

Pesaro. In addition, there are three single illuminated leaves, probably acquired in the mid-twentieth century. The authors have also listed binding fragments from sixteen printed books, cut-out parchment from medieval books, used to strengthen the binding.

To catalogue such a random group of works as a collection is tricky. The decision to describe each individually provides much codicological detail, invaluable to scholars. What proved more difficult was to create an easy-to-reference guide to the collection, to provide an overview of what is interesting and unusual. While the detail in the catalogue descriptions is invaluable, the authors do not use the Introduction to make links and discuss what these manuscripts reveal about medieval Latin book culture, about the intriguing process of formation of this collection, or what can be learnt from continued purchasing: the three single leaves were not acquired until the mid-twentieth century. It is not clear how these manuscripts are used within the current University Library, which might explain the way this book is designed to be used by library readers or external scholars. And it is not clear how the level of detail in the apparatus, perhaps particularly the Index of Incipits, contributes to the understanding of the diverse manuscripts or to these as a group.

Despite these frustrations, what is clear is that the manuscripts at Maynooth are well worth further study, and that this book presents the material for further research. Any opportunity to work on this collection in the Pugin building in which it is housed should surely be taken, with enthusiasm.

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*The Syon Abbey Herbal: the last monastic herbal in England c AD 1517*. Edited by JOHN ADAMS and STUART FORBES. 240mm. Pp 376, many ills (facsimiles and pls). AMCD Publishers, London, 2015. ISBN 9781897762691. £35 (hbk).

In 1415 Henry V founded a double Bridgettine abbey at Syon, intended to house sixty nuns and twenty-five brothers; the publication of this book is intended to commemorate its 600th anniversary. Like all the major religious houses, Syon Abbey was affected by the Dissolution and in

1539 a small group of nuns took refuge in a sister house in Flanders. Eventually the Bridgettine order returned to England in 1861. Never having surrendered the abbey's seal, keys or deeds, they could reasonably claim to have been the only English religious order that survived the Dissolution. Unfortunately, due to falling numbers and ill health, they were disbanded in 2011, just a few years short of the anniversary, and the surviving medieval books and manuscripts that had formed part of the abbey's original extensive library were dispersed to various university libraries and repositories.

The editors rightly point out that Thomas Betson, the herbal's author and last librarian at Syon Abbey from 1481 until his death in 1517, was apparently compiling a notebook for his own reference rather than the production of an original work. Betson's use of, and copying from, other texts available to him, provides one of the strongest reasons for the present publication. Although entitled 'a herbal' Betson's text predates some of the earliest continental herbals that established the standard format of the genre: detailed description of the plant (often including an illustrative woodcut) and discussion of its astronomical properties, followed by its uses and curative powers. Adams and Forbes point out that few of the plants in Betson's list are actually used in his remedies.

Throughout the book there are detailed cross-references, relating to Betson's possible source material, most of which probably originated from before 1500. In particular, the editors suggest that Betson's section on plant names was taken from John Bray's *Simonoma de nominibus herbarum* dating from 1381, although this was not recorded in the Syon library. The selection of herbal remedies was apparently compiled from a number of different sources, and offers a variety of potential 'cures' for miscellaneous ailments – particularly unappealing is the use of horse dung to 'fasten loose teeth' (p 254).

This is a book full of good things: an excellent transcript, which can be easily checked against the original document thanks to the editors' use of electronic technology and meticulous referencing; a useful section on apothecary weights; good translations; and mostly accurate identification of the plants in Betson's plant list. There are, however, some inevitable mistakes with such an undertaking.

From the brief biographical notes for Adams and Forbes it would appear that neither professes any great botanical or medical interest. This has resulted in some question marks about

a few of the modern botanical synonyms and common names suggested; for example, Betson's *Anagallis* would be recognisable as our Scarlet Pimpernel, not a synonym for Comfrey (*Symphytum*). However, Thomas Johnson, in the 1633 edition of John Gerard's herbal, gives a synonym for Comfrey of *Alus gallicus* related to the French use of the plant in leather tanning, which probably caused Betson's confusion. It seems likely that his and / or his source's (Bray) transcribing was inaccurate. Johnson is also equally clear that the sycamore should not be confused with the European sycamore. Unfortunately, the editors have accepted the insidious modern 'correction' of 'sycamore fig', rather than retaining the accurate Biblical sycamore. Similarly Adams and Forbes were unaware that smallpox was commonly known by its Latin name, *variola(s)*. Betson's recipe for the use of rose water on the burning *variola* facial pustules was probably soothing, and may have helped prevent damage to the patient's eyes.

These are only minor errors, but, sadly, the book suffers badly from poor proofreading and compilation. Apart from the 'typos', the illustrations have been inserted in the wrong place (instructions to the printer were retained), part of Appendix 3 is duplicated, Appendix 1 may be missing (p 33 n 36; p 213 n 1), the bibliography is incomplete and unaccountably some reference titles have found their way into the index. These errors should have been removed with proper proofreading and adherence to standard conventions.

While these criticisms may appear to be unnecessary carping, these presentational and technical errors, in the view of this reviewer, undermine the otherwise careful and mostly accurate preparation of the text. Nonetheless, if the reader can overlook such shortcomings, they will be rewarded with much that is useful and worthwhile.

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*Medieval Coins and Seals: constructing identity, signifying power.* Edited by SUSAN SOLWAY. 288mm. Pp iv + 547, ills (some col), maps. Brepols Publishers, Turnhout, 2015. ISBN 9782503543444. €175, £124 (hbk).

Two of the essays in this collection have been published before. One is Brigitte Bedos-Rezak's

seminal article 'Medieval identity: a sign and a concept', in which she demonstrates the lack of continuity in the function and use of seals between the Roman period and early medieval western Europe, in the context of contemporary theology and philosophy. The other is David J Wasserstein's account of 'Coins as agents of cultural definition in Islam' in which he examines the forms of early Islamic coins, how they were seen at the time and their role in the spread of Islam.

Both serve as important background to the other twenty essays, of which many were presented as papers at successive meetings of the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo. The whole book is divided into five sections. In the first, 'Sigillography, numismatics and art history', Lucia Travaini looks at the messages conveyed by the designs of a Merovingian tremissis and a Milanese ducat. In the second, 'Minting policies in medieval Europe and the Middle East', Guido M Berndt, Lisa Mahoney and Wayne G Sayles examine the coins of, respectively, the Vandal empire, the Crusader states and twelfth-century Jazira, that is, northern Mesopotamia, and Susan Leibacher Ward compares a small carved bust in the cathedral at Le Mans with the representation of kings on contemporary English coins. A section on 'Medieval women' brings together work by Liz James on the coins of the ninth- to thirteenth-century Byzantine empresses, by Anna Gannon on women on early Anglo-Saxon coins, by Erin L Jordan on the seals and coins of thirteenth-century countesses of Flanders and Hainault, by Kay Slocum on images of Anglo-Saxon saintly women on later English seals and by Susan M Johns on early medieval Welsh seals. In 'Sealing civic, urban, rural, and corporate identity' John Cherry looks at the images on town seals in general, Elizabeth A New at London's common seal and Markus Späth at French civic seals, while John McEwan and Phillip R Schofield both examine the increasing use of seals, respectively, in London and more widely in England and Marcher Wales. In the final section, 'Coins, seals, medieval art and material culture', James Robinson discusses the spiritual and secular power of seal images, Jesse D Hurlbut the figure of the Lamb on the city seal and altarpiece at Ghent and Janet E Snyder the clothes that appear on carved figures and on seals in the twelfth century. Susan Solway then looks at antique coins introduced into medieval jewellery and, finally, John Cunnally examines a sixteenth-century drawing of six Muslim coins of the twelfth century.