

codicological description and provenance research (5). With its focus on endband construction, the book artist interested in historical forms and techniques could also gain inspiration from the endbands' inherent beauty. There is, of course, no denying the book's technicality—it is not a breezy introduction and assumes some previous knowledge of book structures—but the non-technician should certainly not shy away nor be intimidated by the diagrams. There is much to be learned here for readers from a variety of backgrounds, and the book will particularly appeal to those who are eager and enthused that such thorough, evidence-based work has been undertaken by an expert.

Boudalis' impeccable scholarship will make *On the Edge* an authoritative work on the subject for some time to come, although the author is clear to state that more discoveries are yet to be made—even providing helpful guidance on identifying and describing endbands according to his taxonomy in one of the appendices. Indeed, the mind turns to other repositories with Eastern Mediterranean manuscript holdings to explore; with the recent increase in binding descriptions included in catalog records and binding images in digitization initiatives, more potential is becoming available all the time. For now, the author is to be congratulated on unraveling the mysteries of these intricate, often lovely—even dazzling—components of these important bindings. — *Diane E. Bockrath, Hagley Museum and Library*

Jessica Brantley. *Medieval English Manuscripts and Literary Forms*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022. Hardcover, 346 p. \$65. (ISBN: 9780812253849).

A handbook for the use and understanding of medieval English manuscripts is a significant undertaking. A good version of such a handbook is even more significant—but it can pay dividends for a generation as it introduces a new crop of students to the field, while also advancing scholarship. In addition, the benefits of creating a central repository for information relating to such manuscripts include the very significant opportunity to allow those who don't have access to the physical manuscript the ability to participate in its examination and interpretation. Even in the age of digitized manuscripts, this is important. The new monograph from Jessica Brantley is one such book; *Medieval English Manuscripts and Literary Forms* ably threads the needle of providing content of interest for scholars and teachers, while remaining an accessible work for students. Of note, it is also at times visually arresting with sixteen pages of well-printed full color plates.

Brantley's book is made up of two parts: 'The anatomy of the medieval manuscript,' followed by twelve case studies. The first part provides an introduction to important

concepts, amply illustrated by examples, while the case studies are themed examples: Case Study I is titled ‘Literature’ and uses “The Moore Bede” (Cambridge University Library MS Kk.5.16), Case Study X is titled ‘Mediation’ and uses the example of *The Book of Margery Kempe* (BL MS Add 61823). The final section includes a glossary, a bibliography of primary works cited, and suggestions for further reading. Throughout, the writing is admirably clear with descriptions of technical or visual concepts that are easy to understand.

The first part of this book works through the various parts of a medieval manuscript, including the method of their creation and how they were used; Brantley describes this as “anatomiz[ing] medieval manuscripts into their component parts” (113). This gives the reader all the tools they need in order to understand and interpret medieval English manuscripts—whether a first-time student, or a more experienced researcher needing to deepen or refresh their knowledge. Brantley’s approach is to rigorously define terms initially, as illustrated by the introduction, which begins by asking questions such as, “What does it mean to read medieval books? . . . What does it mean to *read*?” (Page 3, emphasis original). Brantley answers these and other questions in a serious yet approachable way, ensuring that readers understand important terminology and the meaning and context of manuscripts and how to read them. At times the history of writing can seem over-detailed: first- or second-century wooden tablets from Vindolanda seem to be quite far removed from medieval manuscripts, but it’s a tough balancing act to provide context without going overboard, and Brantley, mostly, succeeds.

The glossary and definitions are copiously illustrated and range from ‘medium,’ to tools used in book production, to the scripts and abbreviations used. These are illustrated with examples from a variety of repositories (primarily Yale and the British Library). Some of these illustrations are particularly noteworthy, such as that of Bodleian Library MS Lat. Liturgy. E. 17, fol. 19r (74) which includes instructions for an illuminator that were never fulfilled, resulting in a large empty space on the page. Among other practical sections is a ‘Template for manuscript description’ (110) which is used in practice in the twelve case studies, and can easily be used in an introductory course for manuscript study as the template for a student assignment.

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The second part of the book is made up of twelve case studies. Brantley describes the twelve manuscripts as ‘exceptional outliers’ that help to illustrate, through the characteristics that make them exceptional, important points about medieval literary practice and study. Within each case study, there are several sections, including a ‘catalog-style description’ followed by a thorough essay providing a summary and context for the manuscript’s importance, as well as a selection of images and an in-depth bibliography. This structure enables the reader to treat Brantley’s work simultaneously as a reference work (paging through the glossary and definitions), and a scholarly work in its own right. It should be said, however, that Brantley’s writing is very clear and readable, so this work can be easily read front to back. Each of the case studies is included to demonstrate a theme, including ‘afterlives,’ ‘ownership,’ ‘authorship,’ and ‘editing.’ Case study VIII (‘Writing’ – The Ellesmere Chaucer, Huntington Library MS EL26 C9) is a good example of the benefits of this approach. It expands significantly on terms introduced earlier in the work (there is a short section on writing on pages 31–35, which introduces terms such as “scriptorium,” “hands,” and “scribes”), and gives the reader the opportunity to see these concepts used in practice. This structure works well to create an opportunity for readers to think more deeply about the topics raised by the manuscript in question, while also seeing the manuscript in context.

Importantly, Brantley’s case studies are all manuscripts that have been fully digitized and are freely available online. Making use of these digitized manuscripts enables readers to more fully interact with and explore the works that Brantley selected, viewing them in their totality. The images included in the book are extremely clear—those provided to illustrate terms and concepts clearly do so; those images that accompany the case studies are brightly and lushly reproduced. They provide a great way of attracting the interest of those who may not have had in-person interactions with medieval manuscripts before. In the preface Brantley states that “I hope that this book will make a wide-ranging introduction possible, *especially at institutions with small collections of rare books, geographically distant from large repositories*” (xiv, emphasis added). Each case study includes a bibliography divided into the following sections: Digital facsimile, Catalogs and editions, and Secondary studies. This allows scholars of all levels to find out more, and to further explore the manuscript for themselves.

It is worth mentioning that, unfortunately, six of the twelve case studies selected by Brantley are housed at the British Library (BL), and thus their digitized facsimiles were not available at the time of writing this review, due to the BL’s ongoing issues with a cyber-attack. While this is a blow, it is hopefully temporary, and images and facsimiles of these manuscripts exist elsewhere in most cases. This demonstrates the point noted above: that even when one can generally rely on digitized copies of manuscripts being available, there is value to including images of key plates in works such as this one. While this could not have been predicted or planned for, it is deeply

unfortunate because Brantley rightly gave a lot of thought to only including works that are fully digitized, as working from the full manuscript certainly enhances the power and interest of this book.

In summary, Brantley's work is one that is useful, timely, and appropriate for readers looking for an introduction to the discipline, as well as those seeking something that allows them to experience the beginnings of what it means to study a manuscript in depth. It could be particularly useful as a teaching tool for students of medieval English manuscripts and would work well in conjunction with the digitized manuscripts that Brantley makes use of, or other manuscripts that students are able to interact with at their home institution. As well as being a teaching tool or introductory work for students new to the study of manuscripts, it may also be of use to those more experienced in the study of manuscripts from other geographic areas who might need a brief introduction to what makes English medieval manuscripts unique. *Medieval English Manuscripts and Literary Forms* makes use of modern digitized manuscripts while also hosting enough images and plates of manuscripts to give the reader a real sense of what it means to use medieval English manuscripts. — *Joshua Hutchinson, University of Southern California Libraries*