

Peter J. Lucas & Angela M. Lucas, *The Medieval Manuscripts at Maynooth: Explorations in the Unknown*. Four Courts Press: Dublin, 2014. 308pp. Full colour ill. €40. ISBN: 978-1-84682-534-7

The Medieval Manuscripts at Maynooth offers a thorough and comprehensive guide to sixteen important manuscripts, together with various fragments, which are now housed in the Russell Library of the National University of Ireland (NUI) Maynooth. These manuscripts have been part of the St Patrick's College collection since the nineteenth century but, until the publication of this volume, had never been catalogued. They lay largely neglected until they were properly identified and recorded by Peter and Angela Lucas. This volume had its genesis more than a quarter of a century ago, back in the 1990s. At the time Peter Lucas was a professor of Old and Middle English at University College Dublin and Angela Lucas a senior lecturer in English at NUI Maynooth. Both are now currently based at Wolfson College, Cambridge.

The impetus behind the publication of this volume was to bring attention to the medieval manuscripts contained within the Russell Library, originally the main library of St Patrick's College, which was completed in 1861. St Patrick's College is affiliated with NUI Maynooth and this library was the university's main library up to 1984 when the John Paul II library became the main library. The old library took on the role of a research repository, housing the college's manuscripts and was renamed the Russell Library.

The book under review is an important contribution to medieval studies and will bring these important and previously neglected manuscripts to international attention. The authors provide useful information relating to the process of dating the materials in a way which is understandable to the non-expert. Moreover, the detailed and full descriptions of the manuscripts usefully include comprehensive palaeographical and codicological information, as well as full specifics on what is contained within. Discussion also includes an historical overview

of the manuscripts from their origins, as far as can be ascertained, to the time that they came into the possession of the Russell Library. This detailed text is accompanied by several colour photographs, and Four Courts Press have outdone themselves with the overall design and presentation of this visually sumptuous volume.

The earliest manuscript dates from the eleventh century and is a record of conciliar events in the diocese of Rheims in 991. The latest in the collection dates to 1529. All but one are ecclesiastical in nature, five come from Liège and four of these come from St Jacques, a Benedictine abbey in the city. The others come from various libraries across Europe, but most appear to be French in origin. All manuscripts are in Latin, as is the wont for medieval ecclesiastical manuscripts, but there is some French, Italian and Dutch within the texts as well. Only one is not ecclesiastical in nature, it is a *Commissione* which was given by the Doge of Venice to a captain of the fleet that guarded the Adriatic.

As the authors point out, at the time that the manuscripts were acquired by Maynooth in the nineteenth century, Ireland was still part of the United Kingdom. It is interesting that, in spite of this, the manuscripts from this collection demonstrate the continuing strong links between Ireland and the Continent. In previous centuries, before the Penal Laws ceased to be stringently enforced, Catholic priests were trained on the Continent. The survival of these documents demonstrates that the Catholic Church not only imported men, but also ideas. Maynooth's possession of these manuscripts reflects its importance as a centre of learning in a country where Catholicism could be freely practiced for the first time in centuries.

The authors are to be commended for the forensic work that has gone into this book. The introduction states that a 'love of detection work is an essential qualification for cataloguing medieval manuscripts'. This love is apparent on each page and it is an indispensable addition to

medieval studies that will undoubtedly attract many scholars to Maynooth to examine the medieval manuscripts stored there.

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