IMEMS End of Fellowship Report

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Project Title: The Retrieval, Use, and Development of Knowledge in the Medieval Period

Project Overview:

While at Durham, I sought to examine, in essence, how medieval thinkers studied, how they accessed and ordered information, how these methods can inform our understanding of the past, and how these ideas changed and evolved throughout the medieval period. As such, my research at Durham Cathedral Library focused not on a specific set of manuscripts or texts within the collection, but instead upon the medieval documentation and catalogues related to the collecting, ordering, storage, and use of books related to, in the broadest sense, Durham Priory.

Project Aims:

* Examine the medieval library catalogues contained in MSS A. II.4, B.IV.24, and MS B.IV.46 taking into consideration not only their content, but also the way in which the books were listed and the method in which the various booklists had been compiled and organised.
* Look for any concordances or similarities between the three extant lists as well as the current collection to attempt to trace individual books and their movements through the collection.
* Examine whether there was scope for a larger project looking at the development of Oxbridge College libraries and their monastic antecedents.

Project Activities:

Though the catalogues have been already transcribed, and a number of the volumes identified as extant volumes for the publication of the *Catlogi veteres librorum Ecclesiae cathedralis dunelm. Catalogues of the Library of Durham cathedral, at various periods, from the conquest to the dissolution, including catalogues of the library of the abbey of Hulne and of the mss. preserved in the Library of Bishop Cosin, at Durham* by the Surtees Society in 1838, there remained questions which could only be ascertained by studying the manuscripts themselves. I began by examining the earliest of the lists, that contained in MS A.II.4 (at the time of my fellowship, this was the only manuscript which had been digitised by the Durham Priory Library Project), the donation list of William of Calais, before looking at the way in which the books has been subsequently listed in the ‘first library catalogues’ from the twelfth century, contained within MS B.IV.24, and then in the fourteenth century catalogues in MS B.IV.46 and finally in the fifteenth century booklist found in the same volume. It became immediately apparent that there was ample work to do simply in looking at the way the various lists had been compiled, which led to further questions about the groupings of the manuscripts as they are arranged, especially in the list of MS B.IV.24. Give that I only had a month to spend in Durham, I concentrated my enquiry on this manuscript while using the other two to inform my understanding of not only where these books may have been, but what led to their grouping into finite sets within the ‘earliest booklist’. As an example, the first ‘paragraph’, to use the modern term, of the twelfth-century booklist closely aligns with the donation list of William of Calais, yet not every volume is listed given by William is listed, and additional volumes have been added. Furthermore, other volumes recorded in the Calais donation can be found elsewhere in the twelfth-century catalogue, suggesting that it was compiled based upon the physical location in which books were found, rather than any perceived valuation of their contents. As another example, looking at the Psalters listed in the booklist, each is paired with a name: ‘Psalterium Dunning. Psalterium Eadwini anglice glosatum, Psalteria Eadulfi duo. Psalterium Richardi de Waltham. Psalterium Rodberti filii nigelli, Psalterium Ailrici […]’. This method of listing the Psalters suggests that either each one was currently owned by the named man; or, if the book list was organised by location, that the provenance of the texts was identifiable, perhaps either by inscriptions written on the opening folios, the hand of the scribe, or simply recognised due to an unrecorded oral history.

Such clues offer tantalising glimpses into the place, both physical and metaphorical, of books within the collections of Durham Cathedral from its earliest years. Though I only made small steps in tracking individual volumes, largely due to the inherent difficulties in collating books from the twelfth-century list with those contained in the booklists from the fourteenth century, my time as an IMEMS fellow was incredibly fruitful in generating more questions than I was able to answer. However, in preparing to submit this report, I’ve recently discovered that the two other catalogues of Durham Priory have been digitised and are available on-line, perhaps allowing me to answer a few of those remaining questions, and finally produce the article I had hoped to.

Outcomes:

While I have yet to formally publish on the material that I focused on as part of my stated project aims, I do have an article forthcoming about a palmistry diagram that I stumbled across while working in the Palace Green Library contained in MS B.IV.38. After presenting a paper about the diagrams as part of a colloquium held at Wurzburg in November of 2016, the article has been accepted for publication as part of a Festschrift dedicated to Professor Charles Burnett. Furthermore, since taking up the IMEMS Library Fellowship, I’ve become a Special Collections librarian myself, at the Parker Library at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. As part of my work here concerns the development and care of a medieval library connected to a college, the work that I did in tracing the development of the collection connected to Durham Cathedral, and thus to Durham College in Oxford, has continually shaped my understanding of the concerns and challenges faced by medieval librarians, challenges surprisingly paralleled by librarians holding medieval collections today.

Concluding remarks:

Finally, I would like to thank the community of scholars that I was given the opportunity to meet as part of the IMEMS Fellowship, chief among them Professor Richard Gameson and Ms Maria Nagle, as well as Elizabeth Alpass who was so understanding in rescheduling my the fellowship multiple times and make allowances for my other commitments and Veronica Crooks for bearing with all of my difficulties with electronic communication. I thoroughly enjoyed my (short) time as an IMEMS Fellow at Durham and I cannot thank you enough for the opportunities that you have provided.