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The Auchinleck Manuscript has traditionally been celebrated for the large collection of romances that it preserves and for the interest manifest in its texts in English history and legend. It is usual to point out the near monolingualism of the book and to view the coincidence of its texts' use of English with their insular thematics as constituting a foundational moment for English nationalism (such a conjunction could not be taken for granted at the time of the book's compilation, c. 1340, when other literary manuscripts often mixed texts written in English, French, and Latin). For historians of English book production, the Auchinleck Manuscript has been a useful test case. Once thought to be the product of a London bookshop, the consensus of opinion shifted over the course of the later twentieth century towards the view that the manuscript was compiled in the capital by its main scribe (Scribe I), who wrote around 70 % of its text and who commissioned, oversaw, and finished the work of four or five other copyists in

order to produce a book destined for a commissioning patron. More recent work on the book has sought to reconstruct that patron's requirements, the most common conclusion being that the book was bought with a household readership – including children – in mind. In light of the extant scholarship, much about the Auchinleck Manuscript seems anticipatory of later fourteenth- and fifteenth-century book and literary culture. We are most often told that it was made in London by a group of loosely coordinated copying scribes; that it is written almost uniquely in English and dominated by a concern with insular topics; and that it was designed to meet the needs of a family readership.

The essays collected by Susanna Fein in *The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives* fulfil the promise in Fein's subtitle to develop, nuance, and unpick the critical consensus that I have just described. To my mind, they cluster around – and redefine – three familiar topics in Auchinleck scholarship: the book's supposed Englishness; Scribe I's role in the production of the manuscript; and the interests and capacities of the book's medieval readers.

Several essays in the volume reconsider the sources of the Auchinleck Manuscript's texts and in so doing unearth a trove of information and connections that invalidate any straightforward association of the book with English national identity. A. S. G. Edwards and Cathy Hume consider the popular Latin sources that underlie the texts on which they focus in Auchinleck's first booklet and Venetia Bridges offers a subtle account of the various French and Latin debts of *Kyng Alisaunder*, a text whose partial survival in the manuscript has otherwise led to its neglect in scholarship on the book. The manuscript's supposed identity as an expression of Englishness is further complicated in Ann Higgins's contribution, which reconsiders the location of its first home: since so few of the manuscript's texts are shared across the London milieu, Higgins posits that the manuscript travelled north towards Scotland sooner than is traditionally assumed. Other contributors reconsider the ways in which Auchinleck's texts relate language to nationhood. Marisa Libbon points out that when they used romance to fabricate English history, English authors adopted a model whose origins and primary associations were French. Patrick Butler also treats the constructive uses of French amongst the English to which the Auchinleck Manuscript's texts on occasion bear witness. Butler argues that, in the preface to *Of Arthour and Merlin*, English translation is presented as a *pis aller* and French and Latin are valorized as keepers of the peace; only later in the century will French be reimagined as an instrument of war.

Another group of contributors discusses Scribe I's oversight of the other copyists who worked on the Auchinleck book. Emily Runde argues that several of the manuscript's scribes were left to their own devices when they copied and that their contributions to the book might thus transmit traces of editorial agencies

other than that of Scribe I, whom scholarship has normally considered to occupy the editorial role exclusively. Míceál F. Vaughan presents a different kind of evidence that might persuade us to limit our conception of Scribe I's editorial compass: not all of the corrections made to the manuscript's texts can be attributed to him. Reprising his previous publications on Auchinleck, Ralph Hanna questions whether Scribe I can have had an image of the complete Auchinleck Manuscript in his mind before beginning work on it and suggests that the final ordering of its booklets might be the product of chance. Finally, the author of the seminal article on Scribe I's editorial work, Timothy A. Shonk, also refines his conception of the book's production. Shonk's focus falls on the paraphrasing of the manuscript, which was not completed in one stint after the compilation of Auchinleck's booklets but undertaken piecemeal by four independent hands. Here is another process to be considered in the making of the book, another group of labourers whose work Scribe I must co-ordinate.

In combination, these essays describe a collection of texts that is less closely unified than has hitherto been assumed. The attitudes towards Englishness that they evince are mixed and any role that the book's main scribe played as its editor looks to have been limited. It seems, accordingly, that the Auchinleck Manuscript required a varied set of responses from its medieval readers. This is the case not only for those texts (e.g. *Kyng Alisaunder*, as explicated by Bridges) that eschew the plain style adopted in many of the book's texts; rather the particular mix of materials that the book combines implicates a readership capable of engaging multiple modes of approach. The variety of the book's styles is addressed explicitly in contributions to Fein's collection by Siobhain Bly Calkin, who considers the ways in which Auchinleck texts end, and by Helen Phillips, who finds the reflection of Chaucer's rich poetics in the Auchinleck compilation. Style – the varying forms adopted in Auchinleck's texts and their juxtaposition – is just one promising topic for future research that emerges upon reading this collection of essays from cover to cover.

The volume opens with an introduction by Fein that offers a helpful summary of scholarship on the Auchinleck Manuscript. This is followed by another introductory essay by Derek Pearsall, in which Pearsall reflects on developments in Auchinleck scholarship in the forty years since the publication of the Scolar Press facsimile of the manuscript that he co-edited with I. C. Cunningham. In particular, Pearsall is interested to see what might be salvaged from Laura Hibbard Loomis's now widely discredited theory of bookshop production. Together, the essays that Fein and Pearsall introduce constitute a major reconsideration of the Auchinleck Manuscript's thematic engagements, the processes of its manufacture, and the capacities, tastes, and requirements of its readers. That which now feels familiar about the book, and that which has been defined as anticipatory of

later developments, is here, refreshingly, made strange again. *The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives* contains much that will be of interest to those working on early fourteenth-century English book and literary history. For researchers working on the Auchinleck Manuscript it will be an essential source of information for many years to come.