Europe rather than in England. In the 1460s he was governor of the English nation (of merchants) in Bruges in the Burgundian Netherlands. He moved with the English merchants of Bruges to Utrecht and back during that decade. He helped Edward IV mend relations with the Hanse and eventually decided to learn how to print books in Hanseatic Cologne. The first book printed by an English printer was probably the 1472 edition of *De Proprietatibus rerum* that Caxton co-published with the Cologne printer Johannes Veldner (Blake 2004a). Soon after, Caxton returned to Bruges, and there, in the Low Countries rather than in England, he produced the first books printed specifically for English readers: a *Recuyell of the Histoires of Troie* and *The Game of Chess*, printed in 1474. His next four books were in French, at least some of them published in partnership with Colard Mansion, a Flemish supplier of luxury books to European courts. In 1476, Caxton returned to England, and it was only then that England itself became a site for the production of English printed books. His first editions seem to mark the moment: Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and an *Ordinale* of the English, Sarum Use, both printed in 1476 (Blake 2004a). Many early printers who followed Caxton into the business in England were immigrants. Richard Pynson, who later became the king's printer, was from Normandy. Wynkyn de Worde, a German native who entered Caxton's employ on the Continent, came with him to England and took over his Westminster shop when he died (Blake 2004b). Like manuscripts, early printed books were shaped by international trends and by personal, local connections.

Books, like bookmakers, methods, and materials, moved around in this period. In 1345, Richard de Bury wrote in his *Philobiblon* about how many of his thousands of books came to England from the Continent: 'We secured the acquaintance of stationers and booksellers, not only within our own country, but of those spread over the realms of France, Germany, and Italy, money flying forth in abundance to anticipate their demands' (de Bury 1902: chapter 8, 62–3). The illuminated manuscripts that Edward IV obtained from the Burgundian Netherlands are evidence that those 'demands' continued well into the fifteenth century (Backhouse 1987). Other Englishmen bought books while travelling abroad themselves. In the fifteenth century, this included new humanist texts that were not widely available in England. During his time in Italy, John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester, bought many manuscripts containing Latin texts written in Italian humanist hands; 33 of his manuscripts survive (Rundle 2019: 220–7). Importing books from overseas satisfied demand for titles that might have less circulation in England. This demand also demonstrates knowledge of international textual traditions. Such readers might introduce new texts to England and catalyse the production of English-made books with foreign texts. 'English' books were not necessarily, or narrowly, books from England. When the English papal curialist Andrew Holes bought books in Italy copied by a German scribe, or when Richard Courtenay, Bishop of Norwich, discussed buying books from the Veronese Pietro de Sacco in Paris, they situated England within a trans-national network of book-making, owning, and reading (Rundle 2011: 286; Rouse and Rouse 2000: 287–98).

England was, sometimes, a source as well as a destination for border-crossing books. In the tenth century, Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury's letters make frequent reference to the little books, *libelli*, that he sent to his monastic brothers in France as well as England (Sharpe 2009: 15–20). The earls of Kildare bought their books in England and took them back to Ireland, as did Welsh and Scottish visitors (Byrne 2013: 130–1). The Hengwrt manuscript of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (Aberystwyth, NLW Peniarth 392D) and a Middle English miscellany from the West Midlands

(Aberystwyth, NLW MS Brogyntyn ii.1) reached Welsh hands by the sixteenth century.⁷ Copies of Middle English poems in Welsh (e.g. Aberystwyth, NLW MS Peniarth 50) and Scottish miscellanies (e.g. Edinburgh, NLS MS Advocates 1.1.16, ‘the Bannatyne Manuscript’) also attest to the circulation of English books beyond England. Further afield, continental Hussite communities could rely on a steady traffic in Wycliffite texts between England and Bohemia from the late fourteenth century forward (Hudson 1974). In roughly the same period, French and Burgundian noblemen were buying manuscripts in England. Charles d’Orléans, Lodewijk van Gruuthuse, and members of Charles the Bold’s household bought books there that had once belonged to the French king, Charles V, and carried them back to the Continent (Mattison 2022). In 1522, Hernan Colón bought 200 books during a trip to London (Rundle 2011: 276). These English books were likely all in Latin or French; evidence for the export of books in English is slim. And yet at least one copy of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* found a Continental audience: Jean d’Angoulême, prisoner in England for 32 years, brought Chaucer’s work back to France with him on his release (Ouy 2007: 48, 58; BnF MS angl. 39). It is likely that Jean read the *Tales*, for he added a list of the pilgrims’ names in Frenchified English to the front of his manuscript in his own hand, writing, for example, ‘chip man’ for the Shipman.⁸ A lost copy of Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* may have travelled as far as the North African city of Ceuta, where one João Barroso copied a Portuguese translation of the text in 1430 (Madrid, Real Biblioteca MS II-3088). Other Middle English texts were copied abroad: English merchants visiting Lisbon copied a manuscript of the Middle English *Dives and Pauper* at the monastery of St Catherine in 1465 (New Haven, CT, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library MS 228; Stadolnik 2021). Middle English manuscripts could also be commissioned abroad: a copy of the *St Albans Chronicle* with the coat of arms of the Thwaytes family was perhaps made in France or the Low Countries alongside other manuscripts in French commissioned by Thomas Thwaytes (London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 6; Backhouse 1987: 30, 34–5).

By the end of the fifteenth century, the increasing numbers of presses on the Continent had made England an important market for printed books. As noted above, England imported many Continental printed books, including books of hours and bespoke gifts from the Parisian Antoine Vérard to Henry VII (Ford 2008). The demand was robust enough that such items were shipped speculatively, and the English government saw enough value in this trade that it took measures to protect it. In 1484, Parliament removed any barriers to the book trade other than import duties. Although immigrants’ rights to work in England were curtailed by the act, Parliament included a proviso specifying that the restriction did not extend to:

any Artificer or merchaunt straungier of what Nacion or Contrey he be or shalbe of, for bryngyng into this Realme, or sellyng by retail or otherwise, of any maner bokes, wrytten or imprinted, or for the inhabitynge within the said Realme for the same intent, or to any writer, lymprer, bynder, or imprinter of suche bokes.

(Statues: 493)

Foreign books, merchants, and bookmakers were offered protection denied to a variety of other trades. The act reveals the extent to which the English book trade was reliant on and influenced by international networks.

The internationalism of the English book should not be seen as a simple movement of books or people from one locus to another, but rather as material evidence of a textual culture that stretched beyond borders. English books were often multilingual; they were also in conversation with a multilingual, mobile world of trade and exchange.⁹ From owners to readers, scribes to parchment-makers, the people involved in the making and using of English books often came from far afield. The materials that these people used likewise depended on networks of global trade. Global and European elements, gathered together in the space of the English book, produced textual and material objects that were at once local and transnational.

Books Between Medieval England and France

No place was as important a source of and destination for English books as France, and the movement of bookmakers, materials, methods, and styles between these regions in the Middle Ages situates medieval English texts within a trans-European context, showing how French and other international influences were domesticated as 'English'. France was, firstly, a source of manuscripts. Northern French cities produced books of hours for English patrons, while English travellers to the Continent might purchase books in Paris or elsewhere. The events of the Hundred Years War allowed English people with interests in books the opportunity to purchase, steal, or receive these goods while in France (Mattison 2022). Manuscripts from France that circulated in England ranged in age, genre, and provenance: some early prose Arthurian and *chanson de geste* manuscripts found fifteenth-century readers, while religious, historical, and classical material also moved from France to England (Mattison 2021; Rundle 2011: 276–91). John, Duke of Bedford, bought the French royal library in 1425, which he transported as far as Rouen, where he died in 1434 (Stratford 1993: 95–6). He bequeathed the 'grete librarie þat cam owte of France' to his English uncle, Cardinal Henry Beaufort (Stratford 1993: 356). Certain manuscripts, like the miscellany that John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, presented to Margaret of Anjou (London, BL MS Royal 15 E VI), were made in France but were quickly sent across the Channel (Taylor 2009; Reynolds 1994). The large market for French books in England meant that such seemingly foreign products might become as familiar as English-made books. Some English–French manuscripts returned to France. At least seven of Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester's manuscripts from France returned there before 1500 (Mattison 2022).¹⁰ The bookish networks of England and France were reciprocal.

From Hoccleve's *Letter of Cupid* to Stephen Scrope's *Epistre Othea*, the many Middle English translations and adaptations of French works further attest to the importance of French manuscripts to England. Middle English writers accessed French texts through encounters on the Continent or through books in England. At the beginning of his *Dance of Death*, John Lydgate describes wall paintings that he saw in Paris, probably at the Cemetery of the Innocents (Lydgate 2019: lines 19–20). By contrast, he also read French back in England: in his *Fall of Princes*, he implies that Duke Humfrey gave him a copy of Laurent de Premierfait's *Des cas des nobles hommes* to make his translation (Lydgate 1924: lines 428–33). While many of the French manuscripts used for Middle English writings have been lost or destroyed, texts like Lydgate's that pay homage to Continental influences embed English literature within a transnational network of reading and translation, and of books and people in motion. Even a late copy of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* like London, BL MS Sloane 4031 (c. 1470) conjures for its English audience the spectre of *Des cas*. In this sense, English translations domesticated the French originals from which they derived.

In addition to acting as a source for imported manuscripts, France influenced various aspects of English bookmaking. In 1370s documentary contexts, for example, English scribes began adopting forms of handwriting that drew on the cursive scripts used in Gascony. By the turn of the fifteenth century, this French script, called 'secretary' in England, appeared in manuscripts of Middle English verse, notably early copies of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (New York, Morgan Library MS M.817) and Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes* (London, BL MS Arundel 38; London, BL MS Harley 4866; Hanna 2005: 238). English verse took on a Continental flair. The traditional Insular cursive hand, Anglicana, persisted throughout the fifteenth century, yet the two scripts also combined in hybrid scripts (Parkes 2017: xix–xxi, 9–13).

Facilitating the influence of French scripts in England were French scribes themselves, like the often-studied fifteenth-century copyist Ricardus Franciscus, or Richard the Frenchman. While his national origins are unclear – he may have been English – Ricardus was trained in France where he learned to write in an elaborate cursive associated with Burgundy known as bastard secretary (Driver 2009; Parkes 2008: 116–9) (Figure 3.3). French and Burgundian

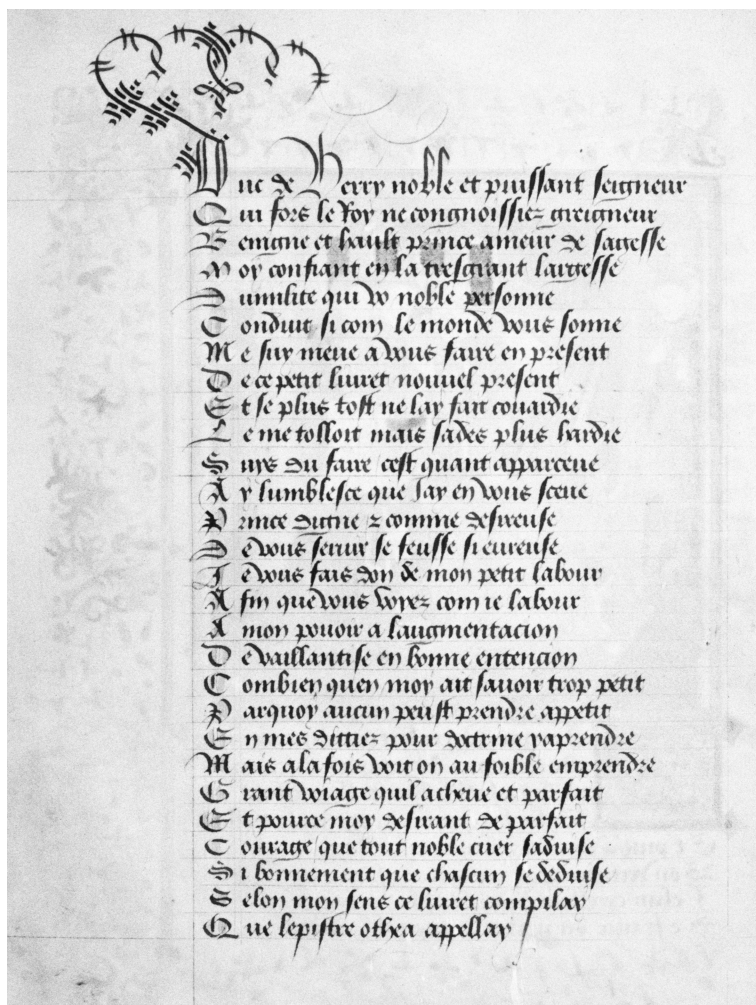


Figure 3.3 Oxford, Bodl. MS Laud Misc. 570, fol. 24^v

scribes often used the script in the second half of the fifteenth century to produce some of the highest-grade manuscripts. At least 19 manuscripts have been attributed to Ricardus, such as Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (New York, Morgan Library MS M.126), Christine de Pizan's *Epistre Othea* in French (Oxford, Bodl. MS Laud Misc. 570), a Latin petition (Kew, National Archives C 49/30/19), and a book of hours (Los Angeles, Getty Museum MS 5 (84.ML.723)). Creating manuscripts in French, English, and Latin for English patrons in styles based on Continental books, Ricardus carved out an international, cross-Channel identity for his work. However, Ricardus was not unique. At the close of a copy of Christine de Pizan's *Livre de Fais d'armes et de chevalerie*, a colophon records the book's completion in London on May 15, 1434 by Peyer de la Fita (London, BL MS Harley 4605, fol. 115^v). De la Fita's name and orthography suggest that he was from Gascony. Other anonymous scribes, whether from France or trained there, almost certainly worked in England. However, their anonymity means that it is often impossible to distinguish French from English, alien from citizen. The ambiguity of certain manuscripts, falling somewhere between Englishness and Frenchness, reveals the extent to which French forms of

writing might be adopted and domesticated – made English. The production of books by immigrant artisans working in England complicates any straightforward notion of the ‘English’ book: these objects align English manuscript production with wider, transnational forms of bookmaking that link England to Europe and regions beyond. The movement of scribes between England and France underscores an internationalism behind the creation of manuscripts.

Like scribes, French book artists and their styles influenced English manuscript production. The manuscript of the *Fais d’armes* copied by Peyer de la Fita also contains the work of a French-trained artist, whose work resembles that of other French-trained artists working in England and across the Channel (Scott 1996: cat. 73). In the manuscript, the French artist’s work appears alongside English-style miniatures and borders, blending styles to develop a manuscript from England that is also international. Such mixing was not limited to French language books: the luxury copy of Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 61), for instance, has long been associated with the so-called ‘International Style’, which drew on Continental elements, probably through contact with France (Scott 1996: cat. 58; Scott 2000: 55–6; Salter 1978). Immigrant artists appealed to English patrons who visited the Continent; French artists like the Fastolf Master, the Talbot Master, and the Bedford Master are named after their English patrons. These artists worked on books in French and Latin, and influenced illustrators working on books in English (Reynolds 1994: 305–9; Driver 2009: 422–7; Scott 1996: 62–4).¹¹ The manuscripts they produced, both on French and English soil, re-emphasise the international aspects of manuscript culture in England. Such artists were as much a part of English book culture as English-born artists; they demonstrate how dividing ‘French’ and ‘English’ artists can elide the important and influential work of artists moving back and forth across the Channel.

Even artists trained in England were influenced by French models and styles. In the thirteenth century, French and English artists and scribes worked together to produce books of hours and bibles (Sandler 2006: 186). Such exchanges continued in later centuries, especially as France and England were drawn together by the Hundred Years War. For example, one copy of a *Bible historiale* illustrated and decorated by English artists, Oxford, All Souls College MS 10, includes some scenes that have few parallels among other English manuscripts; it seems likely that its artists were drawing on a Continental source or sources (Scott 2007: 33–61). The earliest known image of an author presenting their work to a patron in an English-language manuscript occurs in a copy of John Trevisa’s *De regiminie principum* (Oxford, Bodl. MS Digby 233), where the artist re-interprets similar scenes in Continental books for an English audience (Coleman 2013: 403). Such scenes can also be found in earlier manuscripts in French and Latin made in England; French influence, then, built on existing English craft traditions, rather than simply being imported and adopted.

French books were never a monolithic influence; artistic production in Rouen and Paris, for instance, was notably different (Reynolds 1994: 303–4). And the similarities between English and French books still occurred within distinct Insular and Continental contexts, with important differences in book production, literary patronage, vernacular writing, and scribal workshops (Drimmer 2019: 11–12, 36). Nevertheless, the influence of French manuscript culture on English books was complex, deep, and wide-ranging. At times, the two might be more similar than different, with no clear source of influence. Medieval books’ bindings reveal the overlapping boundaries of French and English books. The structures of English and French bindings – their sewing, their board attachments, their spine treatments – are markedly similar. Whereas the straps or hook-clasps in Flemish and German books were more likely to fasten to the left cover, those in English and French books more often fastened to the right one (Szirmai 1999: 253; Foot 2008: 113). German and Flemish books often had plaited endbands and metal shoes on the edges of boards; English and French books tend to lack these features. However, the particular materials favoured by English and French binders do differ, perhaps

based on local availability of materials. For example, English wooden boards were more often made from oak, French from beech (Szirmai 1999: 216).

Like binding structures, binding decoration followed both local and international patterns. The large number of surviving bindings from Oxford and Cambridge, even on texts that originated elsewhere, indicates that book owners in those locations depended on available, local labour (Foot 2008: 116, 121; Pearson 2000, 1–2). Sometimes, particular owners or institutions embarked on campaigns to create matching bindings. But as they localised collections in this way, binders and those who commissioned them also looked abroad. At Bury St Edmunds in the fourteenth century, for example, new and old library books were re-bound in matching, bright white, ‘whittawed’ chemises (Gillespie 2011: 154, 160).

Later in this period, as binders began to rely on stamps to make designs on tanned leather covers, they fashioned English books in European styles in other ways. Individual stamps such as fleur-de-lys and double-headed eagles were common in France, the Netherlands, and England, but the repeated appearance of the same sets of stamps often identified a specific, local binder (Foot 2008: 119; Pearson 2000: 54; Oldham 1952, 34–5). Binders themselves were likely to move, bringing their tools and stamps with them to England and elsewhere (Oldham 1952: 11–12; Foot 2008: 116). Like stamps, panel rolls travelled widely. Some copied patterns from Parisian woodcut borders, translating both medium and place (Oldham 1952: 34). Binders, in England and in France, might personalise their styles not through the specific stamps, but through their arrangements and combinations.

One manuscript, a French, Middle English, and Latin miscellany (Boston, Boston Public Library MS f Med. 92) owned by one of Calais’s English aldermen, William Sonnyng, reflects French and English interactions in its texts, scribes, and binding (Boffey 2003). The trilingual collection, which includes Lydgate’s *Churl and the Bird* as well as Honoré de Bovet’s *Arbre des Batailles*, still has its late fifteenth-century, stamped leather binding. The scribe of the first half of the manuscript names himself: ‘Nomen scriptoris V.C. congnomine moris calesie natus’ (fol. 143^v), perhaps writing in his birth city; a second scribe could have been writing in England or on the Continent (Figure 3.4).

It is not clear how the two halves of the manuscript were united; nor is it possible to fix on the precise location in which each part was copied, giving this already trilingual book a hybrid French *and* English identity. What is true of the text is true of the book’s covers. The stamps the binder used, including a double-headed eagle and a dragon biting its tail, are not distinctive: versions appear on French and English bindings from across the fifteenth century. The overall design, a diamond-saltaire pattern bisected by horizontal and vertical lines, is less commonplace, but it, too, is not specific to any particular region¹² (Figure 3.5). The binder may have been a Frenchman or an Englishman, from either England or northern France. The binding, like the contents of the manuscript, is caught between Insular and Continental style, between Frenchness and Englishness. From the outside in, this book is transnational, an English manuscript not quite bound to Insular shores.

From scripts to stamps, whole books to bookmakers, medieval English manuscripts and early printed books were tied to French modes and styles. Not every book produced in England reflected this influence, but medieval English and French books were part of the same network, and as English book producers adopted and adapted French techniques and features, the medieval English book’s Frenchness was domesticated, and the distinction between these nations’ medieval textual cultures blurred.

Conclusion

We began this chapter by describing the world-traveller Marco Polo’s interest in the lapis lazuli mines that provided blue pigment for some English books in the Middle Ages. Like this mineral, Polo’s text made its way to England: multiple French and Latin versions of his travelogue circulated

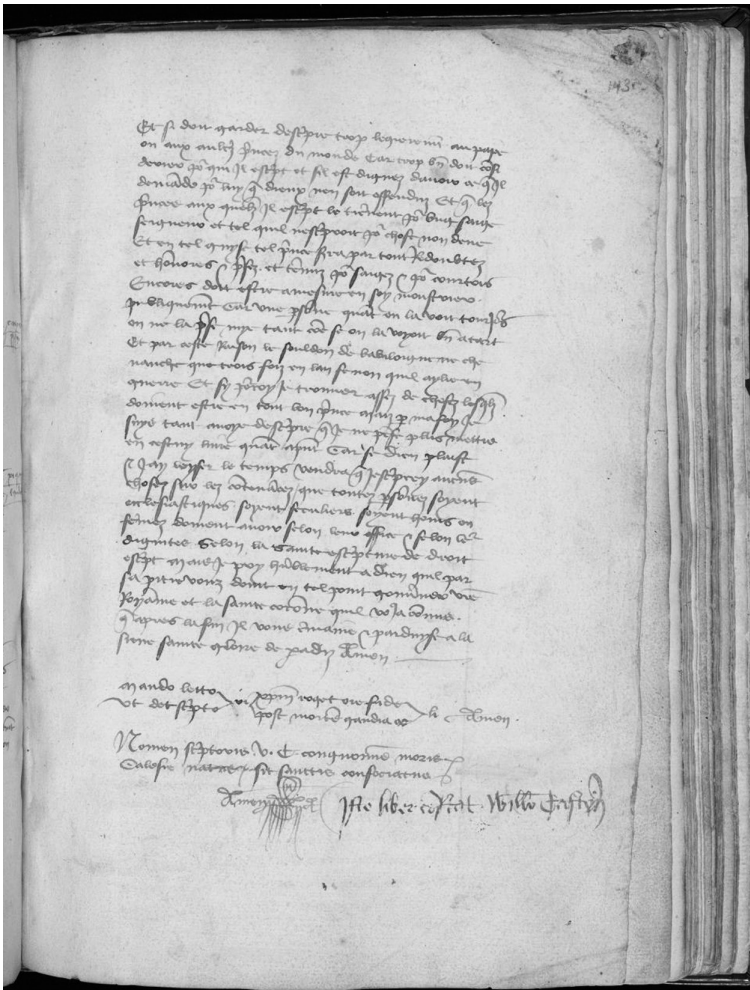


Figure 3.4 Boston, Boston Public Library, Rare Books & Manuscripts Department MS f Med. 92, fol. 143r

there, sometimes in manuscripts that were decorated with the very pigments and metals that Polo associated with his travels to the East.

One composite manuscript containing a French version of Polo's text, *Devisement du monde*, particularly illustrates the transnational and transhistorical aspects of medieval book production that we have described in this chapter. The book survives as Oxford, Bodl. MS Bodley 264; the *Devisement* appears on fols 218–74) (Figure 3.6). The first part of this book (fols 3–208) is a Flemish copy of the *Roman d'Alexandre*, written and illustrated in Tournai between 1338 and 1344. The Flemish book travelled to England not long after its creation, where it was adapted by both English and immigrant scribes and artists. Around 1410, an English scribe copied the Middle English *Alexander and Dindimus* into the manuscript (fols 209–15), supplying episodes in Alexander's life not recounted in the *Roman*. The same English scribe then added the *Devisement du monde* after the Alexander poems. An English artist added the initials to the *Devisement*, including an initial blue 'B' marking the beginning of Polo's description of Badakhshan (fol. 227^r). This blue pigment was probably made not from lapis lazuli, but instead from the 'azure of Allemayne',

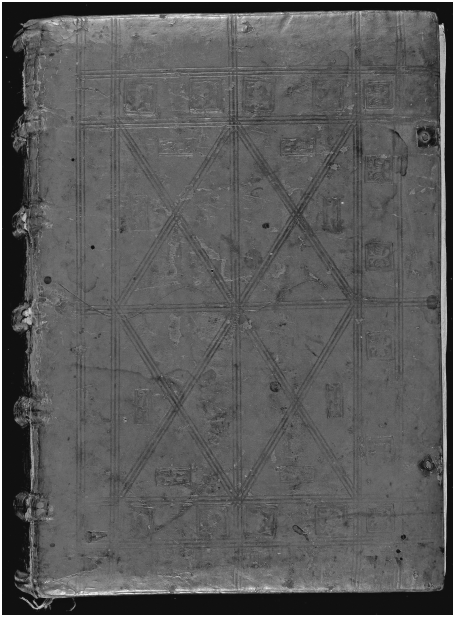


Figure 3.5 Boston, Boston Public Library Rare Books & Manuscripts Department MS f Med. 92, binding

azurite from Germany. This pigment's name explicitly recalls its preferred form from across the sea: lapis lazuli is rendered 'azure' in this French version of Polo's text.¹³ Other decoration in the two fifteenth-century sections of the book follows different international styles. While an English artist added illuminations to *Alexander and Dindimus*, a German artist, Johannes, partially illustrated the *Devisement*.¹⁴ The text of the *Devisement* was copied from another imported manuscript, this one from Paris: London BL MS Royal 19 D I. Most of the illustrations rely on other models, but the English artist of *Alexander and Dindimus* used this Parisian manuscript's frontispiece when creating a new frontispiece for the whole book. MS Bodley 264 is the product of decades' worth of textual adaptation for new owners and audiences. However, it is also the product of multiple transnational material processes. It was brought to England from Flanders, decorated by German and English artists, and augmented visually and textually using a Parisian book as an exemplar. It unites a Middle English text with an Italian one in a French translation. Its contents, the *Roman d'Alexandre*, *Alexander and Dindimus*, and Marco Polo's *Devisement*, depict travels even farther from English shores. The single English literary text in the book, the Middle English romance, is thus given a decidedly international context, in a book that connects England to its closest neighbours across the Channel, as well as to places much farther abroad.

All the books we describe in this chapter are, in some sense, English. They were shaped by local circumstances: from a bible copied for a Dover priory to a collection of romances and travel literature brought to England from Tournai, to be augmented by craftspeople in this new locale. Yet these same books reveal medieval English literature's transnational affiliations through their material as well as their textual forms. Whether compiled from French paper or English parchment, painted with minerals from Afghanistan or Germany, printed in Bruges or copied by a London Scrivener, bound in English oak boards or covered in skin tawed with Turkish alum, the medieval English book was always an emphatically transnational object, a witness to English history, but equally to stories of the nations and regions of the European continent and more distant parts of the premodern world.

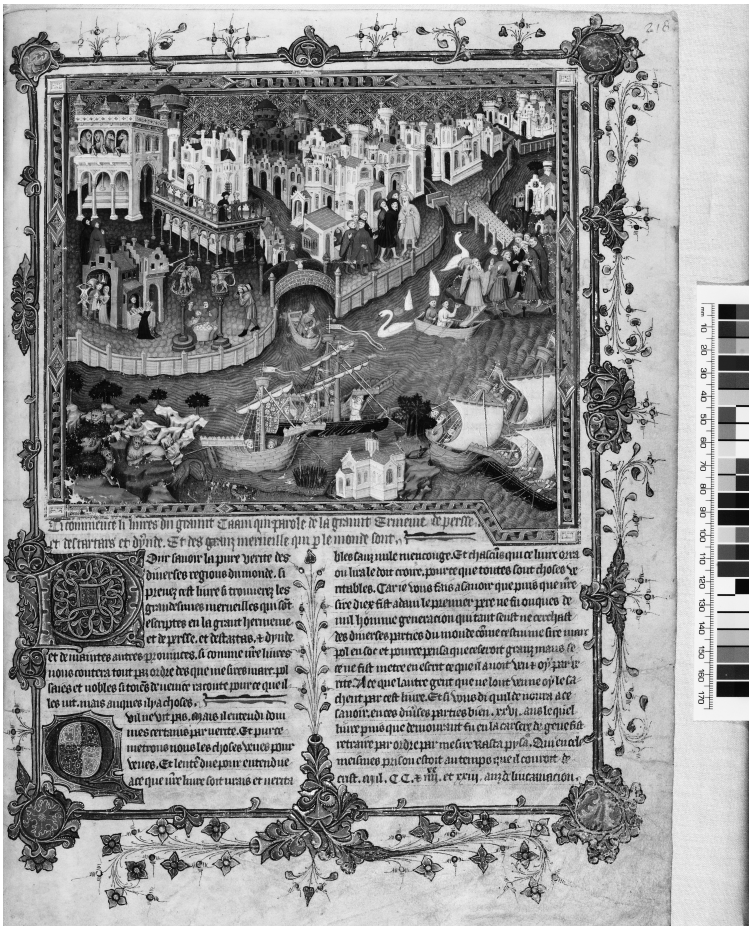


Figure 3.6 Oxford, Bodl. MS Bodley 264, fol. 218^r

Notes

- 1 See also the chapter on ‘The Venetian Gateway: Commerce, Plague, Oriental Motifs’ in this volume.
- 2 Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MSS 2, 3, and 4 use this blue. See Porter 1997: 110. On the removal of the pigment, see Stirrup 2012: 121–2.
- 3 See ‘“Travel” of the Mind via Study: *translatio studii et imperii*’ in this volume.
- 4 *England’s Immigrants, 1330–1550*, 28 September 2021, <https://www.englishimmigrants.com/person/51908>. Cf. Pouzet 2011: 215.
- 5 These records can be found at: John Broun [20825]; Gerard Wake [32085]; John Whyte [21121]; Thomas Amyot [56507]; Jacobus Parchemyner [51908], in *England’s Immigrants, 1330–1550*, 28 September 2021, <https://www.englishimmigrants.com/person/>.
- 6 Hamonus Skryvyn [12101], *England’s Immigrants, 1330–1550*, 28 September 2021, <https://www.englishimmigrants.com/person/12101>.
- 7 NLW, ‘The Hengwrt Chaucer’, <http://hdl.handle.net/10107/4628556>; ‘A Middle English Miscellany’, <http://hdl.handle.net/10107/4398349>.
- 8 BnF MS angl. 39, pastedown; Ouy (2007: 73) identifies this as Jean’s hand.
- 9 See further ‘Mercantile Networks’ in this volume.

- 10 The manuscripts are: Brussels, The Royal Library of Belgium MS 9627–28; Paris, Bib. Mazarine MS 1729; Paris, BnF MS fr. 2; BnF MS fr. 10153; BnF MS fr. 12421; BnF MS fr. 12583; Paris, Bib. Sainte-Geneviève MS 777.
- 11 For example: Oxford, Bodl. MS Laud Misc. 570 and San Marino, Huntington Library MS HM 1099 include artwork by the Fastolf Master; Cambridge, St. John's College MS H.5, Stephen Scrope's English *Epistle of Othea*, reinterprets images from the French text in Bodl. MS Laud Misc. 570.
- 12 In the 1930s, Robin Flower (1936: 36–7) suggested that the pattern was unique to the Abbey of St Peter of Hasnon, but we have found similar examples on books from Cologne to Sunderland.
- 13 *MED*, 'asur' (n.).
- 14 'Johannes me fecit' has been added to Kublai Khan's robe on fol. 220^r.

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Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 61
Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 286
Cambridge, St John's College MS H.5
Cambridge, Trinity College MS B.14.47
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Kew, National Archives, C 49/30/19
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London, BL MS Royal 19 D I
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