

and updated and reorganised by John Insley. The names, all of which are cross-referenced to the labelled stints in the printed text, are arranged under Celtic, continental Germanic, Old English (dithematic and monothematic), Latin, Greek and Biblical, and Scandinavian forms, plus a few that cannot be precisely assigned. A detailed prosopographical survey follows, prepared by Katharine Keats-Rohan, containing notes on all the persons so far identified, whether ecclesiastics (both regular and secular), abbots and monks of Thorney, royalty, aristocrats or gentry and their followers. Two entries receive detailed treatment because of their intrinsic interest: the 'goldsmith's' entry, which records a gift of bullion to the abbey, is analysed by John Insley (on the language), Julia Crick and Tessa Webber (on the palaeography), and Rory Naismith deals with the entry for the moneyer, Turstan of Stamford. These sections are followed by John Insley's discussion of the language of the earliest entries, which refer back to the time of Cnut (folios 9v, 10r and 10v), and Lynda Rollason's analysis of the relic-list. There are full indexes, both for the name-forms and for individual persons. As it stands, the Thorney *liber vitae* is a list of names and, while much can be deduced from their form and context, their greatest value emerges when they can be associated with the individuals whom the monks of Thorney wished to commemorate. For this reviewer the detailed prosopographical list is especially relevant, but there is plenty to interest other specialists, whether codicologists, palaeographers or linguists, as well as historians working on the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Much can be deduced by looking at those who were not entered into 'the book of life'. There is, for instance, no mention of Æthelwold, Bishop of Winchester, even though it was he who instituted Benedictine life at Thorney in the tenth century. The explanation might be that in the time of Abbot Gunter, when the compilation of the *liber vitae* in its current form began, Thorney was concerned to maintain a distance from the resurgent abbey of Peterborough, also founded by Æthelwold, perhaps with Thorney as a dependent cell. Similar considerations might explain why the *liber vitae* appears to skip over the reign of Edward the Confessor, when the abbey was part of the ecclesiastical empire ruled by Leofric, Abbot of Peterborough. The name of King Cnut, on the other hand, figures prominently at the head of its earliest section, perhaps because the abbey enjoyed more independence in the days of the Danish kings. Such considerations emphasise the fact that, like many

similar texts, the Thorney *liber vitae* deals not only with piety but also with property and politics. This comprehensive edition will furnish future researchers with insights into such matters for a long time to come.

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*The Medieval Manuscripts at Maynooth: explorations in the unknown.* By PETER J LUCAS and ANGELA M LUCAS. 210mm. Pp xxvii + 276, col ill. Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2014. ISBN 9781846825347. £35 (hbk).

This is the first time the medieval Latin manuscripts in the library of the National University of Ireland Maynooth have been published. In that sense this is an exploration 'in the unknown', and makes a valuable contribution to knowledge of the collections of medieval manuscripts in Ireland: now fully and comprehensively presented, and with a generously illustrated volume to be proud of, the Maynooth Latin manuscripts, which date from the eleventh to the sixteenth century, are on the map.

The introduction to the catalogue includes a brief history of the college from its origins as a Catholic seminary in 1795. The acquisition of medieval manuscripts may have begun with five manuscripts from the monastic library of Saint Jacques in Liège, which probably came to Maynooth early in its history. These five retain their Liège bindings of the 1720s: 'They seem to be much as they must have been when sold from St Jacques in 1788, and this state of preservation is a bonus' (p 19). From then on, it seems that manuscripts were simply acquired: given or bought. There is no evident policy behind the creation of this collection, but they add substantially to the riches of the University Library.

As the authors make clear, this book is new work, investigating a group of 'virgin manuscripts' (p xv). As such, the focus has been on diligent description, each manuscript treated individually. The catalogue is grouped into six sections: the five manuscripts from Liège, six liturgical and devotional manuscripts from various origins (one of which is a printed book with hand-coloured illuminations), two manuscripts including canon law and biblical commentary, one bible, one benedictional and a fair copy of a Venetian commission from the Doge to his Captain of the Gulf, Nicolò da

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