Reading Robert Thornton's Library: Romance and Nationalism in Lincoln, Cathedral Library MS 91 and London, British Library MS Additional 31042

Abstract:
Robert Thornton of East Newton, Yorkshire (c.1367-c.1465) is the most important scribe of late-medieval England: the only amateur scribe we know to be responsible for the concurrent production of multiple manuscript anthologies. This project constitutes the first extended study devoted exclusively to Robert Thornton and his books that treats them both as independent and as in conversation with each other. By uniting the concerns of codicology and cultural history, we can gain new insights into the effect of each manuscript's textual sequences while also considering the effect of the distribution of texts among both manuscripts. Moreover, by examining Thornton's romances in their original material and social contexts, we can read them as they would have been encountered by Thornton and his intended readers, and gain insight into the social and cultural anxieties that may have led to their organization and distribution among his two books. Chapter 1 compares Thornton's
compilations to those of analogous manuscripts, and demonstrates that Thornton took a more active role than most contemporary compilers did in rearranging and editing his texts in order to emphasize shared themes and interests within his books. Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation examine the nature of each of Thornton’s manuscripts in turn. Chapter 2 demonstrates that Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91 is a book meant to be used in the maintenance of social, spiritual, and physical health, written to be a useful tool for as wide a range of people as possible. Chapter 3 demonstrates that British Library MS Additional 31042 is a history book that traces the development of Christian civilization from its beginnings in the Holy Land to its present form in Thornton’s England. This dissertation then assesses Thornton’s whole library. Chapter 4 examines the literary contexts of Thornton’s romances, demonstrating that they are divided into thematic groups that emphasise conflict between the interests of individuals and the interests of the individual and communal identities with which they associate. Chapter 5 examines the social context of Thornton’s romances, demonstrating that Thornton employs the discourse of English nationalism produced during the Council of Constance (1414-1418), and that he therefore distributed his romances in order to emphasize England’s superiority to France.

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Edited from Robert Thornton's MS., Cir. 1440, in the Lincoln Cathedral Library. [3d ed.] Re-collated with the MS., enl. and rev. 1913. Item Preview. remove-circle. Share or Embed This Item. EMBED. London Published for the Early English Text Society by K. Paul, Trench, Trübner. Collection. robarts; toronto. Digitizing sponsor. MSN. Contributor. Robarts - University of Toronto. The London Thornton manuscript (British Library Additional MS 31042) is uniformly described as a 'religious' compilation, and is a companion miscellany to the Lincoln Thornton manuscript (Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91), both ascribed to Robert Thornton as compiler and scribe. Modern bibliographers have suggested that both compilations exhibit signs of significant design, specifically because of [Show full abstract] their grouping of works in genre sections. The Lincoln Thornton's placing of its collection of romances has, for example, been shown to be far from random. Robert Thornton and his Books Essays on the Lincoln and London Thornton Manuscripts Edited by Susanna Fein Michael Johnston YORK MEDIEVAL PRESS © Contributors 2014 All rights reserved. 2 London, BL, MS Additional 31042, fol. 33r (opening of the 50 Northern Passion) © The British Library Board Keiser, Robert Thornton: Gentleman, Reader and Scribe Fig. 1 Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 91, fol. 98v (end of the alliterative 78 Morte Arthure, 2nd hand) Fig. 2 Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 91, fol. 189r (end of the Privity of the Passion, 2nd hand) Fig. 3 Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 91, fol. 179r (opening of the 80 Privity of the Passion, 2-shaped 'r') Fig. 4 London, BL, MS Additional 31042, fol.