

Jaclyn Rajsic, Erik Kooper and Dominique Hoche, eds., *The Prose Brut and Other Late Medieval Chronicles. Books Have Their Histories: Essays in Honour of Lister M. Matheson* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2016). Print, 272pp., 11 b/w ill., £60.00, ISBN: 9781903153666.



Review

This volume is a *Gedenkschrift* to the late Lister M. Matheson (d. 2012), whose work was largely concerned with the manuscript as artefact and unedited texts (often of the non-canonical or 'common' variety). Towards the end of his life Matheson produced several studies of the *Brut* chronicle, most importantly his 1998 monograph entitled *The Prose Brut: The Development of a Middle English Chronicle*. This work is particularly important, considering this text was wildly popular during the Middle Ages, and the earlier work on the subject, Friedrich W. D. Brie's *Geschichte und Quellen der mittelenglischen Prosachronik The Brute of England oder The Chronicles of England*, was first published in 1905. Matheson's work inspired many others to follow suit. This is demonstrated by this collection in which his colleagues and friends present thirteen essays on various texts and subjects in three thematic sections related to Matheson's research interests.

The first section is concerned with how readers and writers used history. In the first section Krista A. Murchison examines the *Livre de reis de Engleterre* in Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R XIV 7, in its social and manuscript contexts, to see how it was understood by different audiences. Christine M. Rose considers the inconsistent use of miracles, marvels, and portents in the Middle English translation of Nicholas Trevet's *Cronicles*. Alexander L. Kaufman examines similar themes in Warkworth's *Chronicle*, but concludes more forcefully, although not always convincingly, that this

text uses portents and wonders to present the author's criticisms. Dan Embree argues that two mid-late fifteenth century English texts, *The Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire* and *The Historie of the Arrivall of Edward IV in England*, commonly assumed to have a shared author, were written by two very different people through a rigorous comparison of language and detail.

The second section consists of essays on various aspects of *Brut* chronicles. Many of these deal with the thorny problem of how to define a *Brut* text: do they have to match the earliest version from beginning to end? Can they have continuations, or lack the beginning? Can they lack the beginning? Can they be broadly interested in the founding of Britain by Brutus but have a different text? Erik Kooper engages with this problem directly in relation to the Latin chronicle in Longleat House, MS 55, by comparing it with several other *Brut* and related texts. William Marx continues this investigation by looking at two variants from the Middle English Prose *Brut* 'Common Version' (so-named by Matheson in his *Prose Brut*), the 'PV-1437' with continuation to 1461 and 'PV-1422, Group B', and how, although they have interpolated sections of other texts (e.g. the *Eulogium historiarum*), they use them intentionally to present diverse perspectives. Jaclyn Rajsic convincingly argues that the roll chronicle in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 546 is an abbreviated Middle English *Brut*, and shows how different forms and audiences required various types of adaptation. Neil Weijer finishes this section by showing how the early printed editions of the *Brut* were adapted to fit their editors' purposes, with Caxton aiming for a narrative focus and the so-called Schoolmaster emphasising visual display, each to aid a different type of reading.

The essays in the third section are concerned with issues also found in the first two and how they relate to medieval and post-medieval reception. Heather Pagan shows the diversity of readership for the original Anglo-

Norman version of Trevet's *Cronicles* through a close consideration of the eleven extant manuscripts. Elizabeth J. Bryan traces the ownership of one manuscript of the Middle English Prose *Brut*, in British Library, MS Harley 24, with a particular focus on how the scholar Matthew Parker (1504–75) and his circle used it in conjunction with two other *Brut* manuscripts to better understand the peculiarities of Middle English, but also to understand the present in relation to the past. Edward Donald Kennedy then presents a fascinating story of Thomas Hearne, editor of many texts in the seventeenth- and eighteenth centuries, and how his own editorial approaches prefigured those gaining acceptance today. Caroline D. Eckhardt, continuing her previous work on Castleford's *Chronicle*, examines the collaborative composition and ownership of its single manuscript, and its unexpected and varied interest to later owners. A. S. G. Edwards examines the difficult issue of *Brut* manuscript sales, and how their monetary (and perceived) values fluctuated over time.

Many of these essays stand out as major contributions to the field, and will surely be standard works for years to come. In particular Marx's essay is an excellent consideration of the composition with compilation that is at the heart of much medieval chronicle writing. He shows how this uncited borrowing from other historical works does not disqualify a writer from presenting their own opinions, but rather aids their expression. Pagan's essay shows how manuscript ownership needs to be considered in conjunction with the text to determine what its original or understood meaning. Occasionally the lamentable state of the field is evident, as several of these essays highlight a painful absence of editions. This is most obvious in Rose's essay, as her investigation of the Middle English translation of Trevet's *Cronicles* would have benefited greatly from a comparison with the original Anglo-Norman text (an edition is currently in preparation by Pagan and Geert De Wilde).

Overall, this collection shows the great progress that has been made or inspired by Matheson, in the study of medieval history writing. The reader is repeatedly shown that chronicles require a nuanced and contextualised reading to be understood fully. The collection also highlights many of the lesser-studied texts that Matheson himself championed. These are especially important to the field, as they show perspectives that differ from those in conveniently edited and translated chronicles that receive so much attention but are not always representative of medieval attitudes. This collection opens up new avenues for scholarship that are rich with opportunity, but it also shows how much work remains incomplete in the study of medieval chronicles and their manuscripts.

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