

~~chromolithography, and is a must for any library with a focus on design, printing or book history.~~

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~~Liz McCarthy~~

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The Making of the Vernon Manuscript: The Production and Contexts of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. a. 1, ed. by Wendy Scase. Turnhout: Brepols, 2013. xl, 334 p., illus. (Texts and Transitions, 6). ISBN 978-2-503-53046-8. €110.

In the Preface we are given some basic data about the so-called Vernon Manuscript of c.1400: it is 'the largest surviving Middle English manuscript and arguably one of the most important. It weighs some 22 kg, measures about 54.4 cm × 39.3 cm, and has 350 folios. ... Today it contains more than 370 texts and sixteen miniatures; in its original form it may have contained at least seventy-eight miniatures and many more texts.' The word 'arguably' was surely unnecessary in that description.

The present volume consolidates several years of research funded by the AHRC, and follows hot on the heels of a symposium in Oxford in 2009 and the publication of *The Vernon Manuscript: A Facsimile edition ...* (2011); with essays largely by the same authors and with the same editor there is inevitably a certain amount of repetition from that recent work. The new book is in three sections: five chapters about Vernon's language, provenance, and codicology (including script, rubrication, etc.); four chapters about its decoration (miniatures, borders, minor initials), in which as many as nine different border artists and three illustrators are distinguished; and three chapters relating to its patronage; the Editor contributes chapters to the first two sections, and writes all of the third.

The prevailing view is that the manuscript was produced in the West Midlands, perhaps at Lichfield cathedral, and this is supported here by new scribal and linguistic evidence. But even if the book was written there, it may have been decorated somewhere else. Pursuing an observation I made to her after the 2009 conference, that it would be very surprising for a place such as Lichfield cathedral to have access to nine or more different illuminators, the Editor makes a case for it having been decorated in London.

The place of origin of the manuscript has always been a puzzle, in part because of a surprising absence of internal evidence about the patron: the decoration includes a shield, but its heraldry was left blank, for example. In the final chapter, by analogy with what is known about other manuscripts, the Editor concludes that 'West Midlands clergy in the service of lay patrons were the social group most likely to be closely associated with a taste for vernacular material and that they had the means of accessing exemplars and obtaining copies'. She goes on to propose that the patron who best fits the facts was William Beauchamp (d.1411), younger brother of the 12th earl of Warwick. Among the supporting

circumstantial evidence is that he had his own will, made in 1408, written in the vernacular (extremely unusual at this date), and that he owned a house in Paternoster Row, the heart of London's book trade. Whether or not this particular suggestion gains wide acceptance, there is much in this volume as a whole to stimulate new thought about the Vernon and other Middle English manuscripts.

Peter Kidd, London

~~Peter W. M. Blayney, *The Stationers' Company and the Printers of London, 1501–1557*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, November 2013. xxxvi, 1238 pages. ISBN: 9781107035010. £150.00. 2 volume set, hardback.~~

~~Described by its publishers as 'a major revisionist reference work' which 'radically revises accepted beliefs about such matters as the scale of native production versus importation, privileges and patents, and the regulation of printing by the Church, Crown and City', Peter Blayney's book meticulously documents and analyses the roles of all the major players (and a good many minor players) in the development of the Stationers' Company up to the acquisition of its royal Charter in 1557.~~

~~Blayney's style is typically combative. His 'Preface' contains a sustained attack on the use of the term 'bibliography' to describe what is now widely called 'history of the book'. He is remorselessly critical of earlier scholars who have created or perpetuated what he demonstrates to be erroneous conclusions concerning important (and minor) aspects of his subject.~~

~~The book goes beyond its stated focus of the first half of the sixteenth century: Chapter 1 ('1357–1500: Historical and lexical introduction') offers nearly 70 pages on the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and clears out a good many widely held misunderstandings about the pre-history of the Company. In particular Blayney re-interprets the significance of early legislation concerning foreign print trade operatives, by the simple means of reading the legislation in its entirety and subjecting it to close textual analysis. Although he insists that his is a history of the book trade in London, he also provides a very interesting account of the short-lived development in printing and bookselling in the provinces, especially with regard to its London connections.~~

~~The great merit of the work is its detailed presentation and interpretation of documentary evidence concerning the book trade figures who dominated the London trade in the period leading up to the award of the Charter. He particularly stresses that relatively few of the major figures of the pre-1557 period had been members of the Company: 'Of seventy-three master printers known to have worked in England in the first half of the sixteenth century, only fourteen had been trained by serving apprenticeships with Stationers' (p. 931). The religious disruptions on the transition from King Edward to Queen Mary radically shifted the balance to the members of the Company and favoured a renewed campaign to obtain the Charter. Blayney's account of this process is astonishingly detailed and meticulously argued.~~

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