Scribal Authorship and the Writing of History in Medieval England

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Chapters 3 and 4 will turn to some of the least-read texts in two of the best-known books written by two of the best-known scribes of early fourteenth century England: the Harley Scribe, responsible for copying three manuscripts including London, BL, MS Harley 2253, and Scribe 1 of the Auchinleck manuscript. Bringing together the focus in Chapter 1 on the diverse labors of scribes and Chapter 2’s reimagination of the textual tradition of insular historiography, the next two chapters will examine the very different instantiations of a short Middle English historiographical text, the *Short Chronicle*, as written by the Harley Scribe and Auchinleck’s Scribe 1. The Harley Scribe, active between 1314 and 1349 in Ludlow or its immediate environs, is well known for the large corpus of evidence that survives in his hand: three manuscripts and over forty dated charters. Conclusive identification of the Harley Scribe remains, so far, out of reach. Nonetheless,

1. The critical literature on both manuscripts is vast. Specific references will be offered as necessary. Most generally, see *Facsimile of British Museum, MS Harley 2253*, ed. N. R. Ker, EETS OS 255 (London: Oxford University Press, 1965). See also the bibliography available in the online catalogue entry for the manuscript, http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=7704&CollID=8&NStart=2253.

enough is known of when he was writing to situate his work very specifically in the political, ecclesiastical, historical, and cultural contexts of the Welsh Marches in the early fourteenth century. Much of this chapter, then, will trace the influences of national and local history upon history writing, and also upon the other texts written by the Harley Scribe. I will argue that the Harley Scribe composed a number of the texts in London, BL, MS Royal 12.c.xii, a manuscript much less studied than the better-known Harley 2253. Moving beyond the meaning created through textual selection or organization, the chapter will expose the politics that shaped the Harley Scribe’s work as a scribal author of historiography, and his responses to the regional affiliations behind his adaptation of a liturgical piece and his work on an Anglo-Norman romance.

The medieval scribe was positioned in ways that many medieval authors were not. Scribes directly controlled the presentation of text and shaped the rich complexities of a text’s mise-en-page and its situation in a codex. Despite the ongoing tension perceived between the roles of author and scribe, there remain deep uncertainties about what activities in fact constitute the scribal. Recent studies of the lyrics found in Harley 2253 all presume the Harley Scribe, acting as the “organizer” of the Harley Lyrics, read the lyrics before copying them. That is, in order to have organized the lyrics, he must have read them first. Moreover, some critics perceive quite sophisticated principles at work in the arrangement of the lyrics, whether sequences of antithetical texts or other “sustained organizing principle[s].” If the Harley Scribe is indeed responsible for the verbal resonances and

3. Royal 12.c.xii is in turn better studied than the third book in the Harley Scribe’s hand, MS Harley 273, which contains works mostly in Anglo-Norman.


Chapter Three

... aesthetic and political arrangements that have been read into the groupings of texts, he must have read his source texts very carefully, with an eye to copying them and assembling them in very particular ways. At the same time that a loose consensus has granted the Harley Scribe the interpretative sophistication to read, analyze, and group the lyrics, other scholars have argued to separate the Harley Scribe from the work of conceiving, collecting, identifying, and acquiring the necessary texts to create the manuscript. Birkholz puts forth the idea that “the distinction between medieval author-functions has collapsed” and suggests instead that a new understanding of the manuscript can be gained if we “redivide ‘scribe’ from ‘compiler.” Birkholz’s point is an important one for nuancing scribal practices more generally, as is his exploration of plural patronage, complexly multiple audiences, and collective responsibility for acquiring the texts constitutive of the Harley Lyrics. He offers a sophisticated and compelling revision of conventional understandings of the processes underlying manuscript creation. At the same time, however, that he foregrounds the possible milieux in which a single book might be read and from which its texts might be assembled, he reduces the work of the Harley Scribe to something largely mechanical. That is, although the Harley Scribe manages the “layout, arrangement, and selection of received texts,” he very pointedly does not have the social, intellectual, aesthetic, and geographical mobility that everyone else involved with the forming codex does. Birkholz’s Harley Scribe is a largely static and dull figure, surrounded by excitingly mobile contributors who identify, locate, and transmit lyrical texts to Ludlow. After the texts pass through the mechanical hands of the Harley Scribe, they are then received by sophisticated audiences across diverse social registers and geographies. Despite the important reimaginations of the richness of regional manuscript cultures, excluding the Harley Scribe from the intellectual discourses of Harley 2253

7. See Carter Revard, “Oppositional Thematics and Metanarrative in MS Harley 2253, Quires 1–6,” in Scase, *Essays in Manuscript Geography*, 95–112. Revard perceives a “sic et non” structure in the quires. In the same volume, Fein notes: “Middle English scholars seem now to have reached rough consensus that the Harley scribe’s compilation (on fols 49–140) is unusually deliberative in its selections and organization” (“Compilation and Purpose,” 69).

8. Birkholz observes: “Almost uniformly nowadays, scholars posit a Harley ‘scribe/compiler,’” (“Harley Lyrics,” 198). He instead argues for the Harley scribe’s nonmobility which thus “limit[s] his personal inability to procure texts” (199). Evidence that the Harley Scribe worked in Ludlow over the course of his lifetime is emphatically not evidence that the Harley Scribe did not travel. London is roughly 150 miles from Ludlow, and such a trip might take anywhere from four to eleven days to make. See C. M. Woolgar, *The Great Household in Late Medieval Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 187, who notes that Eleanor de Montfort’s household averaged 26 miles per day in 1265.

yet again deauthorizes and precludes a scribe from engaging in more substantive intellectual labor.

There is no conclusive evidence to suggest that the Harley Scribe is the author of the Harley Lyrics. Yet there is a gulf that seems to divide the critical expectations for Middle English lyrics and Anglo-Norman texts copied by the same hand. Although Anglo-Norman literature is finally being more consistently read alongside Middle English texts, texts in Royal 12.c.xii such as *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* have been long described as authored or translated by the Harley Scribe. Even while extensive dialectal work on the Middle English lyrics in Harley 2253 has been used to argue for ever-increasingly complex layers of manuscript transmission, critics have suggested the Harley Scribe’s responsibility for composing the Anglo-Norman Bible stories in the same manuscript. The Harley Lyrics have received markedly less attention in the last academic generation. Nonetheless, they have given rise to an understanding of Harley 2253 as primarily a literary, specifically lyrical manuscript. The astonishing richness of the Harley Lyrics has overshadowed, to some degree, the ways in which Harley 2253 is just another early-fourteenth-century manuscript, unremarkable precisely for its heterogeneity. The Harley Lyrics are monuments to a certain type of literary performance. Despite their resistance to more historicized readings, they nonetheless pose questions of specifically literary authorship. Royal 12.c.xii, however, has received much less critical attention than Harley 2253. Moving away from the overtly literary nature of the Harley Lyrics, the body of the Harley Scribe’s work largely consists of very different types of texts—devotional and liturgical texts, romances and histories. Such texts exert different pressures on authorship, and thus offer different expectations for the talent, vision, and aesthetic mastery of an author. In that space, a different connection between scribe and text can be seen.


11. See *Fouke Le Fitz Waryn*, ed. E. J. Hathaway, P. T. Ricketts, C. A. Robson, and A. D. Wilshere, ANTS 26–28 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), xxxvii: “It is highly likely that he inherited, or had easy access to, the manuscript of the couplet romance, and that he was himself the author of the prose remaniment which he copied.”


13. Birkholz persuasively argues that the interests of New Historicism, replacing those of the New Criticism, have diminished the lyrics’ prominence.
Before turning away from lyrics entirely, however, there is a case to be made about the productive plurality of variation. The intertextuality generated by textual simultaneity will be an important concept for “copies” of texts such as the Short Chronicle, discussed at length below. In Harley 2253, two versions of “Litel Wot Hit Any Mon” coexist on f. 128r. The first, religious version (“The Way of Christ’s Love”) reminds the reader in its final stanza that Christ: “For loue of vs his wonges waxeþ þunne / his herte blod he ȝef for al mon kinne.” On the same folio, a mere seven lines below this blandly pious image, is the second, rather more secular version of the text (“The Way of Woman’s Love”). There, the poem’s frustrated lover takes up the rhymes of the religious version to rather more suggestive effect: “Y wolde nemne hyre to day ; ant y dorste hire munne / heo is þat feireste may ; of vch ende of hire kunne / bote heo me loue of me heo haues sunne.” Presumably the reading audience did not change from the top to the foot of the folio. The pointed juxtaposition and simultaneity of such lyrics could be part of their pleasure. As Firth Green notes: “The unusual practice of the Harley manuscript [in presenting both verses on the same folio] suggests that the English compiler was particularly eager to draw attention to the fashionable parallelism between the two pieces.” The Harley Lyrics are often imagined as discrete phenomena. Yet, here Harley 2253 performs, even revels in, textual plurality on the medieval page. The simultaneous texts do not require an audience to choose between pious verses and the more suggestive love poem.

The two lyrics above are examples of a particular type of text in which substitution and variation play a central role, contrafacta, defined by The Oxford Companion to Music as: “A vocal piece in which the original text is replaced by a new one. . . . Contrafacta make up a significant portion of the surviving repertories of 12th- and 13th-century Western monophonic secular song.” Despite the comforting tone of this seemingly decisive definition, “original text” is a deeply problematic claim for anything that survives to us from the Middle Ages, particularly given the lyrical and musical flexibility

14. MS Harley 2253, f. 128r. I am deeply grateful to the staff of the British Library for facilitating access to the manuscript. See New IMEV, 1922.
15. MS Harley 2253, f. 128r. See New IMEV, 1921.
17. Alex Lingas, “contrafactum,” in The Oxford Companion to Music, ed. Alison Latham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Oxford Reference Online. The definition also notes that “the motet and other genres of medieval polyphony also include many adaptations of sacred compositions to secular texts and vice versa,” suggesting neither the direction of adaptation (sacred to secular or vice versa), nor the language of the song, nor its monophonic or polyphonic compositional status necessarily delimits the genre.
that contrafacta demonstrate. Hypothetically, given two perfectly metrical (or identically imperfect) texts that “fit” with the music, it is difficult to imagine conclusive evidence that might permit us to decide which of the two hypothetical texts might be the “original” text (particularly given the tendency of lyrics to be ahistorical). Such interchangeability is part of contemporary musical practice, as well, which suggests an enormous number of texts for which authorship or originality are understood in very different ways, including mash-ups and remixes, and also less technologically inflicted and less contemporary genres, such as traditional arrangements. Medieval contrafacta can be textually innocuous, or aggressively appropriative. That is, whether contrafacta are religious texts written to displace supposedly sinful lay texts, or obscene texts designed to overlay existing devotional and religious lyrics, they operate in a spectrum of textual substitution, juxtaposition, and exchange. Rendered interchangeable, they can be understood both on their own and collectively.

Another set of contrafacta by the Harley Scribe begins his work in Royal 12.c.xii. The text known as the Office of Saint Thomas of Lancaster is the first text of the book. Offering a set of services for the daily cycle of prayer, the seven-part Office is a contrafacta for at least four (and probably five) of its parts. Moreover, music can be recovered for the four parts of the Office, and strongly suggested for a fifth part. Because the textual alterations are semantically substantive (but metrically minimal), the Lancaster Office can both cue the reader to the presence of a known source text standing

18. See Bella Millet’s wonderful online resource on contrafacta and what she terms “paired lyrics” at http://www.soton.ac.uk/~wpwt/notes/contraf.htm.
20. Thus, the parodic and intertextual song by the band Half Man Half Biscuit, the 2005 “We Built This Village on a Trad. Arr. Tune,” from the album Achtung Bono.
21. See Ardis Butterfield, Poetry and Music in Medieval France (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), especially pt. 2, on contrafacta and “refrain-citation.” Butterfield notes: “Contrafacta composition has much in common with refrain-citation: the substitution and juxtaposition of old texts and new tunes, or of new texts and old tunes is endemic to both” (104).
22. For example, the patriotic song known to Americans as “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee,” set to the tune of “God Save the King/Queen,” neatly captures the politically contentious adaptations that contrafacta may make.
behind the current text, and also allow for the Office's performance as its own unique occasion. The kind of sophisticated polyvalent textuality common to contrafacta seen in the two versions of “Litel Wot Hit Any Mon” in Harley 2253 also operates in Royal 12.c.xii. Note, however, that the texts that stand connected to the Office are all religious texts, and do not cross divides of genre. The Office is a contrafacta of a hymn celebrating Christ’s battle with the devil, and of an antiphon and a prosa for Saint Nicholas. It is also linked to a sequence on the miracles of Saint Thomas Cantilupe, Bishop of Hereford, and lastly to another sequence that survives in three versions—for Saint Thomas Cantilupe, for Saint Ethelbert of Hereford, and for the Blessed Virgin Mary.25

Despite the Office, Thomas of Lancaster is not a saint. He was the earl of Lancaster, and one of the most powerful magnates in England before his quasi-judicial execution in 1322. The opening words of the entire manuscript, the lines that greet the reader upon first opening Royal 12.c.xii, are "Gaude thoma ducum decus lucerna lancaster qui per necem imitaris Thomam Cantuarie [Rejoice, Thomas, the glory of leaders, the light of Lancaster, you who imitates through death Thomas of Canterbury]."26 In order to make sense of Royal 12.c.xii, it is necessary to make sense of Thomas of Lancaster’s history and the complex roles he played in English politics during the reign of Edward II. It is also essential not to separate Thomas’s political history and the later politically charged contests over his canonization. The geographic spread of his cult offers evidence for Thomas’s importance to Ludlow and adjacent areas, including Hereford, not only as the leader of the Baronial opposition to Edward II and the Despensers, but as a locally venerated saint. Much like the famously troublesome Thomas Becket, Thomas of Lancaster’s legacy was not only as a challenger to royal power. When Chaucer’s pilgrims set off for Canterbury, a fourteenth-century audience was not likely to suspect them first and foremost of sedition.27 Yet, political understandings of Thomas of Lancaster have tended to overshadow other aspects of his importance in fourteenth-century England. This is not to say that

25. Page, “The Rhymed Office,” 136–38. Note that Page identifies these as source texts, which while clearly the case for the contrafacta of Fortunatus’s Easter hymn, “Pange lingua gloriosi proelium certaminis,” is potentially more complicated with the sequences for Cantilupe, as they only survive in a fifteenth-century gradual, BL, MS Harley 3965, and thus postdate Royal 12.c.xii.

26. MS Royal 12.c.xii, f. 1r; translation mine.

27. As against the hostility to Becket encouraged by Henry VIII, leading to the dismantling of his shrine and his name being scratched out of books, such as the erasure of the Feast of Saint Thomas from the calendar in the Queen Mary Psalter, London, BL, MS Royal 2.b.vii, f. 83r, a book closely contemporary (c. 1310–20) with the work of the Harley Scribe. See http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=6467&CollID=16&NStart=20207.
Thomas of Lancaster’s political activities were not connected to his popular worship, but that they can be read, like Harley 2253’s contrafacta, simultaneously rather than oppositionally. The texts of Royal 12.c.xii celebrate Thomas as a saint, and also advocate for political reform in broad, conventional, non-revolutionary ways. The following sections will trace Thomas of Lancaster’s political history and the politics of his contested canonization in order to argue for a regional, rather than a political, understanding of the interventions the Harley Scribe makes in Royal 12.c.xii.

The contrafacta that begins Royal 12.c.xii links Thomas of Lancaster to two other Saint Thomases, Becket and Cantilupe, through the simple echoes of their shared first name, in a direct comparison of the opening lines of the Office, and also in the Office’s reworking of two sequences originally composed for Cantilupe (d. 1282). The Office for Thomas adapts a triumphal hymn by the sixth-century Italian poet and composer Fortunatus, “pange linguam,” thus adding to the broad comparisons attesting to Thomas of Lancaster’s sanctity a link between Thomas and Christ.28 Like Christ, Thomas becomes a victor on the third day, “agonista fit invictus statim die tertia / dire neci est addictus, ob quod luget Anglia [On the third day he is suddenly made an unconquered champion, he is delivered to dire death, on account of which England mourns].”29 In Royal 12.c.xii, Thomas of Lancaster is explicitly situated as a political martyr, “cuius capud conculcat ur pacem ob ecclesie / et tuum detruncatur / causa pacis anglie. . . . Copiose caritatis Thoma pugil strenue / qui pro lege libertatis decertasti anglie 
. . . . O Thomas, strenuous champion of plentiful charity, who didst combat for the law of England’s liberty].”30 Yet, as seen in Chapter 2, appeals to “lege libertatis” and the charters can be formulaic, an expression of moderate hopes for reform rather than political radicalism.

Rather than opposing the sacred and the sinful, the devout and the romantic, the Office for Thomas of Lancaster in Royal 12.c.xii sees the Harley Scribe working in the midst of the intertwined discourses of politics and political sanctity in the Marches at the beginning of the fourteenth century. The Office should be read as a regional text, participating in and contributing to the local spiritual economy of the Marches—it reflects devotional prac-

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28. Fortunatus’s hymns seem to have been popular starting points for contrafacta. Another well-known hymn of his, “Vexilla regis prodeunt,” was adapted to celebrate Piers Gaveston’s execution in a version surviving in Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.9.38. The manuscript is available online with relevant bibliography: http://scriptorium.english.cam.ac.uk/manuscripts/images/index.php?ms=O.9.38&page=139.

29. MS Royal 12.c.xii, f. 1r; translation from Political Songs, 270.

30. MS Royal 12.c.xii, f. 1r; translation from Political Songs, 272.
tices specific to Ludlow and nearby Hereford. The presence of the contrafacta for Thomas at the beginning of the entire codex is significant. Royal 12.c.xii was written at different times in the Harley Scribe's career: the script of the texts range in date from c. 1316–1340. The codex itself suggests booklet-based assembly, and the manuscript can be divided into eight booklets, of which those not written by the Harley Scribe seem to be the core around which other materials were assembled. What is now the first booklet of the codex, containing the Office for Lancaster, was necessarily written after Thomas's execution 1322. Revard's paleographical comparison of the scripts of Royal 12.c.xii to the dated charters in the Harley Scribe's hand suggests the Office was likely written sometime between 1321–27. A prophecy on f. 6r adds slight evidence for the middle or end of that range.

Royal 12.c.xii was not bound at random. Although the Office for Thomas of Lancaster begins the codex, it must have been bound there 15–18 years after it was written. That is, the Office, written between 1322–27, would not have been bound in its present position until after the latest texts in the book had been written. Other items in the codex can be dated on internal evidence to 1338, and the Harley Scribe seems to have worked on the codex as late as c.1340. The Office celebrates Thomas’s political opposition to Edward II, but it also emphasizes his holiness, employing musical sequences not found outside of Hereford to celebrate his virtue. Royal 12.c.xii is a regional book that transforms Thomas into a local saint, translated not physically but textually.

The reputation of Thomas of Lancaster in 1322 was very different by 1340, when the Office was bound at the front of the codex. The implications of advocating for his canonization had changed over the intervening decades—his legacy had been appropriated and reappropriated by the crown and the opposition to the crown. The following sections will trace the history of Thomas of Lancaster and his reputation in order to argue for the Harley Scribe as the composer of the Office, work that might have been politically motivated in its inception, but was an expression of regional spirituality by the end of the period under consideration. A close consideration

32. See Revard, “Scribe and Provenance,” 60n; and Fouke, xlv–xlvi.
33. See Revard, “Scribe and Provenance,” 60n. The prophecy on f. 6r, originally dated 1325 but altered to 1326, has been used as evidence that the booklet was not completed before that date. However, the prophecy, reading “Anno mille C. ter / x bis quinto [superlinear ‘sexti’] dabit ether / vina bladum fructus, fiet pro principce luctus, / vna columna cadet populo quia cismita tradet,” need not have been written after that date, rather than before, given the future tense of the main verb “dabit,” and the unreliability of dates in prophecies more generally.
34. See Revard, “Scribe and Provenance,” 60, citing Ker, Facsimile, xxi.
of Thomas’s role in the history of Edward II’s reign, his attempts to avail himself of symbolic similarities with the earlier rebel, Simon de Montfort, and the royal attempts to appropriate Thomas as a symbol of royal power rather than baronial opposition will be set against easy generalizations. Thomas of Lancaster, the second earl of Lancaster, second earl of Leicester, and earl of Lincoln, was executed at Pontefract in 1322 after a show trial by seven judges favorable both to Edward II and to the then-exiled Despensers. The Earl was charged with crimes dating back almost ten years, ranging from plundering jewels and horses, to coming armed to parliament, to negotiating with the Scots. He was sentenced to be hanged, drawn, and beheaded for his crimes, though he was spared the first two punishments because of his royal blood. As is often the case in the pointed performance of public execution, Thomas’s crimes were only notionally connected to the reasons for his execution. Moreover, his execution by the royalist judges was staged to closely mimic the execution of Edward II’s favorite, Gaveston, some ten years earlier. Thomas was, in very literal senses as well as more broadly suggestive ways, the inheritor of much that was forfeited by the “disinherited” of the Barons’ Wars in the 1260s. His father Edmund, the son of Henry III, had received Simon de Montfort’s forfeited earldom of Leicester, and the castles and lands (though not the title) forfeited by the earl of Derby, de Montfort’s companion Robert de Ferrers. In 1267, Edmund received what


39. The earldom of Derby should have returned to Robert de Ferrers following the Dictum of Kenilworth, but various legal maneuverings prevented this. See C. H. Knowles, “The Resettle-
was essentially the entire county of Lancaster, a grant that formed the core of the dynastic inheritance that would play such a major role in English politics over the next several centuries. Thomas of Lancaster's holdings were thus primarily in the North and the Midlands, but through his wife, Alice, he also held significant lands in North Wales and areas much closer to the Marches milieu of the Harley Scribe.40

Thomas of Lancaster directly benefitted from Simon de Montfort's execution and the wages of political insurgency. Despite what might have been a fairly strong argument against emulation, at times Thomas seems to have consciously modeled himself upon Simon de Montfort. Thomas struggled with Edward II over local, national, and foreign policy throughout Edward's reign. It is important to see his opposition not as a singular program, nor as one driven by an unchanging or wholly consistent ideological vision. From 1315–18, Lancaster's opposition to Edward II centered upon the king's adherence to the Ordinances, the 1311 collection of 41 grievances-turned-injunctions that had been forced upon Edward II by the Ordainers (the chief of the Ordainers was Thomas's father-in-law, Henry de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln). The Ordinances, primarily designed to push the much-hated Piers Gaveston firmly out of the king's retinue, also addressed a wide variety of complaints, including the deeply troubling growth of prises (essentially the arbitrary seizure of goods in the king's name). Prises were so unpopular throughout the kingdom that the very wording of the Ordinances expressed anxiety that their abuse might provoke popular revolt, suggesting the country was "upon the point of rising on account of oppressions, prises and destructions."41

The Ordinances had in part mirrored the Provisions of Oxford forced upon Henry III by Simon de Montfort in 1258. As Maddicott notes: "We are deal-

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40. One curious connection is to be found in Harley 273, the third book by the Harley Scribe. There, he copies a text by Robert Grosseteste, Les Reules Seynt Roberd, a text originally composed for the Countess of Lincoln (Margaret de Lacy, d. 1266), whose grandson was Henry de Lacy, third earl of Lincoln (d. 1311). Henry's daughter Alice would marry Thomas of Lancaster, and thus be suo jure Countess of Lincoln, and Countess of Lancaster and Leicester. Alice held the great lordship of Denbigh until threatened by the Despensers following Thomas's death in 1322. Les Reules also appear in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Fairfax 24, which contains the unique copy of "La plente par entre mis sire Henry de Lacy e sire Wauter de Bybelesworth pur la croiserie en la terre seint," a humorous debate poem between de Lacy and Bibbesworth. See Ruth Dean, with Maureen Boulton, Anglo-Norman Literature: A Guide to Texts and Manuscripts, ANTS Occasional Publications 3 (London: Nuffield Press, 1999), 84 and 215. Henry de Lacy commissioned the so-called Petit Brut that survives in MS Harley 902 (incorrectly identified in the ODNB as Harley 907).

41. Maddicott, Thomas of Lancaster, 107, quoting Statutes of the Realm, i.157, 159. The Ordinances were not revoked until after Thomas of Lancaster's execution, in the 1322 Statute of York.
ing with men who knew their history and were rooted in it . . . it was not surprising that Lancaster should view himself as another Montfort. The parallels were too obvious to be disregarded.”

In the early 1320s, Lancaster’s opposition shifted from upholding the Ordinances, particularly those that had been articulated with regards to Gaveston and the limitations of royal power, to a position catalyzed by the Despensers’ influence over the king. In 1321, as in the 1260s, a collection of barons set themselves in military opposition to the king. Politics are always local as well as national, and the problems of the Marches were transformed into a contest waged throughout the country. The baronial party included the Earl of Hereford and a number of lords from the Welsh Marches, all of whom were particularly threatened by the Despensers’ challenges to the long-held traditions of inheritance in the Marches. Lancaster assumed the leadership of the revolt by May 1321. Whereas more broadly political concerns had anchored Thomas’s earlier opposition, in 1321 Thomas was likely driven in part by the Despensers’ rise to power and their problematic influence over Edward II. His condemnation in 1321 focused on the “evil counsellors” surrounding the king. Like the earlier revolt of Simon de Montfort, the Earl’s opposition failed. He was largely abandoned by his supporters before being captured at the battle of Boroughbridge, in Yorkshire. Thomas was beheaded on 22 March 1322, and interred in the Cluniac Priory of Pontefract.

Thomas followed the pattern set by de Montfort in death as in his life: a devotional cult promptly grew around Thomas’s remains in Pontefract. In order to make sense of why the Harley Scribe, working 150 miles away from Pontefract in Ludlow, wrote the Office in Royal 12.c.xii, it is important to trace the cult’s early popularity, particularly outside of the North. A number of miracles were quickly associated with his tomb, recalling those at Simon de Montfort’s place of death at Evesham sixty years earlier. Unlike Simon de Montfort’s cult, however, Thomas’s seems to have spread widely and quickly. Pilgrim badges, illuminated manuscripts, and wall paintings honoring the Earl all survive—the very heterogeneity of the evidence suggests something of the strength of the cult’s support. For a man who was not a saint, he occasioned significant quantities of devotional material in

his honor. In addition to the Office in Royal 12.c.xii, there are three Suffrage prayers (prayers pleading for the intercession of a saint) addressed to Lancaster, surviving in Baltimore, Walters Art Museum MS W.105, Cambridge, Clare College, MS 6, and Dallas, Bridwell Library, MS 13. A series of stylistically distinct images accompany the Suffrage prayer in the recently described Bridwell MS 13, the “Sellers Hours,” suggesting the cult had crossed the Channel quickly, as it was produced in St Omer c. 1325. In addition to the illuminations in Bridwell MS 13, Thomas is also visually depicted in the well-known and gloriously decorated Luttrell Psalter (London, BL, MS Additional 42130) and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 321, both books from Lincolnshire. A wall-painting, unintentionally preserved through Reformation-era whitewashing, survives in the church of St Peter ad Vincula, in South Newington, Oxfordshire. The painting draws on the same political resonances between Thomas Becket and Thomas Lancaster that are found in the Royal 12.c.xii Office, and depicts the executions of both Saint Thomas Becket and Thomas of Lancaster. The wall paintings were probably composed c. 1326. Lastly, two pilgrimage objects connected to Lancaster’s cult are housed at the British Museum. One is a more conventional pilgrim badge and the other is a larger (165 x 127mm) devotional plaque honoring Lancaster and depicting his vita. In 2008, still another object was uncovered at an archaeological dig at Riverbank House and is now housed in the Museum of London. From Pontefract, to Ludlow, to Oxford, to London, to St Omer, in humble lead pilgrim badges and simple


48. McQuillen, “Who Was St. Thomas?” 2. The localization is partly an art historical conclusion, based on comparisons with the illuminations in New York, The Morgan Library, Morgan MS M. 754 and London, BL, MS Additional 36685, the two parts of a single Book of Hours. McQuillen notes of Bridwell MS 13: “The manuscript’s production in a French workshop . . . offers important evidence that the cult was more widespread than previously assumed” (12).


verses to illuminated books of hours, from wall paintings to elaborate musical prayer cycles, Thomas of Lancaster was worshipped and celebrated as a saint.

As seen in Chapter 2, relics are an essential part of authorizing sainthood, and require narratives to situate those objects as sanctified. Through the work of writers and artists such as the Harley Scribe, the cult of Thomas of Lancaster spread throughout England within months of his death, and continued to grow throughout the 1320s and 1330s before waning, though not disappearing. The cult underwent something of a revival at the beginning of the fifteenth century as part of Lancastrian propaganda. Although his relics do not seem to have been widely spread (or, perhaps more accurately, were not always well recorded), Lancaster’s hat survived at Pontefract until the Dissolution, where it was held to be an efficient cure against headaches. His belt, also at Pontefract, was thought to be effective for women during labor.  

Durham Cathedral held a rosary that was purportedly his. Closer to the Harley Scribe is a note added to a cartulary from St Guthlac’s Priory (a dependent priory of Gloucester Cathedral, the Priory is situated in Hereford), now Oxford, Balliol College MS 271. The note, probably dated to 1328, records receipt by the priory of 8s.4d. from “offerings of visitors at the image of Thomas of Lancaster in St. Peter’s church, Hereford.” The sums are small compared to those generated for Hereford by the 1320 canonization of Thomas Cantilupe. As they had likely fallen off in the years since Thomas of Lancaster’s death, however, they suggest there remained devotional interest in Thomas. More broadly, the presence of at least a mildly flourishing cult of Thomas of Lancaster as late as 1328 is significant. The Harley Scribe wrote local texts in local books—Harley 2253 includes three saints’ lives in his hand, those of Saints Ethelbert (jointly, the patron saint of Hereford  

51. See Maddicott, Thomas of Lancaster, 329. See also the account of the chapel’s foundation in 1361 after blood flowed from the Pontefract tomb in 1359, Victoria County History of York, vol. 3: “His body was interred in 1322 in the priory church near the high altar. Many miracles were said to have been wrought at his shrine, and a chantry chapel was afterwards founded to the memory of ‘Saint’ Thomas. . . . This chapel was built c. 1361 on the top of the hill where the execution took place. In 1359 blood was said to have been flowing from the tomb of the martyred earl, his belt was reported to give assistance to women in child-bearing, and his hat to cure pains in the head.” http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=36255#n30.


Cathedral), Etfrid of Leominster, and Wistan of Wistanstow. Leominster is roughly eleven miles south of Ludlow, and Wistanstow about ten miles to the northwest. The note in the cartulary from St Guthlac’s priory attests to Thomas of Lancaster having joined the other three Herefordshire saints as local.

Other local shrines to Thomas of Lancaster were implicated in the politics of the country. There seem to have been several instances where offerings were left at informal or impromptu shrines in honor of Thomas. One such shrine neatly captures the extent, and limits, of Thomas’s popular veneration. Thomas himself had donated a “wooden tablet” to St. Paul’s Cathedral in 1311, to celebrate the Ordinances. After Thomas’s execution, St Paul’s became a locus of devotion, and at some point a statue of Lancaster was placed near the plaque. The statue and plaque became popular objects of devotion, and a number of miracles were claimed as having occurred near the plaque by the “saint.” Thomas of Lancaster’s legacy was still, in 1323, primarily political. Edward II wrote to the bishop of London in June 1323, harshly condemning those “foolish pilgrims, without authorization from the Roman Church, [who] venerate and worship this tablet as though it were a holy thing and believe that it works miracles . . . in disgrace to the whole church.” Edward II’s opposition to the cult and his sense of the challenges the cult posed to his authority (here couched as a challenge to papal authority) is an obvious response to a dead-and-buried political opponent. Yet, as the cult became more widely distributed and the years passed from Thomas’s execution, his quasi-sanctification ceased to signify solely, or even primarily, a politics of opposition. His relics were good against headaches and pain in childbirth, neither of which would concern Edward II. By the end of Edward II’s reign, Thomas was not merely a symbol of opposition to the king or the Ordinances.

The political implications of the Harley Scribe writing the Office a few years after Thomas’s death, therefore, are not as clear-cut as they might seem. It is important to resist an oversimplification of the politics of the era into a binary of “royal” and “baronial.” As the frequent reissues of Magna Carta first symbolized rather more than they stated, and then symbolized rather less than they had done originally, so too the valences of Thomas’s reputation: his cult was used to advocate not a formal program of opposition to the crown,

but rather a more general and generalized case for “good governance” and reasonable rule. Indeed, the decoupling of Thomas of Lancaster’s popular cult from any particular political program is seen most clearly in the attempts made to deploy his reputation by Edward II’s successors. By 1327, Isabella and Mortimer had captured Edward II. The pair made a number of efforts to increase their support among those who had fallen out with Edward II. As one means to solidify and legitimate their own seizure of power, they petitioned the pope for Thomas of Lancaster’s canonization, once in 1327 and again in 1330.56 The first letter to the pope was written a mere two days after Edward III’s coronation, suggesting something of the perceived urgency, and utility, of the project.57 The second set of letters was sent in Edward III’s name in March 1330, shortly before Isabella and Mortimer lost power.58 Embracing the popular cult of a former opponent was a shift from past practices—Henry III had moved to suppress the cult and the miracles of Simon de Montfort, and Edward II had attempted to suppress the growth of Lancaster’s cult in Pontefract and in London. Isabella and Mortimer, seeing an opportunity to align themselves with both popular devotional sentiment and a mild sense of political opposition, found publicly supporting Thomas of Lancaster’s prospective canonization to be politically useful. The implications of the Office had changed significantly between its composition in the early 1320s, and its being bound to open Royal 12.c.xii before 1340.

Lancaster’s cult cannot be reduced to any particular political program.59 Once Thomas’s popularity was available for appropriation, it became convenient symbolic currency. Lifting a page from his mother’s playbook, Edward III also petitioned the pope for Lancaster’s canonization shortly after claiming power in April 1331. Edward III’s tactics suggest that Lancaster had already become a politically potent but also a safely redeployable symbol of “good counsel” and “good rule.” Between 1325 and 1327, the period during


58. See Echerd, “Canonization and Politics,” where he notes the letter emphasizes “the impressive number of miracles being worked at his tomb and the great throngs of pilgrims which flocked to Pontefract as a result” (138). The focus on Lancaster’s cult as a religious rather than a political program is notable.

59. See Echerd, “Canonization and Politics,” who observes: “It is not surprising that a third drive to secure Thomas of Lancaster’s canonization was mounted . . . within a few months after Mortimer’s fall. . . . Just as in the letter of 1330, there is nothing said about Lancaster’s political career, and again the stress is on Thomas as a miracle-worker rather than as a defender of the English constitution” (149).
which the Royal 12.c.xii Office was written, and the assembly of the entire
codex, a process completed as late as 1340, English politics were—unsur-
prisingly—complicated. While the details may have changed radically (pre-
and post-Isabella and Mortimer, for example), the political contests over the
nature and processes of power, and the extent and limits of royal power, were
not dissimilar throughout the Middle Ages. Many critics have attempted to
connect the Office for Thomas of Lancaster with the political sympathies of
the Harley Scribe or his employers, as if such affiliations were unchanging.60
More significant for the Harley Scribe is understanding the ways in which
the Office participates in the traditions of Ludlow, Herefordshire, and the
Marches more generally. The Office celebrates a local saint, and calls for
good governance, good counsel, and integrity as important to England’s laws
and politics.

Royal 12.c.xii is a local book, embedded in the spiritual and financial
economies of the region, and engaged in the history of that region over sev-
eral decades.61 The Harley Scribe’s work on the texts of Royal 12.c.xii is best
understood when read in those contexts. And it is in writing the history of
the region that we see the Harley Scribe as the scribal author of another text
in Royal 12.c.xii, the Short Chronicle, a short historiographical text in Middle
English. The Harley Scribe remodeled and reimagined his source text(s) in
ways deeply connected to the local and regional concerns manifested in the
Office. The following section will interrogate the unique version of the Short
Chronicle preserved in Royal 12.c.xii as an example of scribal authorship.
It will consider first the challenges to conventional editorial theory posed
by mutable and mobile texts such as the Short Chronicle, and then argue
for vernacular historiography as a particular locus of scribal authorship. In
doing so, it will also challenge the generic boundaries between history writ-
ing and romance, between list-making and literature, and between scribes
and authors.

Thomas of Lancaster’s death recalled Simon de Montfort’s, but it also
recalled that of Edward II’s favorite Piers Gaveston in 1312. The polysemy
should remind us of the dangers of reading history as anything but literature.
It is in this fluid historiographical, visual, cultural, and political context that
the Short Chronicle in Royal 12.c.xii exists, both at the time of its writing,

60. The long period of time during which the book was written and assembled should mili-
tate against attempts to place the Harley Scribe in a household or retinue solely on the basis of
their support for Thomas of Lancaster’s political agenda.
61. Page, “The Rhymed Office,” states: “The evidence points strongly to the diocese of Her-
eford. The three sequences beginning Summi regis in honore do not appear, as far as I am aware,
outside of books conforming to the use of Hereford” (138).
c.1316–17, and when it was incorporated into the codex before 1340. For a short Middle English text, the *Short Chronicle* poses complicated textual issues, resisting many of the editorial assumptions considered in Chapter 1. Its complexities provide significant insight to how scribes engaged with their textual models, and offers evidence for nonreplicative forms of copying, including, ultimately, authorship. An initial difficulty stems from talking about “the” *Short Chronicle* at all—the different versions, such as they are, are clearly connected, yet also clearly distinct. The text is recognizably history writing, though such a generic classification says little about the text’s relationship to the historical: Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum* seems to delight in being utterly un-historical history writing. The wide variation among the different texts of the *Short Chronicle* does not preclude their identification as historiography, inasmuch as they include miracles, wonders, and other elements of saints’ lives, rudderless boats and giants and the stuff of romance, and other narrative conventions of other genres of medieval texts. The poem narrates the history of the island of Britain, divided into the three conventional periods of *translatio imperii* as constructed by insular historiography: legendary British history (Galfridian), Anglo-Saxon history (derived from Bede and his twelfth-century successors, particularly Henry of Huntingdon), and post-Conquest history. The *Short Chronicle* offers short descriptions of kings in a relentlessly seamless sequence. Sometimes, the narrative is so spare as to provide only a king’s name, the length of his reign, and where he is buried. At times, however, the bare narrative becomes richer and more complex. For lack of a better term, narrative “episodes” of varying length offer anecdotes of historiographical, hagiographical, geographical, and simply general interest.

The differences between the versions of the *Short Chronicle*, particularly those amongst narrative episodes, both create and frustrate a sense of there being “a” text shared by all surviving manuscripts. The *Short Chronicle* is, in fact, a set of distinct and yet interrelated texts. The texts were written between 1280 and the middle of the fifteenth century, and the variations between texts challenge some key assumptions made both in the critical editorial project, and also resist attempts to distinguish the scribal from the authorial. Setting aside the unique version in Royal 12.c.xii for the moment, the *Short Chronicle* as a group of interrelated texts survives in five manuscripts and three fragments.62 In addition to Royal 12.c.xii and MS Advocates

62. Note that David Burnley and Alison Wiggins make two errors in the notes to the *Short Chronicle* in the Auchinleck facsimile available online (http://auchinleck.nls.uk/mss/heads/smc_head.html). They incorrectly conflate London, BL, MS Cotton Caligula A.xi with London, BL, MS Cotton Caligula A.ix, which contains Lajamon’s *Brut*, but not a fragment of the *Short Chroni-
19.2.1 (the Auchinleck manuscript), “complete” texts of the Short Chronicle (those that do not present any evident loss) survive in London, BL, MS Additional 19677, and CUL, MSS Dd.xiv.2 and Ff.v.48. Fragmentary versions survive in Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson Poet. 145, BL, MS Cotton Caligula A.xi, and the recently discovered Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, MS M199.63 In date, they range from the earliest fragment, a strip bound into a manuscript of the Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester in Cotton Caligula A.xi, dated by Ralph Hanna to c. 1280, to the recently discovered fragment BPH M199, a late-sixteenth- or early-seventeenth-century copy.64 Royal 12.c.xii and the Auchinleck copy of the Short Chronicle date to the first

63. See An Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle, ed. Ewald Zettl, EETS OS 196 (London: Oxford University Press, 1935); The Abridged English Metrical Brut, ed. U. O'Farrell-Tate; and Peter Grund, “A Previously Unrecorded Fragment of the Middle English Short Metrical Chronicle in Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica M199,” English Studies 87 (2006): 277–93. Line numbers will be cited by specifying manuscript by sigil (as employed by Zettl, plus M, to designate the BPH fragment) and line number. Royal 12.c.xii will be quoted from my transcriptions of the manuscript, or from the edition by O’Farrell-Tate, and cited accordingly. The BPH fragment will be quoted using Grund’s line numbers. All other quotations will employ Zettl’s line numberings but include a manuscript sigil to indicate which text of the Short Chronicle is being quoted.

64. See Ralph Hanna, “Reconsidering the Auchinleck Manuscript,” in New Directions in Later Medieval Manuscript Studies: Essays from the 1998 Harvard Conference, ed. Derek Pearsall (York: York Medieval Press, 2000), 91–102; and Grund, “Previously Unrecorded Fragment,” 278. It is striking that the strip in MS Cotton Caligula A.xi and the text in MS BPH M199 begin at precisely the same place. Both describe the making of the hot baths at Bath by the British king Bladud. The Cotton Caligula A.xi fragment, forty-seven lines in a single column, begins at line B.151 (“After þe kyng Lud / Regned his sone Bladud”) and is bound before a very similar passage describing the origins of the baths in the Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester. The BPH MS199 fragment also begins at B.151 but is almost twice as long as the Caligula fragment. According to Grund’s collation of the fragment, “it does not share any unique readings with . . . C [Caligula]” (285) and “cannot derive from any one of the extant manuscripts exclusively” (288). The interest expressed by BPH M199 likely reflects the alchemical conceits of the text, a concern of the BPH manuscript more generally. An interest in the alchemical may well also explain why the Cotton Caligula fragment was separated from what one presumes to have been a complete text (written in 1280 in a formal book hand, the fragment was unlikely to have been an excerpt). MS Cotton Caligula A.xi is a volume bound by Robert Cotton, and the second part of the codex, a later text of Piers Plowman, is not connected to the Chronicle in the first part of the volume. It is possible the strip was bound in when the two parts of the manuscript were brought together in Cotton’s collection. There are notes in the hand of John Stow (d. 1605) on f.164".
half of the fourteenth century, while the two CUL manuscripts can be dated to the middle of the fifteenth century.

Because of the text’s brevity, the imagined audience for the Short Chronicle has most typically been an ignorant one. What little attention has been paid to the text has speculated about the purpose and audience of the text, without fully considering the surviving paleographical and codicological evidence of the text’s first readers: the scribes who wrote it. Both Cambridge manuscripts can be dated and localized quite specifically, and those localizations offer previously unconsidered evidence for the poem’s reception. CUL MS Ff.v.48 was written by Gilbert Pilkington, who was ordained as a subdeacon, deacon, and a secular priest in the diocese of Lichfield between 1463 and 1465.65 CUL MS Dd.xiv.2 was written by a wealthy Oxford brewer, Nicholas Bishop.66 In a colophon to the codex in his hand, Bishop dates the book to 1432.67 The lives and work of these two men argue against the suggestions of previous critics that the text’s purpose was “to interest, and so to inform, the unlearned.”68 More charitably, this ignorance has been constructed as a function of an audience’s youth or more general lack of education. Understanding the text as primarily pedagogical, however, insidiously constructs the text as too simplistic for learned adults. Such assessments devalue Middle English at the beginning of the fourteenth century, implying it was not a viable vernacular in which sophisticated literary and intellectual composition might take place.69 For example, the Short Chronicle fragments


68. Quoted in O’Farrell-Tate, Abridged Brut, 12. See also Zettl, Short Chronicle, cxxx.

69. See Revard, “Scribe and Provenance”; and A. G. Rigg, A Book of British Kings, 1200 B.C.–1399 A.D.: Edited from British Library MSS Harley 3680, Cotton Claudius D.vii, and Harley 1808 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2000), a text the editor considers to be mnemonic verses and versified redactions of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s history, seen primarily as a “pedagogical tool” (3), although interestingly accompanied by prose commentaries, suggesting a higher order of pedagogy than one might first presume.
in Rawlinson Poet. 145 are accompanied by Latin annotations, which argue against the text as by or for the unlearned. More recent critical opinion has shifted from Turville-Petre's description of the Auchinleck Short Chronicle as a “wretched little work.” For example, the editor of the Royal 12.c.xii text suggests that the Short Chronicle “be considered on its own terms, instead of being examined in terms of expectations of ‘romance’ writing and ‘historical’ writing.” What those terms might be is not entirely clear. This is not to say the Short Chronicle is great poetry, nor that it is fundamentally innovative as history writing. But it was interesting enough to occupy the time and work of at least seven medieval scribes. It is an unconsidered critical reflex to dismiss those seven scribes as primarily desiring to entertain themselves, and thus to imply all seven were ignorant of literary merit, historiographical convention, or history itself.

Gilbert Pilkington, the scribe and owner of CUL MS Ff.v.48, copied a wide variety of texts in the book, including Mirk's Instructions for the Parish Priest, the Northern Passion, a number of other Middle English items in prose and verse, and two short Latin texts (one a charm, and the other a vatic text). Pilkington may not have been university-educated—there is no record of him at either Oxford or Cambridge—but neither his ecclesiastical background nor his collection suggest someone who would struggle to remember the sequence of post-Conquest kings. Given his vigorous and highly textualized engagement with devotional texts, and his training as a secular priest, Pilkington was not someone who might merely have found the Short Chronicle a pleasing rhyme to help commit history to memory. He may have mediated such a function for others, of course, but pedagogy cannot have been the text’s only purpose.

Nicholas Bishop, the Oxford brewer, was also quite sophisticated in his tastes. The book in his hand, CUL MS Dd.xiv.2, contains only two Middle English pieces, both of which recount his legal struggles with Oseney Abbey. The other materials in his hand include extensive copying from a now-lost version of the cartulary of Eynsham Abbey and a number of other Latin texts related to Oseney and Oxford. Bishop's book engages with the fundamen-
tally historicized and textualized nature of English law, particularly property law and its historical and documentary requirements.\textsuperscript{74} Not only did Bishop find the \textit{Short Chronicle} of interest while copying records to address the various legal issues he confronted, but he added to the text. Bishop extended the \textit{Short Chronicle} in verse up to the reign of Henry VI, and then in rather fragmentary prose to c. 1431. Again, the \textit{Short Chronicle} may be neither exquisite poetry nor wholly accurate history, but to dismiss it as a rhyme for children or the ignorant is to ignore the evidence that survives. The Harley Scribe single-handedly preserved an important collection of Middle English verse of emphatically high literary quality. He found it worth his time to copy the \textit{Short Chronicle}, and, as I will argue below, to rewrite and to write parts of it. The \textit{Short Chronicle} may have been used to instruct parishioners or young members of a wealthy household, but it also may have been used to help construct a historical narrative as part of Bishop’s lawsuits and legal claims. Regardless, the poem is not wholly devoid of subtlety, substance, or sophistication.

There is something innate to the poem that poses fundamental challenges to the rigorous expectations of traditional editorial practices. Editing privileges either the manuscript or the author. In the latter scenario, editors seek to reconstruct the text of the earliest archetype for all surviving versions, a single text standing behind all surviving instances. As seen in Chapter 1, many of the assumptions of stemmatic editing rely upon unreliable expectations for medieval texts—scribes did not always attempt to copy their exemplars. The \textit{Short Chronicle} demonstrates a series of scribal activities that are quite clearly not copying, but also not simply (or simplistically) “authorship.” The poem was described by the original \textit{Manual of Writings in Middle English} as “in five recensions in five MSS.”\textsuperscript{75} The one-to-one correspondence of manuscripts to versions points to some of the difficulties posed by a work that varies from 900 lines to almost 2400 lines, and ends with prayers for two, and possibly three, different kings of England. The text, however it is described, raises complicated questions about composition, circulation, and

\textsuperscript{74} See Ralph Hanna, \textit{London Literature, 1300–1380} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), chap. 2.

\textsuperscript{75} See J. E. Wells, \textit{A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050–1400} (New Haven, CT: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1926): 198; and E. D. Kennedy, \textit{Chronicles and Other Historical Writing}, vol. 8 of \textit{A Manual of Writings in Middle English, 1050–1500}, ed. A. E. Hartung (Hamden, CT: Archon Books for the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1989), which describes the text as “five manuscripts that represent approximately complete redactions” (2622).
medieval authorship. Particularly because the poem has hitherto been little valued as either history writing or poetry, those questions prove more amenable to less conventional answers.

The terms “copy” and “manuscript” were shown in Chapter 1 to be insufficiently nuanced to take in the varieties of medieval practice. So, too, the traditional terminology of textual scholarship is less useful when applied to texts such as the Short Chronicle. “Version,” “recension,” and “redaction” all suggest that there is some original text, singular and knowable, that stands behind all other texts. Moreover, however complex the chains of descent imagined may be, the terms imply a single source from which all other instances derive. As Elizabeth Bryan has noted, there are further difficulties of vocabulary when comparing the “same” text found in different manuscripts. Stating that a text has or does not have a passage relies upon a logic of absolutes. There can be an unconscious narrativization from “has” and “doesn’t have” to presence and absence, and from there to “added” or “lost.” The language of supplement and decrement still presupposes a single and fixed textual archetype. In discussing texts both distinct and connected, the critic teeters at the moralizing edge of the traditional language of manuscript studies and textual criticism, and its “good” readings and “bad” manuscripts. Bryan articulates her own critical dilemma to find a terminology that could address the very different—but clearly connected—texts preserved in the two manuscripts of Laȝamon’s Brut:

Instead of saying “The Otho C.xiii manuscript omits a line contained in Caligula A.ix” or “Otho substitutes a word with French etymology for a word with English etymology”—which would imply that Otho was directly derivative from Caligula, and it is not—I substituted phrases like “Otho does not contain a line that Caligula does contain.”

The language surrounding scribal error and accuracy presumes static and singular exemplars, and a scribe engaged in replicative or duplicative copying. This narrative of textual transmission, which entails linear temporal progression and geographic distribution, fits poorly with vernacular historiography. Texts exist in multiple manuscripts that are not simply derived from one another, or from a single, stable antecedent.

76. See Elizabeth Bryan, Collaborative Meaning in Medieval Scribal Culture: The Otho Layamon (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), xii. See also Lauryn Mayer, Worlds Made Flesh: Reading Medieval Manuscript Culture (New York: Routledge, 2004), who offers a different vocabulary to discuss the Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester, which she refers to (confusingly) as the Metrical Chronicle.
Observing that the *Short Chronicle* written by the Harley Scribe in Royal 12.c.xii does not contain text that another manuscript of the *Short Chronicle* does contain, while free of unintended narrativization, does not necessarily allow for explanation past that simple description. That is, on the face of it, the text absent from Royal 12.c.xii and present in another manuscript may indicate that the Harley Scribe has “omitted” some text, whether through mechanical error or through more considered scribal intervention. Alternatively, his exemplar might not have possessed the text. In that scenario, textual omission becomes instead the Harley Scribe engaging in accurate replicative copying. The mechanical reproduction of an exemplar by medieval scribes cannot be assumed as axiomatic. Even the narrative suggested by “generations” of texts, copied and read and recopied by medieval scribes, may reflect the temporalizing narrative logic of biological reproduction that we impose upon manuscripts. Some manuscripts of the *Short Chronicle* are quite clearly unique versions. Whatever the connections between these versions, they are not explained by straightforward models of textual transmission. At the same time, other manuscripts of the *Short Chronicle* contain texts more similar than different. All manuscripts of the *Short Chronicle* contain at least some text in common. Inasmuch as they are *sui generis* medieval artifacts, all manuscripts contain different texts. But, for the *Short Chronicle*, it is disingenuous to note their differences without acknowledging that the manuscripts also preserve connected texts. Particularly for two textually close manuscripts (CUL MS Dd.xiv.2 and BL MS Additional 19677), it seems fairly evident that they are both textually descended from some type of “original” archetype in a more traditional model of textual transmission. At the same time, the work of the Harley Scribe in Royal 12.c.xii and Scribe 1 of the Auchinleck manuscript suggest textual transmission in ways that are anything but traditional.

Chapter 2 argued for the ways in which historiographical literature was particularly susceptible to rewriting and redirection within the broad contours of a textual tradition. The *Short Chronicle*, for all the difficulties it poses to critics who reject it as either literature or history, is nonetheless instantly recognizable as insular historiography. Though its specific textual perfor-

77. Thus Zettel’s sense that the “original version . . . cannot have had more than about 900 lines of metre at the most” (*Short Chronicle*, cxxix). In his review of Zettel’s edition, Ekwall discerns a still smaller core, in which the pre-Conquest entries resembled the post-Conquest entries for brevity, “The whole chronicle will have filled about 250 lines, that is some six lines to each of the 40 or so kings enumerated.” E. Ekwall, *English Studies* 19 (1937): 220. Note the imperative by both scholars to find the “original” text. Addressing the text’s initial extent rather than length, Hanna suggests that, given his redating of the fragment in Cotton Caligula A.xi, the “original” may have extended only to the reign of Henry III. See also O’Farrell-Tate, *Abridged Brut*, 18.
mance of genre may be uncomfortably vague, its participation in the discourses of history writing in England at the close of the thirteenth century is not at all uncertain. After the great Latin historiographical texts of the twelfth century, in particular Geoffrey of Monmouth, Henry of Huntingdon, and William of Malmesbury, much history writing was composed in the vernaculars in the course of the thirteenth century, particularly by the end of the century. Shorter texts proliferated in the place of longer texts. Increasingly, texts such as the Anglo-Norman prose *Brut* and *Li Rei de Engletere* appeared in numerous manuscripts, evidence of their rapid circulation and quickly accrued popularity. The *Short Chronicle* is part of the larger shift to a more heterogeneous corpus of history writing in the second half of the thirteenth century.

Many medieval texts exhibit varying degrees of textual mobility in unproblematic fashion. Lyrics, in particular, are often found to be copied and recopied with additional verses or altered lines, something neatly captured in the four lines of “Earth upon earth” the Harley Scribe copied in Harley 2253. This lyric survives in at least three versions in almost forty manuscripts, ranging from only a few lines to over eighty lines. In their brevity they resist many of the processes of conventional editing, but their brevity also makes it possible simply to print multiple versions alongside each other, and be done with the matter. The *Short Chronicle*, at over 900 lines, is long enough to be edited, as witnessed by the many attempts to do so in the past one hundred years. At the same time, however, there is clearly something unsatisfying, because unsuccessful, in those repeated attempts. Indeed, those aspects of the *Short Chronicle* that resist editing are those that enabled medieval scribes (including the Harley Scribe) to recognize the text as modular and flexible, as amenable to excerpting and to more interventionist engagement, including correction, emendation, and substantive rewriting. That is, the *Short Chronicle* was not subject to, but rather was an occasion for composition, and editorial practices predicated upon “copying” cannot accommodate its textual mobility.

A sense of the textual variation of the *Short Chronicle* can be seen in comparison with the Anglo-Norman text *Li Rei de Engletere* (hereafter *Li Rei*), a short prose history that extends in its most common form from the ninth-century Anglo-Saxon king Ecgberht to Henry III. One section of *Li Rei* likely derives from the *Gesta regum* of William of Malmesbury: a list of the shires of

78. See Sharon K. Goetz, “Textual Portability and Its Uses in England, ca. 1250–1330” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2006), chap. 3. I am grateful to Sharon Goetz for discussions about her work, as well as on textual mobility and English historiography.

79. See Harley 2253, f. 59r. See also *IMEV*, 703, 704, 705, 3939, 3940, and 3985.
England, often accompanied by a list of the bishoprics of the island. Versions of this list survive in roughly comparable forms in Latin, Anglo-Norman, and Middle English histories. This list, a section of longer (though often still quite short) histories, is itself sometimes found on its own. Its separate circulation is instructive, attesting to the episode’s textual mobility and its resistance to conventional editing. As the following quotations demonstrate, it can be extremely difficult to formulate a decisive description of the connections between the Anglo-Norman prose “Shiring” found in London, BL, MS Cotton Caligula A.ix:


and the *Short Chronicle* account found with some variation in most of its manuscripts:

Suþþe anon sone & swiþe
Was Engelond idelyd afyue
To fyue kynges treuwelich . . .
Þe kyng þat was of Merkene riche
Nas þer non to hym iliche
He hadde Gloucestreschire Pynnocschire
Wircestreschire Warwicschire
Staffordschire Derbischire
Chestreschire Schropschire
Aþ þe March Herefordschire
Oxinfordschire Hontyngdoneschire
Hertfordschire Bokynhamschire.

Whether in Anglo-Norman prose or Middle English verse, a list of the counties and bishoprics of England needs no singular textual antecedent. Moreover, the list does not require specialized, local historical knowledge to

recreate or to modify. Such moments pose a particular difficulty for the textual critic: the list-making in which both texts engage is evidence neither for textual replication or traditional copying, nor for scribal innovation or composition. This is not to say that such lists are inconsequential; the imposition of political and ecclesiastical frameworks upon the geography of the island accomplished by the Shiring is an enormously important moment in English history writing. Taken in isolation, however, the function the list performs as part of larger texts is lost. Within the shared textual vocabulary of the insular historiographical tradition, the implications and accomplishments of any particular textual moment are less visible when extracted and situated alongside comparable textual moments. Their multiplicity and existence across several texts can dilute their perceived importance.

It is all too easy to skim over lists of counties and bishoprics in Middle English. In the passage quoted above, all manuscripts of the *Short Chronicle* except for Royal 12.c.xii assign a number of counties to the King of the March/Mercia, including the slightly less well-known county of “Pynnocshire.” Zettl unhelpfully glosses this in his index as “Pinnok and district, in Glouces tershire,” without adding further comment as to why it might be in a list of counties ruled by the King of the March/Mercia. Although rhyming on “-shire” can hardly have posed serious difficulty to anyone living in England, let alone a scribe, Pinnockshire’s improbable appearance in four manuscripts suggests that its appearance may well have occurred in the common core of shared materials that constitute the *Short Chronicle*. That is, the place name was likely a feature of the earliest text upon which subsequent alteration, revision, and expansion took place. Although this may describe when it

84. The “Shiring” employs a variant of Henry of Huntingdon’s Heptarchy, dividing the island amongst the kings of Kent, Wessex, Mercia, East Anglia, and Northumbria. There seems to be some slippage between “Merce,” indicating Anglo-Saxon Mercia, and “march(e),” meaning Anglo-Saxon Mercia, or the Welsh Marches. See MED “Merce” and “march(e),” and note the conflation in the *Chronicle* of Robert of Gloucester: “Þe kyng of þe march þulke time hadde wel þe beste / Muchedel of engelond þe on half al bi weste / Wircestressire & warewik & also of gloucestre [and Worcestershire, Cheshire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Herefordshire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, and Nottinghamshire] . . . Al þis was zwile iclped þe march of walis” (Robert of Gloucester, *Chronicle*, 91–93, 110; emphasis mine). The potential polysemy continued upon Roger Mortimer’s creation as the first Earl of March in 1328.

85. *Short Chronicle*, 161. In the glossary, he does record that MSS BFD read “Pynnocschire” and MS A “Pinokschire.”

86. Interestingly, Pinnockshire also appears in the Anglo-Norman text found in CUL MS Gg.i.1, a text long recognized as closely connected to the *Short Chronicle*, although subject to much debate as to which direction the connection points. The text is prose, and thus Pinnockshire appears in a nonrhyming location, but again, this is insufficient evidence to demonstrate
entered the textual tradition, it does not explain its presence amongst the other, legitimate counties of Mercia or the Marches. The following section will argue to localize the composition of the earliest version of the *Short Chronicle* to Pinnockshire or very nearby, situate it in a regional tradition of vernacular history writing in the Marches in the second half of the thirteenth century, and describe the Harley Scribe’s response to a local text as that of a writer of local history.

Pinnockshire is not on modern maps, but “was in Temple Guiting and Didbrook,” about ten miles south of Evesham, the site of Simon de Montfort’s defeat. First found in the Great Domesday Book as “pignocisire,” Pinnockshire was a modest place, a fee-farm granted (for an annual rent) by Henry III to the Cistercian Abbey of Hailes in 1253, and held by Hailes until the Dissolution. The living there was clearly never a particular prize. By the beginning of the fifteenth century it was proving very difficult to fill, as the Papal Registers for 1406 indicate:

Mandate to collate and assign to John Stanlake, Cistercian monk of Hayles in the said diocese, if found fit in Latin, the parish church, value not exceeding 3½ marks, of Pynnokschyre in the same diocese, which has been wont to be served by secular clerks . . . in consequence of the rarity of secu-


88. “Pignocisire” is mentioned on f. 170v of Great Domesday. See also Carpenter, “The Career of Godfrey,” 54 n. 166. Hailes was still paying the rent to the crown in 1378: “To the abbot and monks of Hayles. Writ de intendendo, directing them of the fee farm of Pynnokshire which they were bound to render to the late king at the exchequer to pay to William Archebaud the late king’s esquire 161. 16s. 10½d. a year for life, according to letters patent of 18 December 47 Edward III, which the king has confirmed.” “Close Rolls, Richard II: February 1378,” *Calendar of Close Rolls, Richard II: 1377–1381*, ed. H. C. Maxwell Lyte (London, 1914), 46–58. http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=106797.
lar priests in those parts, and of the fact that on account of the smallness of
the stipend no fit secular priest was to be found willing to be instituted.89

Complaints about Pinnockshire stretch back at least to January 1313. Wil-
liam de Boreford, “clerk,” took the position at the church of Pinnockshire,
and was rather unimpressed with his new living. The archdeacon of Glouces-
ter was ordered to investigate the living, as “the new Vicar complained of the
numerous defects in the chancel, and that the books, ornaments, houses and
manse remained unamended by default of the late vicar.”90 Pinnockshire,
with its small fee-farm, parish church, and perpetually underfunded living
for a secular clerk, is a deeply odd inclusion to the Short Chronicle’s list of the
counties of the March.

A few miles away, the Cistercian Abbey of Hailes, on the other hand, was
nothing like the modest living it managed at Pinnockshire. Founded in 1246
by Richard, Earl of Cornwall, Hailes held a relic of Christ’s blood (certified
by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who would later become Pope Urban IV),
and swiftly became “one of the principal pilgrimage centres in the West of
England.”91 It was also a center in the Marches where quite a bit of history
writing was taking place. A number of manuscripts closely associated with
Hailes survive, and of particular interest is London, BL, MS Cotton Cleopa-
tra D.iii, an early-fourteenth-century codex containing a number of histo-
riographical texts, including an Anglo-Norman prose Brut, a version of the
so-called Vera Historia de Morte Arthuri, and a Chronicon and Annales of
Hailes Abbey. Also surviving is MS Harley 3725, a fifteenth-century codex
which preserves a number of texts associated with Hailes.92 As Lapidge notes

89. Quoted from “Lateran Regesta 125: 1405–1406,” Calendar of Papal Registers Relating to

90. See Register of the Diocese of Worcester during the Vacancy of the See, Usually Called
1xxxvi and 150.

91. Nicholas Vincent, Holy Blood: King Henry III and the Westminster Blood Relic (Cam-
bridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 137–41. It is unknown whether the Franciscan au-
thor, Thomas of Hales, was from Hailes or Hales Owen, in Shropshire; his “love rune” preserved
in Oxford, Jesus College, MS 29 was intriguingly implicated in the politics of Simon de Mont-
fort’s fall in a talk by Jennifer Miller at the 2009 Music and the Technology of the Written Text
conference held at UCLA.

D.iii, ff. 33–59) with an Examination of Their Sources” (MA thesis, Manchester University,
1974); Marcia Maxwell, “The Anglo-Norman Prose ‘Brut’: An Edition of British Library MS Cot-
ton Cleopatra D.III” (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 1995); Neil R. Ker, Medieval Librar-
95; and Michael Lapidge, “The Vera Historia de Morte Arthuri: A New Edition,” in Glastonbury
of Cotton Cleopatra D.iii: “This manuscript provides evidence of some brisk historical activity at Hailes at the very end of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth centuries.”93 Even before the late thirteenth century, however, and probably close to its foundation, Hailes had a textual influence upon other local institutions, including another Cistercian house in North Wales, Aberconwy.94 The documentary tradition carried on until the fifteenth century, when the register and chronicle of Aberconwy were likely assembled at Hailes towards the end of the century.95 Intriguingly, the Abbey also demonstrated a profound interest in the blurry intersection between history writing and romance: the floor of the Abbey was laid with tiles containing pictorial roundels depicting scenes from the Anglo-Norman romance Tristan.96 Hailes Abbey was a prominent local center for historiographical compilation and composition, and the floors themselves record the Abbey’s enthusiasm for romance texts.

It seems likely that the inclusion of “Pynnockschire” was connected to the composition of the Short Chronicle. Speculatively, I would suggest that the Short Chronicle was written in the five miles around Pinnockshire, an area which includes the Benedictine Winchcombe Abbey, and the more likely candidate, Hailes Abbey. “Pynnockschire” appears in four of the five manuscripts that contain this passage, and also in the closely related Anglo-Norman text in CUL MS Gg.i.1, indicating it is common to some shared textual antecedent of the Short Chronicle. The oldest witness to the Short Chronicle, the c. 1280 fragment preserved in Cotton Caligula A.xi, manifests dialectal forms associated with northern Gloucestershire or southern Worcester.

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93. Lapidge, “Vera Historia,” 121, who goes on to state: “This activity then peters out and finally ceases after 1314.” In light of Stephenson’s evidence, below, it seems more likely history writing continued until the fifteenth century.

94. See David Stephenson, The Aberconwy Chronicle (Cambridge: Hughes Hall and Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, University of Cambridge, 2002). Stephenson concludes of the Aberconwy Chronicle: “The Aberconwy-text seems, on this view, to have been assembled in large part from texts in or brought to the library at Hailes—including the chronicle in MS Cotton Cleopatra D.III (produced in Hailes Abbey itself), works of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Giraldus Cambrensis, and chronicles from Tewkesbury and Worcester, as well as material collected from or relating to other Welsh Cistercian houses, Strata Florida, Strata Marcella, and possibly Cwmhir” (16–17).

95. Stephenson, Aberconwy Chronicle, 17.

shire. Hailes and Pinnockshire lie precisely in the northern Gloucestershire region dialectally suggested by the Cotton Caligula A.xi fragment. The strong tradition of history writing and demonstrable interest in vernacular romance at Hailes Abbey included the production of Latin chronicles and annals, and Anglo-Norman historiography and romance texts such as the Anglo-Norman prose Brut, and Des Grantz Geanz. Moreover, the connection between the earliest Short Chronicle and a very small geographic area is further strengthened by the appearance in the Short Chronicle of material relating to Saint Kenelm, whose relics are at Winchcombe, a mere three miles from Hailes and six miles from Pinnockshire. Other reasons may account for the presence of this obscure hamlet in an otherwise utterly conventional list of the counties of England. But the powerful confluence of Hailes as a regional center producing and circulating historiography and romance and the closely aligned interests manifested by the Short Chronicle argue for its origin in this regional literary culture, in Pinnockshire itself, or in Hailes.

Moving past the text’s origins, the basic structure of the Short Chronicle can render the appearance of lists such as the Shiring indistinguishable, at first glance, from the rest of the text. Without knowing that the Shiring is a convention found in Latin, Anglo-Norman, and Middle English historiographies that all predate the Short Chronicle, an audience need not recognize the Shiring as a coherent and separable textual unit. The Short Chronicle

97. Hanna, “Reconsidering the Auchinleck Manuscript,” 100. The “Pynnocsshire” item in the list of counties must have entered the textual tradition no later than the Auchinleck manuscript, copied in the 1330s, or the similarly dated Anglo-Norman version in CUL MS Gg.i.1.

98. The Kenelm material in the Short Chronicle (B.395–402) draws on the larger tradition of Kenelm’s vita in Latin and in Middle English, as found in the South English Legendary and the Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester. The Harley Scribe does not include the Kenelm legend, perhaps because Kenelm is incorrectly described as having been killed in battle along with Edwight: “Seynt Fromund & Kenelm bo / In batail were islawe þo” (B.395–96). See my article “When Variants Aren’t: Authors as Scribes in Some English Manuscripts,” in Editing Medieval Texts from Britain in the Twenty-First Century, ed. Anne Hudson and Vincent Gillespie (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming).

99. Interestingly, “Pynnokshire” survives in much later descriptions of the counties of England, including one published by Hearne from Leland’s Itinerary, and in another version in Halliwell’s Reliquiae Antiquae. Hearne’s text from Leland reads: “Pynnokshire is not to prayse; / A man may go it in to dayes,” printed in Lean’s Collectanea (Bristol, 1902), 1: 231, and also 177. The verses are also reprinted in Bye-Gones, Relating to Wales and the Border Counties, June 1882, 85, in response to a much later version of the text printed in the publication May 1882, 61. The Halliwell piece, printed “from a different MS” under the title “Here sueth the propertees of the shyres of Engelond,” prints the couplet identically. I regret that I have not been able to locate the manuscript, for which see Thomas Hearne, ed., The Itinerary of John Leland the Antiquary, 2nd ed., 9 vols (London, 1744–55). Hearne identifies only as “codice MS. membranee penes Antiquitatum nostrarum egregium cultorem atque conservatorem Thomam Rawlinsonvm, Arm. Medii Templi Londini Socium” (Hearne, Itinerary, 5: xxvi).
is both a linear temporal narrative (a list of kings), and an episodic narrative—for a small subset of those kings, brief anecdotes are related. There is a certain amount of bland recitation that goes into the structure supplied by the temporal narrative. The text seems to find only so many ways to vary its stock phrases such as “After þilke kyng . . . / Reignede his sone” and “He reignede þrettene ȝer / To Wynchestre me him ber.” It is largely in the text’s “additions” (for such they can feel to the reader, although it is important to stress this is not a structural argument) to the short descriptions of the lives of kings that moments of narrative interest and more substantive detail appear. Part of the frustration many modern critics express with the text is perhaps prompted by the comparatively greater narrative detail the text supplies for British and Anglo-Saxon kings, rather than for the post-Conquest England of the text’s creation. In the Royal 12.c.xii Short Chronicle, Brutus’s son Locrinus receives 16 lines of narrative (R.123–39), and the Anglo-Saxon king Edmund receives 24 lines of description (R.656–80), whereas the reigns of Richard I and John receive only 9 lines each, that of Henry III 14 lines, and Edward I 10 lines. It is tempting, however, to impose a narrative of value upon textual duration just as we do upon textual presence or absence, as discussed above—to say that Richard “merits” or “warrants” only 9 lines to Edmund’s 24 is to presume that importance, both for the composer of the text or its audience, can only be measured by length.

The Harley Scribe was rather more prone to removing parts of his source texts than he was to adding things. This tendency further works against episode length as a reliable indicator of overall significance within the text. The text of the Royal Short Chronicle consistently addresses itself to different concerns than the texts of other manuscripts. The Harley Scribe was very particular about the history he wished to craft. His alterations, emendations, and expansions to his source text reflect a recognizable set of priorities. At the smallest level, the Harley Scribe is noticeably attentive to what might be termed historical accuracy throughout his text, from legendary British history to the post-Conquest period. He provides “historically correct” lengths of several kings’ reigns (or something closer to the correct figure), against readings found in all other manuscripts, sometimes providing dates where none of the other manuscripts do so. Thus, for Eadred, Edwyn, Edgar,

100. Short Chronicle, R.884–85, R.934–35.
101. Note that of Royal 12.c.xii, O’Farrell-Tate argues of its capitulum signs that their “primary function is to mark significant or interesting events and facts” (Abridged Brut, 60), which might be said rather more generally of paraphs and other similar signs.
102. See the introductory table of differences between the Royal 12.c.xii Short Chronicle and the other manuscripts. O’Farrell-Tate, Abridged Brut, 21–28.
Edmund Ironside, Hardeknut, Henry I, Stephen, Henry II, Richard, and John, the Harley Scribe offers different (and usually more correct) regnal lengths. This project of revision and correction culminates in the rather preposterously specific account of Henry III’s reign as “lvj folle ȝer / Ant tuenti dawes þerto” in the place of the apparently unsatisfying “seuene 7 fifti fulle ȝere” of the other manuscripts.¹⁰³ This impulse toward a concern recognizable by modern standards as historical accuracy is doubly significant. First, it tells us something of the agenda of the Harley Scribe, and his desire to craft a text without empirical errors, such as incorrect regnal lengths, or the assertion that Saint Kenelm was killed in battle with Edright. Second, the Harley Scribe here reveals that he has access to other historiographical sources beyond his exemplar of the Short Chronicle—his work to correct his exemplar relies upon still other exemplars.

Numbers are a particularly flimsy basis upon which to ground many textual conclusions, and stemmata that group texts according to the number of years a king reigned, or the size of an army, are not always particularly robust. It is all too easy when using Roman numerals to add or subtract inadvertently, or to emend more intentionally. For example, one can readily imagine a scribe feeling the need to emend the vast numbers seen in the unlikely claim that the Roman army sent to conquer Arthur had “Of an hondred þousend hors & four score þousend þer to . . . wiþ ȝotmen þat were so vale þat þer nas of non ende.”¹⁰⁴ As a neat case in point, two manuscripts of the Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester, Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.4.26 and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Digby 205 both offer not a mere hundred thousand horses, but “two hondred þousend hors.” Is this evidence of textual affiliation between the two manuscripts? Or have the scribes of these manuscripts separately stacked the odds against the British to heighten a remarkable victory? Or perhaps it is a scribal correction of the number of troops the Roman army sent to conquer Arthur?

Beyond the errors of mistranscribed Roman numerals or purely fictional numbers, historical facts can be an opportunity for systematic and intelligent scribal authorship. The Harley Scribe’s consistent engagement with regnal lengths suggests it was a matter of particular interest and importance to him. More notable is his ongoing access to other texts containing different readings. Although for post-Conquest kings he might have been working

¹⁰³. Short Chronicle, R.1009–10 and B.1041. O’Farrell-Tate observes: “The reign lengths given in AEMB(R) are frequently longer and more detailed . . . and are often more accurate” (Abridged Brut, 29).
from memory, the Harley Scribe’s concern with other types of accuracy with regards to the sequence of British and English kings is a pointedly textual concern. His exclusion of one particularly fanciful accretion to the historiographical tradition, discussed below, suggests that he used other sources to correct his instance of the Short Chronicle, and to support textual interventions that went rather beyond simply correcting historical infelicities. The multiple texts the Harley Scribe deploys to shape his own text suggest something of his understanding of the Short Chronicle itself. In modifying, altering, and adding to his unique text, his belief in the value of the text itself is revealed. The Short Chronicle was worth his time and labor to copy, and worth the effort to locate texts to compare it to, and to compose supplementary materials for inclusion.

The Harley Lyrics should balance an understanding of the Royal Short Chronicle as a repository of facts for the young or ignorant. The Harley Scribe was not a man lacking in critical faculty or aesthetic appreciation. He found the Short Chronicle sufficiently valuable in terms of both time and parchment to copy the text, and to enact a series of informed and even learned textual transformations. The Harley Scribe was concerned with the minutiae that constitute history. Along with his emendations to the lengths of kings’ reigns and removing the misplaced anecdote of Saint Kenelm, the Harley Scribe excised “Pinnockshire” from the possessions of the “kyng of Merkyneriche.”

His documented life in Ludlow, and thus his familiarity with which counties constituted the March and which obscure Gloustershire towns were not, in fact, counties, suggest he was in a position to exclude the spurious county. Indeed, this is the one place in the Royal Short Chronicle where the rhyming-couplet scheme is interrupted. The shift in rhyme reveals the Harley Scribe adjusting his text after excluding Pinnockshire, making his local text still more local precisely by excluding the record of a previous inscription of place.

Elsewhere, the Harley Scribe was forced to find different solutions to the sometimes flamboyant intermixture of history and romance that the Short Chronicle exhibits. Consider his response to a lesser-known eponym of English history, Inge, variously a Spanish or Saxon or Saracen maiden who absorbs much of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s tale of Ronwenne. Here are the different texts of the Short Chronicle:

105. Short Chronicle, R.373.
106. O’Farrell-Tate notes that “lines 377–79 form a three-line rhyme on–schire,” but concludes that “it is not possible to state whether R has omitted or added a line” (Abridged Brut, 56 and 57 n. 74).
Chapter Three

In þat tyme Seint Albon for godes loue suffred martirdom
7 fourti þer wit schame 7 schonde
was idryuen out of Engelond
in þat tyme wite ȝe wel
com wesseil 7 drynk heil
in to þis lond witoute wene
þoru a maide bryȝt 7 schene
he was icluped maide Inge
of hure can many man rede 7 syrge
þis lond haþ hadde names þre
þorstu men clyped þis lond Albion
or Brut fram Troie com
7 nou Engelon icluped is
after maide Inge iwis
þilke Inge of Saxons come
7 wit hure many man moder sone
for gret hunger ich vnderstonde .
Inge wende out of hure londe .
7 of þe kyng he bad a bone
7 hei hure grantede sone
as muche lond he bad
as wit a bole hude myȝte be sprad
þe kyng grantede þo hure bone
Inge an castel made hure sone .
ac whanne þe kyng awai was went
Inge after hure men he sent
7 seide to hom in þis manere
þe kyng tomorwe schal ete here
he 7 alle his men .
whenne we han al most iȝete
wassail y schal sai to þe kyng
7 sle hym witoute lesynge
7 loke þat þe in þis manere
echon of þou sle his fere
7 so hí dûde þenne
slou þe kyng 7 alle his menne
7 þus þoru hure quentyse
þis lond he wan in þis wise
& after hure name iȝh vnderstoned
he rule þis lond Engelond.

Additional 19677

Royal 12.c.xii

The historiographical muddle in the left column is here taken from Additional 19677, but variously similar versions can also be found in CUL Dd.xiv.2, Auchinleck, and CUL Ff.v.48. The Inge story combines details and characters originally drawn from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum*, though it conflates several episodes in the process. The Inge story in the *Short Chronicle* absorbs the following textual moments from the *Historia regum*: 1) the “Thongcastle” episode, in which the British king Vortigern is tricked; 2) the “wassail” and “drinkhail” exchange; 3) the treacherous murder of the Britons by the Saxons upon the utterance of “nimet oure saxas.”

In Geoffrey’s *Historia*, the British king Vortigern offers the Saxon leader Hengist as much land as can be covered by a bullhide, only to be tricked when Hengist cuts the hide into a thin string. Hengist’s daughter Ronwenne arrives after the Thongcastle episode, and she introduces the “wassail” and “drinkhail” exchange in the first of two distinct moments of linguistic intrusion, where English penetrates Geoffrey’s Latin text. Ronwenne then seduces Vortigern, which leads to Hengist becoming Vortigern’s father-in-law, and a swift increase in the Saxon migration to the island. Vortigern’s son Vortimer briefly rules the Britons, but Ronwenne plots against him and bribes a member of his household to slip him a poison, which he drinks. Vortigern resumes the throne, and despite the counsel of his wife Ronwenne, opposes further Saxon incursions, a stance that leads to “peace” talks at Amesbury on May Day, where Hengist, “resorting to unheard-of treachery, ordered that each of his companions should have a long knife . . . and while the unsuspecting Britons were negotiating, on his signal, ‘nimet oure saxas’, each should be ready to grab the Briton beside him . . . and slit his throat.”

All three of these episodes were extremely popular in the insular historiographical tradition. The *Short Chronicle* manuscripts other than Royal 12.c.xii offer a compelling decoupling of the radically overdetermined ethnic contest of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s version. Inge is identified as a Saxon in only three manuscripts of the *Short Chronicle*: Additional 19677, Pilkington’s CUL Ff.v.48, and the fragmentary version preserved in Rawlinson Poet. 145. In the other texts of the *Short Chronicle*, Inge is from “Speyne” in the

111. *Historia regum*, 129–35.
Auchinleck version, and “of Sarcyns come” in Nicholas Bishop’s MS Dd.xiv.2. These texts separate Inge from the Saxon *adventus*, and also render nameless “the kyn” she interacts with, further distancing the narrative from the binary opposition of ethnicities that underpin the histories of Bede, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Henry of Huntingdon, and William of Malmesbury. The massacre at Amesbury is, in Geoffrey’s twelfth-century *Historia*, a climactic moment of Saxon/British strife. In the *Short Chronicle* it has been rendered a seamless transfer of power, featuring an eponymous woman of variable origin and a king without a name. This is not a text concerned about conquest, *translatio imperii*, and ethnic identity in the same ways, or with the same urgency, as its historiographical forebears.

The two moments of linguistic alterity in the *Historia regum*, where Saxon English disrupts the smooth contours of Latin (or within the narrative frame, British), implicate specifically English linguistic difference in treachery and conquest. In the *Short Chronicle*, “drinkhail” and “nimet oure saxas” become instead a single etiological account of the introduction of “drinkhail” to England. This account, moreover, erases the linguistic difference that makes the exchange notable in the first place, and in fact removes the climactic moment of murderous Saxon treachery from the text itself. Inge describes her plans, and then in the next line, “so hi dude þenne,” leaving the massacre to take place off-stage. The relentless continuity in the *Short Chronicle* manufactures a false sense of the continuity of political power, and obscures all moments of political discontinuity. Inge, in absorbing the epochal shift from British to Saxon, and the legacy of Saxon treachery, instead enables the *Short Chronicle* to offer a seamless narrative whereby the ethnically charged eponyms of previous historiographies, British-Brutus-Britain and Angles-Hengist-England, become de-problematized. This transformation is sealed by the textual segue from Inge to the geographical lists of the five Saxon kingdoms and counties and bishoprics of England—the Shiring.

The Harley Scribe cared about history, and far more importantly, about how history could be connected to history writing. This is not to call the Inge account “wrong,” of course, but rather to stress that the Harley Scribe knew in a different form the episodes attached to Inge. Specifically, he knew them in a narrative that resembles the account in Geoffrey’s *Historia regum* and the mainstream of the historiographical tradition. The challenges faced by the Harley Scribe in negotiating the competing demands of his exemplar and his other texts, the demands of copying and composition, are seen in the

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113. As ultimately attested by its inclusion in the Anglo-Norman and Middle English *Bruts*, which texts will come to define the “mainstream.”
decisions he made navigating the transition from the death of Saint Alban, immediately preceding the Inge episode. In MSS Additional 19677, Auchinleck, CUL Dd.xiv.2, and Rawlinson Poet. 145, the texts of the Short Chronicle all note that Saint Alban after “& forty ȝer with schame & schonde / Was idryuen out of Engelond.” Following a brief account of Alban’s forty-year exile, these texts all turn to Inge and her introduction of “drinkhail.” The Harley Scribe, however, has written “Kyng Fortiger wyþ schome 7 schonde / Wes driuen out of Engelonde / Þourh Hengistus forsope ywys.” (See figure 5 and refer to Plate 3.) The Harley Scribe’s transformation of “fourti ȝer” to “Fortiger” makes it immediately clear that the connection between the two is not, in the conventional sense, an instance of scribal error. In the process of both copying his exemplar and composing his original text, the Harley Scribe is reading ahead in his exemplar. This is to be expected in any situation beyond strict replicative copying. The Harley Scribe came across the “fourti ȝer” of Saint Alban’s exile, followed by the historiographical muddle of Inge absorbing three episodes from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Historia regum. There are two likely possibilities to explain the transformation. The Harley Scribe either initially mis-read “fourti ȝer” as “Fortiger” because he was conditioned by his knowledge that episodes associated with Vortigern were to come next in the Galfridian narrative and thus expecting to see Vortigern, or he has very cleverly adapted the line about Saint Alban’s exile to “Fortiger.” The Harley Scribe uses the change to correct the historiographical account. He notes that Hengist’s treachery drives Vortigern out of Britain, reintroduces Ronwenne as responsible for “drinkhail” and “wassail,” and reestablishes Vortigern as the correct audience for that exchange. Moreover, Vortigern, instead of suffering the indignity of being passed over as a nameless king, is identified as the victim of specifically Saxon “tresoun.” The Harley Scribe, drawing upon a text or texts firmly in the mainstream of the historiographical tradition, recovers in twelve lines some of the highlights of Geoffrey’s Historia regum and the translatio imperii from the

114. Short Chronicle, B.273–74. It is significant that the Rawlinson Poet. 145 fragment uses Roman numerals, rather than spelling out the numbers, and reads “And xl. ȝere.”
115. Royal 12.c.xii, f. 64r; Short Chronicle, R.329–31.
116. Thus, O’Farrell-Tate: “confusion between Fortiger and fourti ȝer, indicating that a scribal or auditory error seems likely to account for the variation at this point,” before concluding rather torturously that Royal 12.c.xii’s exclusion of Inge “may represent the material contained in the original version” (Abridged Brut, 23). I believe her explanation is less convincing than the more straightforward explanation offered here.
117. It is important to note that the “g” of “kyng fortiger” is written above a caret, and written slightly above the line. See Royal 12.c.xii, f. 64v. It is likely that the Harley Scribe was copying from his own foul papers, rather than composing directly on the page. For a further discussion of compositional practices, see Chapter 4 below.
British to the Saxons. It is a series of modest changes to the text he was copying, but they reveal the Harley Scribe as a deeply engaged reader of the text in front of him, as well as of other historiographical texts. They show him not merely copying an exemplar, but conscientiously writing a new text into being, and shaping that text’s historiographical and political trajectory carefully.

Another substantive rewriting by the Harley Scribe appears in the fourteen lines of Royal 12.c.xii that narrate the reign of Henry III. The Royal Short Chronicle rather emphatically directs the reader’s attentions to a single issue:

After him reignede Henry
a god kyng ant holy
In his time wes werre strong
ant gret strif in Engelond
bituene þe barouns 7 þe kyng
Was gret stryuyng
for þe purueance of Oxneford
þat sire Simound de Mountfort
Meintenede, ant gode lawes
þerfore he les his Lyfdawes.\textsuperscript{118}

The other manuscripts of the Short Chronicle also offer blandly generic praise of Simon de Montfort’s political agenda. The Royal Short Chronicle, however, is the only text to refer to the contest between king and barons not as over “wickede red” and “goude lawes,” but over the “purueance of Oxneford.”\textsuperscript{119} The Provisions of Oxford were forced upon Henry III in 1258, and were repudiated by him in 1261.\textsuperscript{120} Rather than being simply ancient history to the Harley Scribe, however, the Provisions of Oxford were deeply implicated in the baronial contest led by Thomas of Lancaster, specifically the Ordinances of 1311. The historical parallelisms considered above, with regards to the Office of Thomas of Lancaster opening Royal 12.c.xii, return abruptly here in the Royal Short Chronicle. As Maddicott notes: “Just as the strength of Montfort’s claims had lain in Henry III’s acceptance of the Provisions of Oxford, so Lancaster’s case rested on the Ordinances and the King’s oath to maintain them.”\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{118} MS Royal 12.c.xii, f. 68v; Short Chronicle, R.998–1007.
\textsuperscript{119} Short Chronicle, B.1036, 1038.
\textsuperscript{121} Maddicott, Thomas of Lancaster, 322.
The implications of making this parallel explicit, however, depend upon when the Harley Scribe was writing the *Short Chronicle*, and the ways in which his composition of history writing was shaped by history itself. The Royal *Short Chronicle* comes to its end rather abruptly, not with a prayer for Edward I or Edward II (or Henry III) as in other instances of the text, but rather with a final political argument that works to summarize the entire reign of Edward II:

[þ]o anon afterward  
Reignede hys sone Edward.  
þilke Edward, saunt 3 fayle  
3ef þe erldome of Cornwayle  
To Sire Pieres of Gauastoun  
þat for enuiwe ye nome  
þe lordinges of Engelonde  
To him heueden gret onde  
For he wes wel wiþ þe kyng  
ho heuden him in henying,  
ant seiden he wes traitour  
to þe king 7 to heore honour  
ant for he was louerd suyke  
heo ladden him to warewyke  
At gaueressich, 3e mowe wyte  
þer his heued wes ofsmyte.122

There the text ends, two-thirds of the way down the first column of f. 68v, leaving the remaining column blank. F. 68v is the last folio of the quire, and indeed, of the booklet (though not, it should be clarified, of the manuscript). Much depends upon when, precisely, the completion of the Royal *Short Chronicle* is dated. Revard’s extensive analysis of the paleographical features of the Harley Scribe suggest the text was copied after 1316–17 and before 1325–29.123 The specifics of his argument ultimately rest upon the coexistence in the text of two different letter forms of “L” and “N.”124 If the text is

122. MS Royal 12.c.xii, f. 68v; *Short Chronicle*, R.1022–37.  
123. Thus, Revard, “Scribe and Provenance,” 58; and O’Farrell-Tate, *Abridged Brut*, 47. I am grateful to Carter Revard for confirming that the “Chronicle” is later than his three deeds of 1314 and 1315, but resembles his deeds of 1316 to 1320 and 1321, and is less like his deeds of 1325–29” (personal communication, 2006).  
124. Revard, “Scribe and Provenance,” who points to “a mixture of 1b and 1c” corresponding to a charter of 1316, and “a mixture of 2a and 2b such as does not occur in any holograph later than 1320” (58). It is important to stress, however, that neither does that mixture of Revard’s
incomplete, it is nonetheless a remarkably suitable ending. Gaveston’s execution completes the circle begun by the opening words of the entire manuscript, and the Office celebrating Thomas of Lancaster, “Gaude thoma ducum decus lucernā lancastriē.” Like Gaveston, Thomas also had his head “ofsmyte,” in 1322, and the Harley Scribe may very well have brought his composing and his copying of the *Short Chronicle* to an end in response to Thomas’s execution. The Harley Scribe was particularly responsive to a sense of historical and regional accuracy in writing Royal 12.c.xii, but there are times when history catches up with history writing.

The Harley Scribe’s politics were hardly radical, and Gaveston was so thoroughly disliked that it was not particularly contentious, particularly after his execution, to write of his death. Using Gaveston’s execution as the centerpiece of Edward II’s reign places the Royal *Short Chronicle* squarely in both the larger tradition of insular historiography, and the nuanced politics of the Marches in the first decades of the fourteenth century. History writing is always a series of political decisions about the past, but in the Royal *Short Chronicle* we see the Harley Scribe making political decisions about the present. There is another example that offers, I believe, further evidence for this reading of the Harley Scribe’s awareness of the present when writing about the past. The Harley Scribe also wrote *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, an understudied Anglo-Norman romance only very recently beginning to receive the attention it deserves. His decisions made while writing the text serve neatly to encapsulate his sophistication as a reader, translator, and writer. It is important, however, to realize the simultaneity of those roles, and the politically sensitive decisions faced by the Harley Scribe, whoever his audience. The poem’s editors argue that the Harley Scribe “was himself the author of the prose *remaniement* which he copied.” The arguments behind this conclusion are various, though persuasive, but it is one particular feature of the poem that will be considered here: the abrupt change of handwriting and decoration in the midst of *Fouke*. Mid-line on f. 53r of Royal 12.c.xii, there is a change in handwriting that is so notable that it was first thought to indicate

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forms 2a and 2b appear in any holograph before 1320. 2a forms only occur in three of the eleven dated holographs before 1320, as capital “N” was not a high-frequency form; throughout the Royal *Short Chronicle*, there are five instances of 2a and six of 2b. 1b is also a problematic form, appearing in a single charter of 1316, and then reappearing late in the Harley Scribe’s career, in charters of 1346 and 1348. Palaeographically, I believe the text should be dated within a few years of 1320. On textual grounds, I would suggest it was written after Thomas of Lancaster’s execution.

125. MS Royal 12.c.xii, f. 1r.
127. *Fouke*, xxxvii.
a change in scribes. Neil Ker and Carter Revard have conclusively argued that the handwriting is still that of the Harley Scribe, but that a significant period of time had passed between the two stints.\textsuperscript{128} (See figure 6.) Following the evolution of the Harley Scribe’s script in a series of dated charters, Revard indicates the break might have been up to ten years, and offers a number of hypotheses for why the romance should have been set down, perhaps sometime c. 1327, and picked up again as late as 1333.\textsuperscript{129} The poem’s editors find a number of “linguistic peculiarities” in the first five folios after the Harley Scribe resumes translating and adapting his text, which suggest “that the scribe, who appears to be actually remodelling the verse text into prose, takes some time to adjust himself to the task of prosifying and modernizing . . . after taking up his pen again.”\textsuperscript{130} His work as a translator from verse to prose, from older Anglo-Norman to more contemporary forms, is an important reminder of the wide array of the Harley Scribe’s literary skills.

The break in the script of \textit{Fouke} appears mid-sentence, in the midst of a particularly dramatic scene. The titular hero, Fouke, a proto-Robin Hood figure, is about to capture the villainous King John, and hopes to coerce the king into granting various demands:

\begin{quote}
Le roy ly cria mercy, e ly pria pur amour Dieu la vie, e yl ly rendreyt entere-
ment tou[t] son heritage e quanqu’il avet tolet de ly e de tous les suens. . . .
Fouke ly granta bien tote sa demande a tieles qu’il ly donast, veantz ces che-
valers, la foy de tenyr cest covenant. Le roy ly plevy sa fey qu’il ly tendroit
 covenant, [change in script] e fust molt lee que issi poeit eschaper. E revynt
a soun paleis, e fist fere assemblez ces chevalers e sa meisné, e lur counta
de mot en autre coment sire Fouke le avoit desçu, e dit que par force fist cel
serement, pur quoi qu’il ne le velt tenyr
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Fouke}, xlv. The break comes towards the end of the fifth quire of Royal 12.c.xii, but on the recto, rather than the verso, of the final leaf of the quire. \textit{Fouke} occupies quires 5, 6, and 7: 5\textsuperscript{12} (ff. 33’–44’), 6\textsuperscript{10} (stub of excised first leaf visible, ff. 45’–53’), 7\textsuperscript{8} (ff. 54’–61’).

\textsuperscript{129} Revard, “Scribe and Provenance,” 61. In the same article, Revard suggests the break might have been “a break of up to ten years ca. (?1328–38)” (71). He notes: “Obviously the Harley scribe was not working on a commission or a deadline; this break and resumption would seem to show a personal or familial interest in the text rather than a professional scrivener’s concern” (71). Revard also offers more complex hypotheses for the break, suggesting the pause occurred between 1327 and 1331 and was connected to the Harley Scribe’s loss of access to the FitzWarin archives prompted by the exile of various members of the FitzWarin family between March and December 1330.

\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Fouke}, xlvi–xlvii.
Figure 6. London, British Library, MS Royal 12.c.xii, f. 53r
he had taken from him and all his friends. . . Fouke accepted the king’s
offer on one condition. In the presence of all the knights here present, he
would have to give his solemn word to keep this covenant. The king pledged
solemnly that he would keep faith with Fouke [change in script]. He was
overjoyed to be able thus to escape so easily. Upon his return to the palace,
King John assembled his knights and his retinue, and told them in detail
how Sir Fouke had deceived him. Since his solemn oath was made under
duress, he had no intention whatever to keep it.[131]

Fouke’s story is typical of outlaw tales. Perhaps overexposure to similar
moments in similar tales has lessened some of the appalling drama of this
moment. Writing about kings being captured and kings begging for their
lives, particularly English kings, requires a certain delicacy. In Fouke, the text
navigates the overlapping worlds of the “historical” King John and Fulk Fitz
Warin, and their romance doppelgangers.[132] On the other hand, when the
Harley Scribe set down his text unfinished c. 1327, the doubled worlds of
Fouke were themselves doubled, caught in the events of the present. The Har-
ley Scribe was copying a text that blurred romance and history in the Marches
of the early thirteenth century, yet also resonated quite specifically with his
own present day. The seizure of Edward II by Isabella and Mortimer in late
1326, and Edward II’s oath to Bishop Adam Orleton of Hereford that his son
Edward III would succeed him, were momentous political occasions. It was
not the time to translate a scene in which the King of England is captured
and forced, under duress, to swear an oath.[133] Neither copying nor composing
texts is without very real dangers in such circumstances. Though Edward II,
unlike the romance King John, upheld his oath, Edward II did not escape his
captivity, and was executed in September 1327.[134]

Upon Edward III’s accession to power in 1330, one of Parliament’s first
acts was to reverse the proceedings against Thomas of Lancaster. The Har-
ley Scribe, surrounded by the contentious and complex politics of the first
decades of the fourteenth century, had set down his pen, freezing the nar-

131. Fouke, 50.2–4, 6–13. Translation from T. E. Kelly, “Fouke Fitz Waryn,” in Medieval Out-
laws: Twelve Tales in Modern English Translation, ed. Thomas Ohlgren (West Lafayette, IN: Parlor
Press, 2005), 228.


133. For details of the deposition process, see Haines, King Edward II, 177–95. Note, too, the
presence of the seal-motto of Bishop Orleton copied in Royal 12.c.xii, which occasioned much
eyear speculation about links between the Harley Scribe and Orleton’s household. I am not in-
tending to revive the idea that the Harley Scribe was in Orleton’s household, but want to stress
how socially and geographically close the Harley Scribe was to Edward II’s deposition.

134. Whether Edward II did in fact die in September 1327 at Berkeley Castle, or lived for years
after, is unimportant for present purposes.
rative at a moment where King John had been taken captive and pledged to keep his oath to Fouke. John had not escaped from Fouke’s capture in the forest, nor had he repudiated his oath because it was made under duress. And there, awkwardly, the narrative would sit from 1327 to perhaps 1333–34, when the Harley Scribe would return to his work and his translation, beginning the words that had brought him pause before: King John’s joy that “e fust molt lee que issi poeit eschaper [he was able to escape so easily].” Poetry has consequences, for its readers and its writers. In copying Royal 12.c.xii, the Harley Scribe situates the Office for Thomas of Lancaster, the Royal Short Chronicle, and Fouke in the midst of extremely contemporary political concerns. In his work copying and composing, translating and innovating, the Harley Scribe quietly endorsed modest political reform, encouraging a role for good counsel and promoting a particular vision of accurate history writing. Twice, it seems that the Harley Scribe set down his pen at the moments when history had problematically and troublingly caught up with history-writing. Once, he waited until it was appropriate, or safe, to resume. Scribe, translator, and scribal author, he did resume his work, first bringing Fouke to an end, and then finishing Royal 12.c.xii. Working most likely in Ludlow, the Harley Scribe copied the last text into the last quire, ordered his quires, and had the volume bound in c. 1340. It was safe, by then, to begin the volume with a prayer for Saint Thomas of Lancaster.