Medieval Libraries of Great Britain (MLGB3) by Bodleian Libraries (review)

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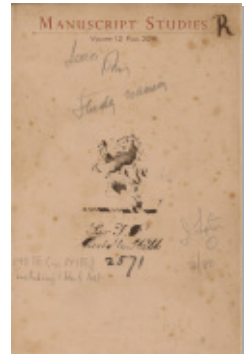
adds to his important corpus of research on William of Malmesbury, offering new and at times revised insights into the librarian-polymath's reading under three headings: quotations from unusual texts in unlikely places (such as adapting Apuleius in a commentary on Lamentations, or Ausonius in miracles of the Virgin); William as the possible author of learned introductions to some ancient texts; and William as textual editor of Pliny, Suetonius, and Cicero. This is an essay that allows us into the medieval scholarly process and the modern one too: Thomson describes not only William of Malmesbury's editorial work, but his own scholarly researches and those of colleagues such as Robert Kaster, with whom he shares expertise on the medieval reception of classical authors. There is also an appendix to his earlier list of William's readings in the classics.

Altogether this expert, useful, and broad-ranging volume merits the epithet "innovative." Each essay is researched and developed to the highest standard. The color plates at the end of the volume augment the black-and-white photographs and diagrams within the chapters. Scholars of classical reception in the Middle Ages will welcome this fine addition to the material history of that field, and professors can direct students to the essays collected here in confidence that the expositions will be at once accessible and reliably informative. *Manuscripts of the Latin Classics 800–1200* enters the field with great energy and will be a significant influence long into the future.

Medieval Libraries of Great Britain (MLGB3). Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, 2015. http://mlgb3.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/.

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The Medieval Libraries of Great Britain project (abbreviated as MLGB3) aims to provide comprehensive and searchable information about medieval English libraries and their books. By collating evidence from both surviving medieval books and library catalogs, and by adding digital

images of features of medieval books that provide information about provenance and ownership, such as their bindings or ownership inscriptions, the project offers scholars of medieval manuscripts and libraries an important new research tool. Its online structure allows users to search and isolate records by library, text, author, type of evidence (such as shelfmark or inscriptions on provenance), and other variables. MLGB3 is hosted by the Bodleian Library, directed by Richard Sharpe and James Willoughby, and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

MLGB3 draws on and is named after Neil Ker's *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain*, a book that identifies all medieval libraries in Great Britain based on evidence found in surviving manuscripts. First published in 1941, a second, revised edition of the book appeared in 1964 and a supplement by Andrew Watson appeared in 1987. Additional information on medieval British libraries and their catalogs has been drawn from the Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogs (henceforth CBMLC), a series that prints editions of extant medieval British library book lists and catalogs.

The combination of Ker's research on surviving manuscripts and the CBMLC's research on surviving medieval catalogs is important for two reasons. First, Ker's research allowed for the positive identification of numerous medieval British libraries for which no catalog survives, widening significantly the number of libraries included in the project. Second, since the vast majority of the manuscripts listed in medieval library catalogs no longer survive, the inclusion of the CBMLC's cataloged books makes the MLGB3 project useful for understanding not only the vagaries of manuscript survival, but also patterns of book ownership and use in the Middle Ages. The project spans the eighth to sixteenth centuries, the start date constrained by manuscript survival and the end date determined by the dissolution of the monasteries in the mid-sixteenth century by Henry VIII.

MLGB3 is currently in its beta version, with data transcribed from the eight thousand file cards on which Ker and his collaborators recorded evidence such as shelfmarks and ex libris inscriptions that give proof of the medieval locations of books. It is not clear how many file cards remain to be uploaded; the website advises users to crosscheck the website's data with the printed editions of Ker to ensure they have "all the information." The plan to include digital images of as many manuscripts as is feasible will

eventually allow users to check many of Ker's original observations for themselves. The images are of very high quality but are only of select leaves containing, for example, observed provenance marks, rather than digitized versions of entire books. Thus far the beta version includes only descriptions of the full contents of manuscripts at the cathedrals of Lincoln, Hereford, and Worcester, along with Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Like Ker, MLGB3 excludes books that remained in their original college libraries at Cambridge and Oxford.

The varied and high-quality information made available by this project, as well as its enhanced search capabilities compared to the print version of Ker's book, makes MLGB3 a significant asset for those who study medieval English books, authors, and libraries. The body of work on which it draws is exemplary, and it promises to be an extremely useful tool once completed. As it stands, however, there are certain interface difficulties that will hopefully be smoothed over before the project reaches a more complete state.

The website interface has four main tabs: *Browse*, *Advanced Search*, *Authors/ Titles*, and *Medieval Catalogues*. The *Browse* tab takes users to an alphabetical list organized by each library's geographic location, starting with Abbotsbury (Dorset) and its Benedictine Abbey of St. Peter. A user may opt for either a "tree view" or a "table view." The tree view lists all the books in each library, but runs together—with no formatting or spacing conventions— information on their current location, contents, and dates. In contrast, the "table view" separates information on modern location, shelfmark, date, and contents into columns that are significantly more user friendly.

The *Advanced Search* allows users to search on author, medieval library, modern location, evidence type, and ownership, or only books with images in the project, among several other possibilities. It does not, however, allow users to search manuscripts by their dates, which can only be searched by date range on the *Author/Title* page. The decision to use a drop-down menu for Ker's evidence codes restricts users to searching either for a single type of evidence (e.g., "b" for bindings) or for two types of evidence together (e.g., "b" and "i" for inscriptions). There is no option available to search for books identified by more than two different types of evidence. A set of optional check boxes would allow users more flexibility and control and

eliminate the drop-down menu, which contains more than forty different options for paired evidence codes.

The *Author/Titles* tab allows for searching and browsing on author, title, or both, though not every text within every manuscript has yet been listed. This page also provides documentation for users in the form of download-able PDFs with a "list of identifications" (an alphabetical list of authors and their works) and a "key to codes" used in the database. The "key to codes" information should be more visibly linked, as it includes information about symbols that the user will encounter time and time again throughout the project and that mean different things in different locations. For example, "†" next to an author's date means the year of their death, but "†" next to a word indicates a probable error in copying. Fortunately for users who have not read these PDFs, the –searches return all matches, not just exact matches, though this can occasionally result in a flood of only tangentially related search results.

The *Medieval Catalogues* tab is a list of links to full medieval catalogs, derived from the CBMLC volumes published thus far. Each catalog is pre-sented as a web page in its own right, providing hyperlinks to each book listed. Interestingly, this tab offers users the option to export individual pages as a text file.

Documentation on the project is sometimes hard to locate on the web-site. Non-specialists encountering the drop-down menu labeled "type of document" on the *Authors/Titles* page may not know, for example, that one of the menu's options, "Henry de Kirkestede," refers to a fourteenth-century universal catalog of writers and their works. Even those who realize that the "type of document" menu refers to the sources by which authors and texts were identified and who are sufficiently familiar with the relevant primary sources for English library history to know what "Bale" or "Leland" refer to might prefer to see other terms in the drop-down menu such as "loan" or "undefined" described more clearly. Are the former books identified because they were used as collateral for a loan? What is meant when a book is labeled "undefined"? More explanation would help users search more effectively.

The search functions seem to be optimized for a user who wants to look up a specific text—the *Roman de Brut*, for example—or a specific author—such as Gerald of Wales—and see all references to those works in medieval

library catalogs. The search also allows users to identify the locations of extant manuscripts of a particular text. Users can search by the modern locations of manuscripts to determine what is available near them, a feature that that will certainly help those seeking to plan research trips. Those who search by specific call numbers, authors, or titles in mind will benefit most from the search features. The navigation is straightforward enough if one is familiar with Ker's printed book and its organization, but might seem slightly opaque to those less familiar with MLGB's print incarnation.

The website's main drawback is the inability to export individual search results. With the exception of the *Medieval Catalogues* tab, which allows users to print an image of the page, and thus of a specific medieval catalog's listed contents, users cannot download their search results. Users can download a PDF of MLGB3 that lists the full contents of all identified medieval English libraries in alphabetical order by geographic location. This functionally delivers to the user a PDF of Ker's print book, augmented by the additional information in the CBMLC.

This restricted output is a serious flaw because it means that users cannot take advantage of their own personal search results in any way other than copy-pasting them from the web page into a word processor or spreadsheet or taking a screenshot of the page. This restriction also means that those who are interested in querying the dataset in ways not envisioned by the project managers are unable to do so, restricting the kinds of research that may be done with this project. Future versions of MLGB3 should allow users to download their searches, or even the entire dataset, as several other digital humanities projects do. Making the information available as a CSV file would help researchers make more use of the project and expand its impact.

MLGB3's strengths are the depth and breadth of the secondary scholarship on which it draws and the primary sources to which it will direct users via digital photographs. The current interface allows for better access and new ways of understanding the data collected by Ker and others, but improvements in the interface, particularly making search results downloadable into usable formats by researchers, will significantly enhance the value of this exciting project. MLGB3's scholarly value will also be strengthened by adding other information, such as the data in the appendix of David Bell's *What*

Nuns Read, but even in its beta version it proves an excellent resource for scholars.

Felice Lifshitz. *Religious Women in Early Carolingian Francia: A Study of Manuscript Transmission & Monastic Culture*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2014. Xxii + 349 pp. $55.00. ISBN 978-0-8232-5687-7.

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WHILE STUDYING A GROUP of related early medieval manuscripts in Würzburg, Felice Lifshitz began to notice subtle ways in which their scribes had redacted the texts they contained. These manuscripts, copies of patristic and early medieval theological treatises, were associated with Bishop Boniface of Mainz and his associate, Abbess Leoba of Tauber-bischofsheim, thus with the movement of Anglo-Saxon missionaries on the Continent in the early eighth century. Through close scrutiny, Lifshitz was able to trace these manuscripts to several women's communities in the pre-Carolingian Rhineland, and to make the series of deductions about their social and intellectual context that form the core of this bold and deeply learned book.

In the first three chapters, Lifshitz identifies the several women's communities in the Rhineland with the political and economic stature to copy manuscripts such as these. She gives an overview of the monastic ideal of syneisactism (men and women living chastely in egalitarian communities) in the Main and Tauber valleys, showing that women's houses such as Karlburg, Zellingen, and Ochsenfurt (which predated the foundation of the See of Würzburg in 741), as well as notable later foundations such as Kitzingen, were independent cultural centers with their own schools and scriptoria, and participated in networks of trade, embassies, and gift exchange in the Trier area equal to those of famous local men's houses such as Echternach (pp. 17–20). Lifshitz draws two important conclusions from her thorough