

SUSANNA FEIN, ed. *The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives*. Manuscript Culture in the British Isles. Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2016. Pp. 253. \$99.00 (cloth). doi: 10.1017/jbr.2018.95

This thought-provoking and rich collection of thirteen essays takes up an important set of questions on the vexed matter of medieval manuscript compilation, focused on the iconic “Auchinleck” manuscript (as known by specialists, named after one of its early owners), Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Advocates’ 19.2.1. Dateable to around 1330–40, this sizeable manuscript brings together a broad range of genres within its contents, predominantly Middle English popular romances. As Susanna Fein, the volume’s editor explains, the collection includes essays revised since their original presentation at 2008 a London Old and Middle English Research Seminar conference on the topic of the Auchinleck manuscript, as well as several newly commissioned essays to complement work that, in the meantime, had matured.

The volume is organized around three overlapping themes that tackle the main questions about the manuscript as announced by Fein in the first few pages of the introduction: “Who were its makers? Its users? How was it made? And what end did it serve?” (4). These overlapping themes emerge as the make-up of the manuscript and the implications of its process of production (Derek Pearsall, A. S. G. Edwards, Emily Runde, Timothy Shonk, Míceál F. Vaughan, Ralph Hanna); some of its constituent texts and their relationship to broader issues of transmission and readership (Cathy Hume, Butler, Venetia Bridges, Ann Higgins, Marisa Libon, Siobhan Bly Calkin); and relationships between the manuscript as a whole and the culture in which it was produced, which it influenced in its turn (Pearsall, Helen Phillips). These themes reinforce the diverse avenues for research that this impressive compendium proposes to the modern scholar, by no means limiting the scope for further investigation.

In his broad reassessment of “Auchinleck forty years on” from the publication of the paper facsimile, Pearsall reviews, among other, the myth of the minstrel manuscript and the growth of critical studies on the continuities (and discontinuities) that can be identified in the contents of the book. In turn, Edwards delves into the intricacies of codicological analysis of the first part of the manuscript, which contains religious pieces (some unique), concluding that the balance in the contents of this manuscript may well have weighed more in favor of religious and devotional material than of the popular romances, as has long been believed among modern critics. The early religious sections are important in establishing “the full range of the compiler’s concerns” (34). Hume picks up one such religious piece, *Adam and Eve*, and argues that the text can be integrated into a broader perspective of reading a household or family manuscript on the basis of the story being told as that of a couple and family. Patrick Butler’s essay turns to the oft-cited multilingualism issue in the prologue to the romance *Of Arthur and of Merlin*, where an argument is made for language education as a potential avenue to stopping violence. Runde, on the other hand, goes back to the scribes of Auchinleck, in particular Scribe 3, in order to reevaluate the ways in which their work might bear on the ways in which the texts were read by their first audiences.

Bridges makes a claim for the role played by the defective romance *Kyng Alisaunder* (of which only about 9 percent survives out of the complete text) in Auchinleck not alongside “filler” items in booklet 8, but rather as a lynchpin among the diverse preoccupations of texts elsewhere in the manuscript, including the issue of multiple cultural identities. Higgins picks up the same topic of identity through her study of *Sir Tristrem*, and she speculates about its link to the potential Scottish identity of Auchinleck. While the issue of Auchinleck’s origin cannot be settled easily, with critics now moving away from the traditional view that this book was produced in a London workshop, the suggestion put forward by Higgins is interesting. Turning to another well-known romance, *King Richard*, Libon suggests that the

copy in Auchinleck might be imperfect, but its effects on its medieval readers might have been just as strong as those of the complete text—reflecting pride in nation-building.

Phillips boldly tackles the vexed question of not how or if Chaucer had access to Auchinleck, but rather what we can learn from looking at compilation and romance reading from Auchinleck onwards to Chaucer, and vice versa. Calkin, on the other hand, explores what endings might tell us about Auchinleck—that is, “perfect” endings to a variety of texts from different genres—in particular the ways in which these endings “show aesthetic choices both to embrace and to refuse traditional ending devices” (175).

While the rest of the contributions to this collection focus almost exclusively on the arrangement of texts and textual form, function, and transmission, the last three chapters in this collection are most valuable for their fresh examination of aspects of presentation and copying. Timothy Shonk, Míceál F. Vaughan, and Ralph Hanna build a case for continuing scrutiny of the manuscript for its production and presentation patterns—old, or newly revealed. Shonk’s fascinating chapter on paraphs and presentation in Auchinleck continues his landmark study of Scribe 1, and now draws attention to the lesser frequency with which paraphs were used in prestige items (where flourished capitals were inserted instead). Shonk makes a case for this scribe’s potential overall supervision of other copying, as well as the four artists inserting paraphs. Vaughan turns to scribal corrections, in particular the vexed question whether or not patterns of correction might suggest several stages of supervision and control over the copying by more than one scribe (usually believed to be Scribe 1). Finally, Hanna takes these challenges further, provocatively (and persuasively) suggesting that Scribe 1 and Scribe 6 might be one and the same, working at different times, hence allowing for a greater amount of inconsistency in the overall shape of the project than modern scholars have been prepared to grant.

As these essays amply demonstrate, the Auchinleck manuscript should remain well and truly at the center of any study of late medieval English literary culture. The thirteen essays in the collection are complemented by an introduction, a bibliography, and an index. Thus, new avenues to explore Auchinleck are traced, suggested, or boldly opened here—leading the way to further investigations of the rich insular manuscript culture that produced it.

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TARA HAMLING and CATHERINE RICHARDSON. *A Day at Home in Early Modern England: Material Culture and Domestic Life, 1500–1700*. New Haven: Yale University Press, for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2017. Pp. 320. \$75 (cloth).
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A Day at Home is a study of how the middling sort’s houses and possessions defined their identity. The authors share the caution of other historians in using a concept they describe as a historiographical construct, which conceals considerable variety. In his study of *The Middle Sort of People in Provincial England* (2007), Henry French denies that the “middle sort” had any cultural identity, beyond the aspirations to gentility of its most prominent members. Yet the importance of houses and possessions to middling identity is stressed throughout *A Day at Home*. The middling were set apart from those less well-off by a variety of decorated and furnished spaces, by the number and diversity of their possessions, and even by the whiteness of their linen and the scent of their houses. They shared godly values, self-conscious conformity to ideals of behavior, an orderly mindset, and concern to maintain continuity of status between