- Garden lime (hydrated lime).
- Various impossibly heavy and / or bizarre pieces of machinery and equipment.

Unruly Reading: The Consuming Role of Touch in the Experience of a Medieval Manuscript

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When scholars like myself hold medieval objects such as manuscripts, we catch but a glimpse of what past handlers, readers, and viewers may have also experienced. Nevertheless, we do share something with the nuns and monks, kings and queens who also held these objects. And occasionally, the handlers of the past chose to leave marks more permanent than the everyday wear and tear these books usually show. My essay will discuss the unique qualities of one medieval manuscript in particular: a primarily twelfth-century Latin manuscript that includes an illustrated *Passion of Saint Margaret* along with twenty-six other texts, primarily other unillustrated saints' lives (MS München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 1133;¹ Plates 1-4²). The deliberate traces left by past users demand further inquiry, beseeching us to investigate more closely the relationship between our experiences of manuscripts today, and those responses of past readers who have left an indelible mark on the pages.

In the Munich manuscript of Margaret's *Life*, the physical destruction of evildoers was literally enacted by the reader / viewer, the figures becoming present to the reader and thus vulnerable to attack. And even though that audience was likely aware of the preciousness associated with the manuscript, that

¹ Although Margaret's *Life* in this manuscript has most often been dated to the twelfth century, Elisabeth Klemm suggests an earlier dating of the eleventh century for the *vita*: E. KLEMM, *Die Illuminierten Handschriften des 13. Jahrhunderts deutscher Herkunft in der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1998), 1, p. 290.

² The plates can be found at the end of the volume.

knowledge did not deter them from making their marks on this book. Forcing us to grapple with such contradictions, the defacement demonstrates that perhaps the greatest power of this book lay not in its inherent value, but rather in the opportunity it provided for the physical and immediate eradication of evil. Such tactility, which resonates with the very nature of medieval visibility, suggests that the “tangible materiality”³ and immediacy of medieval material remains a largely untapped area of investigation, one that has the potential to open and expand the ways in which we approach our study of the historical past.

I begin this study by outlining the specifics of this manuscript’s defacement, describing what has happened to the pages of Margaret’s *Life*. I consider the possibilities for how this damage was achieved, discussing the particularities of each mark and its results. Although the reasons for the book’s defacement elude us, this essay proposes how we might come to understand the manuscript’s treatment in historical terms. Beyond hypotheses regarding the motivations of past users, my project here also seeks to view this book’s value as an object that facilitates our theorisation of materiality itself.

The treatment evident on the folios of this specific manuscript seems at first to be a demonstration of flagrant vandalism: nearly every illustrated scene displays one or more damaged figures. A variety of body parts have been erased, and these faces and limbs are now replaced by dirty, abraded marks. Occasionally, a hole has been rubbed completely through the parchment. In our pursuit for an explanation as to why a past user (or users) treated the *vita* in this way, a wide range of additional issues and questions will surface. As I hope to demonstrate, extensive consideration of the material aspects of this unusual book fosters new ways of thinking about how medieval manuscripts moved their viewers and, conversely, how the viewer’s touch affected the manuscript as well.

All medieval manuscripts come to us with secrets, secrets that often can only be accessed, if at all, by closer investigation of the materiality of the book, by what has survived the centuries and can be held in our hands today. I will argue that this *Life* of SMargaret, a preserved material object that links us

³ M.E. CARRASCO, “Spirituality in context: The romanesque illustrated Life of St. Rade-gund of Poitiers (Poitiers, Bibl. Mun., Ms 250)”, *Art Bulletin* 72 (1990), pp. 415–435, at p. 430. Carrasco is speaking specifically to the accessibility of saints through shrines, relics, and other trappings associated with their cults, but the term seems equally relevant to the manuscripts that relayed the stories upon which these cults were based.

physically with the past we study, ought to prompt us to reevaluate the system by which we relate to, and therefore analyse, the past.

Clm. 1133 is a manuscript now housed in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, in Munich, Germany. According to the catalogues of the library’s collections, this humble manuscript was probably one of over 400 manuscripts that were accessioned into the state library in the early nineteenth century, when the Benedictine abbey in Benediktbeuern, in southern Bavaria, was secularised in 1803.⁴ The small manuscript (4.5 by 3.1 inches) contains twenty-seven texts, of which sixteen deal with saints – their lives and / or their martyrdoms. Saint Margaret’s *Life* is fourth in the manuscript, and is one of the longer texts, extending over thirty-seven folios. The items included in the book range from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries, but most appear to be from around the twelfth century.⁵ Of all these texts, the *Life* of Saint Margaret is the *only* text that includes illustrations. In addition to seven drawings currently found in the manuscript, twenty-seven more folios of Margaret’s *vita* have large areas left blank, presumably for further illustration that was never completed.⁶ Margaret’s *vita* may have originally been an independent *libellus*, or small pamphlet, which may explain its singularity.⁷ Nevertheless, Josepha Weitzmann-Fiedler has asserted that the consolidation of the extant volume took place soon after Margaret’s *Life* was made.⁸ Indeed, the expense of generating pages dedicated to illustrations and the additional effort necessary to complete them was not negligible, even for a quite small and relatively modest volume like this one.

The Passion of Saint Margaret tells the story of an early Christian virgin martyr who was tortured and killed because she would not submit to the advances of a Roman prefect, Olibrius, and renounce her Christianity. Integrated with the text on each page, the images consist primarily of simple line drawings of the main characters of the narrative, and rarely depict external architec-

⁴ *Das Bistum Augsburg 1: Die Benediktinerabtei Benediktbeuern*, ed. J. HEMMERLE (Berlin and New York, 1991: *Germania Sacra*, new series 28), p. 118. See also the electronic catalogue *Halmii Codices Latini Monacenses (Clm)*: http://webserver.erwin-rauner.de/halm/vsign_sacc.asp?provenienz=Bened.

⁵ Klemm also proposes an alternative date for the entire manuscript (eleventh-thirteenth centuries): KLEMM, *Die Illuminierten Handschriften des 13. Jahrhunderts*, p. 290.

⁶ For a more extensive discussion of the possible content of these incomplete images, see the comparison with other Margaret cycles in J. WEITZMANN-FIEDLER, “Zur Illustration der Margaretenlegende”, *Münchner Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst* 17 (1966), pp. 17–48.

⁷ WEITZMANN-FIEDLER, “Zur Illustration der Margaretenlegende”, pp. 17–18.

⁸ WEITZMANN-FIEDLER, “Zur Illustration der Margaretenlegende”, p. 18.

tural or spatial details such as framing, or lines indicating the ground.⁹ The figures are drawn in light brown ink, and the manuscript is without other colour except for the occasional red rubrication used in the initials. There is also (presumably later) overdrawing evident on several of the images, which seems to be of similar ink to the additional identifications that also appear on several of these folios.¹⁰

The focus on Margaret's story itself is not terribly helpful in determining audience or possible users, for she was a popular saint in this period of the Middle Ages and later, as indicated by other manuscripts devoted to her as well as the abundance of relic veneration.¹¹ The legend of Saint Margaret can be traced to at least as far back as the eighth century, which is the date of the earliest extant Latin manuscript containing a version of Margaret's *passio*, and there are some illuminated manuscripts from as early as the ninth and tenth centuries.¹² She was an especially popular saint from the twelfth century onwards. Unfortunately, no critical edition of the Latin *Passio S. Margaretae* has been produced to date. The most recent survey of the various Latin versions can be found in the study made by Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis. The text included in the Munich manuscript is very similar to the most widespread and influential version cited in the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina* (BHL), No. 5303, "Version 1 (a)".¹³ Clayton and Magennis have printed the text of MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 5574, a manuscript of version BHL No. 5303.¹⁴

⁹ The one exception is the prison tower depicted on f. 69r.

¹⁰ These 'captions' or identifications include: "S. Margareta" on f. 64r, "S. Margareta" and "Oues" on f. 66r, "S. Margareta" on f. 66v, "Carcus" on f. 69r.

¹¹ See B. CAZELLES, *The Lady as Saint: A Collection of French Hagiographic Romances of the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1991); M. CLAYTON and H. MAGENNIS, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret* (Cambridge, 1994); E. ROBERTSON, "The corporeality of female sanctity in the Life of Saint Margaret", in: *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. R. BLUMENFELD-KOSINSKI and T.K. SZELL (Ithaca, 1991), pp. 268-287; E. TREHARNE, "'They should not worship devils ... which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk': The sensibility of the virtuous and the Life of St. Margaret", *Proceedings of the PMR Conference 15* (1991), pp. 221-236.

¹² CLAYTON and MAGENNIS, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, p. 195.

¹³ *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina Antiquae et Mediae Aetatis*, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1898-1899: *Subsidia Hagiographica* 6) (henceforth BHL), 2, pp. 787-788 and *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina Antiquae et Mediae Aetatis Novum Supplementum*, ed. H. FROS (Brussels, 1986: *Subsidia Hagiographica* 70), pp. 575-578; CLAYTON and MAGENNIS, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, p. 7. This Latin version can also be found in *Sanctuarium seu Vitae Sanctorum*, ed. B. MOMBRITIUS, 2 vols. (Paris, 1910), 2, pp. 190-196.

¹⁴ An English translation of the Latin *Passio S. Margaretae* can be found in CLAYTON and MAGENNIS, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, Appendix 2; my translation of the

In the first scene, Margaret is shown as a model of virtue alongside two other saintly virgins, Thecla and Susanna (ff. 63v-64r; Plate 1). These three are placed opposite a man, probably Margaret's father Theodosius, who is shown to be held in the grip of the devil, worshipping idols.¹⁵ Located to the right and facing away from Margaret, this man looks at an idol, depicted as a beastly creature, standing upright and about half the height of the man. Margaret is shown with her foster mother in the *vita*'s second scene (f. 64v), in which two female figures face one another. The text suggests that Margaret loved her foster mother, who was also a Christian, although the figure on the left, presumably Margaret, displays a halo while the other woman does not. In the third image (65v-66r), Margaret tends to her sheep as a man on horseback (Olibrius), followed by a group of soldiers, approaches her. As logically follows, the fourth scene shows Margaret surrounded by three soldiers, who follow Olibrius' command to seize her so that he may make her either his wife or concubine (f. 66v; Plate 2). On folio 67v, a creature that appears winged stands facing Margaret (Plate 3). Although we might be inclined to read this image as one of the beasts that visit Margaret while she is incarcerated, the figure is depicted sitting on a faldstool (folding stool), and is described in the text as the prefect Olibrius.¹⁶ In the sixth scene (f. 69r), a small crowd of men, probably guards, stands in front of a tower, identified as the prison in which Margaret has been shut up. Finally, the remaining scene illustrated in this manuscript depicts the

manuscript's text is read against this translation. Their translation is based on a tenth-century Latin text, a text quite similar to that in Clm. 1133. Only occasionally does the Latin text of MS München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Clm. 1133 differ significantly from BHL No. 5303; see CLAYTON and MAGENNIS, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, "The Latin versions of the legend", pp. 7-23, and Appendix 2, pp. 191-223. Another strand of Version 1 in Latin is classified as BHL No. 5304, "Version 1(b)", also referred to as the Casinensis version, and departs in some ways from the BHL No. 5303 (or the Mombritus) version; see CLAYTON and MAGENNIS, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, pp. 13-16, and Appendix 3, pp. 224-234. In the Munich manuscript, some of the departures from BHL No. 5303 seem to evoke unique aspects of BHL No. 5304 instead, although such inferences are not identical to this alternative Latin version either.

¹⁵ On the next page, f. 64v, the text states "*Beatissima enim Margareta erat Theodosii filia qui erat patriarcha gentium et idola adorabat*" ("The most blessed Margaret, then, was the daughter of Theodosius, who was chief priest of the pagans and worshipped idols"); CLAYTON and MAGENNIS, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, p. 195.

¹⁶ Why this figure would have wings is unclear. It may be that wings are not depicted at all, but that the defacement here has erased enough of the image to create the illusion of wings out of lines that simply represent the prefect's arm and robes. At the same time, the text above the image and on the next page discusses the prefect as wicked; Margaret prays to God and describes Olibrius as a wolf, a snare, and a net. Thus it is possible that the wings were intended to reflect the wicked, devilish nature of the prefect.

enthroned prefect opposite Margaret, who faces him as she is held by two guards, one on either side of her (ff. 69v-70r; Plate 4).

The two scenes in which Margaret stands in front of Olibrius show the prefect as remarkably bestial (Plates 3 and 4). Indicating his monstrosity, even his faldstool represents a monstrous hybrid of animal parts: two heads and two legs, sticking out from behind the figure of the ruler. Along with the threat, and eventual occurrence, of tortures and imprisonment, Margaret's ordeal involves two later encounters with beastly entities: a dreadful dragon that appears to her in prison, and another devil, in the form of a black figure, who claims to be the brother of the dragon. In the first case, Margaret is swallowed whole by the dragon, but by making the sign of the cross, she grows and splits the dragon "into two parts", emerging from his body unscathed. It is apparently this successful emergence that caused Margaret to eventually become known as a patron saint of birth and motherhood.¹⁷ Although the later illustrations that probably would have depicted these beasts were never completed, it is clear that the illustrator conceptualised an overt pictorial association between the prefect and the demons that harass Margaret later in her story.

In four of these scenes, various figures have been radically defaced. In the first image (Plate 1), the man's face is virtually erased, but the vigour of the rubbing here is minimal compared to other places in the manuscript. In fact, on the same page the idol's face has been worn completely through. The idol's hand and foot are also erased, grey smudges appearing where these extremities once were.¹⁸ The most prominent example of defacement appears in the scene of Olibrius on his throne on f. 69v, as two guards escort Margaret to him on f. 70r (Plate 4). The prefect's face and right hand and arm are rubbed completely through, as are parts of his throne, including one of the bestial feet. In this case, even the markers of Olibrius's authority are removed by the diligent defacer. Across from this image, Margaret remains legible while the two guards appear as headless henchmen without hands or feet. The figure on the right is especially dissolved, with only a pelvis and stumps of legs remaining. Without a leg to stand on, these symbols of Roman paganism and imperial authority fall to the blessed and intact Margaret and her reader ally.

¹⁷ For instance, this can be found in later vernacular versions of the legend in both English and French; see ROBERTSON, "The corporeality of female sanctity", p. 285, and CAZELLES, *The Lady as Saint*, p. 218.

¹⁸ For more on the depiction and defacement of representations of idols, see M. CAMILLE, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge, 1989), especially pp. 18-19.

The endeavours of this reader are especially noteworthy when considered in relation to the materials of which these folios were made. Parchment, especially that which was produced in the Middle Ages, is tough. The contents of medieval manuscripts like Clm. 1133 have survived for hundreds of years. Many manuscripts were seen by their owners as precious commodities, and were treated carefully, stored in cool, dark libraries that were ideal for preservation. For me to be able to handle the pages of this manuscript in the twenty-first century, these pages were clearly made to be strong and resilient. The particular leaves on which Margaret's story is illustrated are demonstrably high quality, lacking blemishes, thin spots, or cracking. Although small manuscripts are often made from the outer edges of a stretched skin in order to efficiently use up all the materials available, those areas also tend to be the weakest parts of the treated skin.¹⁹ However, that does not seem to be what was done in this case. These folios demonstrate virtually no flaws, holes, or bumps from insect bites. They show consistent colour and texture, indicating the relative expense of these high quality folios, clearly designated as such early in the process of making Margaret's *Life*. It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that a subsequent reader would take to these images with such deliberate violence.

The nature of the abrasions in the images of Margaret's story varies, but most of the areas seem to have a slightly darker colour (not unlike the grey smudge that is often left behind by a dirty pencil eraser) and are visibly abraded. What kind of tool or process would have made such markings? Sharp metal tools were likely used by those preparing the original parchment, and by later scribes correcting their mistakes: flesh and hair scraped away by the former, and errors in ink by the latter. A skilled scribe would be able to scrape away a malformed letter or unplanned ink droplet so that there was no evidence of either the error or the correction. Once the area was cleared of the mistake, the parchment was likely smoothed with the same tools that were used for the original treatment of the parchment, such as pumice.²⁰

¹⁹ In the process of parchment production, the edges of the skin are less desirable both because the skin left inadequately stretched becomes hard and horny like rawhide, and because the weaker parts of the skin (under the legs, etc.) end up situated at the edge of a treated skin as well.

²⁰ Pumice was used much like sandpaper or other sanding methods would be used today; see R. CLEMENS and T. GRAHAM, *Introduction to Manuscript Studies* (Ithaca, 2007). See also M.L. RYDER, "Parchment: Its history, manufacture, and composition", *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 2 (1960), pp. 391-399, at p. 395.

With tools likely available to make clean erasures, what does the rough nature of these markings tell us about the method by which they were made? A sharp tool appears to have been used, signalled in part by several of the holes that suggest the defacer eventually sliced through the parchment, perhaps while scratching or rubbing. And yet, the abraded nature of some of these spots speaks for a tool that was not especially good for smooth, refined corrections: these are messy, sloppy, uneven actions against the manuscript's pages.

So how do we begin to interpret these markings? Many instances of such treatment of medieval manuscripts exist, and in some cases it is clear that repeated touching of a particular spot has led to the disappearance of what was once depicted. However, this is most common with images of devotion, where representations of Christ or the Cross have been kissed and caressed repeatedly over centuries.²¹ Similar responses have been described for other medieval objects. For example, the wear displayed by Byzantine ivories indicates not only frequent handling, but also sometimes the caressing or kissing of specific elements within the image.²² Even clear instances of censorship are often minimally disruptive to the fabric of the parchment itself, for instance, in cases where puritan beliefs have led to the removal of genitalia.²³ But in the case of Margaret's *Life*, the parchment has sustained serious trauma. These are demonstrably violent alterations that require a more nuanced reading to acknowledge the forcefulness evident here.

In addition to mutilation caused by censorship of sexuality or even passionate devotion, the Munich manuscript's damage clearly resembles another form of defacement, that which is intent on removing representations of evil – demons, devils, or the Antichrist.²⁴ For example, similar defacement can be found in the fourteenth-century Macclesfield Psalter, in which a rubbed-out devil

²¹ Several such instances are discussed in K.M. RUDY, "Kissing images, unfurling rolls, measuring wounds, sewing badges and carrying talismans: Considering some Harley manuscripts through the physical rituals they reveal", *The Electronic British Library Journal* (2011), at <http://www.bl.uk/ebj/index.html>; see also M. CAMILLE, "Obscenity under erasure: Censorship in medieval illuminated manuscripts", in: *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*, ed. J.M. ZIOLKOWSKI (Leiden, 1998), pp. 139–154, at p. 141.

²² A. CUTLER, *The Hand of the Master: Craftsmanship, Ivory, and Society in Byzantium (9th–11th Centuries)* (Princeton, NJ, 1994), pp. 23–29, 39.

²³ CAMILLE, "Obscenity under erasure", p. 147.

²⁴ CAMILLE, "Obscenity under erasure", pp. 144–145; S. LEWIS, *Reading Images: Narrative Discourse and Reception in the Thirteenth-Century Illuminated Apocalypse* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 126.

confronts St. Dunstan in the folio's *bas de page* (Plate 5).²⁵ Anticipating the actions of the later reader (and perhaps even their tools of defacement), St. Dunstan defends himself against the devil with his attribute of goldsmith's tongs (he is the patron saint of goldsmiths and other metal smiths). Although the erasure here does not break through the parchment, it does invite associations between the destruction of wicked entities and the sorts of implements that may be used for such erasure. Rather than censorship per se, such defacement reflects the desire to make something pictured 'unseen', to enact the 'obliteration' of 'that which shows itself'.²⁶ This defacement, violent and aggressive in its materiality, suggests that the viewer was not only unconcerned with hiding the nature of the erasures; on the contrary, it seems the perpetrator wanted the aggressiveness of these changes to be clearly evident to subsequent readers. In this lack of subtlety, the hands responsible for this damage seem to have wanted others to notice the change that had been enacted on this manuscript's parchment.

The Munich manuscript's *Life of St. Margaret* shares some characteristics that have also been observed in other manuscripts of Margaret's cycle, books that are generally from around the same time and located in southern Bavaria, the region in which the Munich manuscript is presumed to have been made.²⁷ Weitzmann-Fiedler has pointed out the similarities between several such manuscripts, and in some cases (though not all of them), Olibrius is the recipient of censorship as well. Although primarily actions that rubbed out or erased Olibrius' face, these examples may indicate trends of defacement particular to this region or a specific moment. Michael Camille has suggested that much of the sexual censorship that took place on the folios of medieval manuscripts took place in the later Middle Ages. This is based primarily on social and cultural changes identified in notions about sexuality rather than on scientific data. Nevertheless, similar continuities suggest that when such defacement happens to certain image types, and comparable methods are used across many examples, we may have stumbled upon a momentary trend that was unlikely to have been continuously sustained over a long period of time.

One scenario for us to consider is that these actions were perpetrated initially by one person, but then each reader was reminded of this somewhat iconoclastic behaviour when reading the book and inclined to repeat it. Over time,

²⁵ I thank Elaine Treharne for bringing this image to my attention.

²⁶ CAMILLE, "Obscenity under erasure", p. 145.

²⁷ WEITZMANN-FIEDLER, "Zur Illustration der Margaretenlegende", pp. 24–25.

multiple readers or at least multiple touchings may have contributed to the long-term result. Such repeated touching might have exacerbated the damage, for the abraded surface would have been even more susceptible to the added grime of dirty, rough tools or soiled fingers. The darkened quality of some of the damaged areas might be interpreted as simply use over time, for hands are some of the most significant culprits for destroying manuscript pages. But in contrast to the usual wear and tear that is observed in many well-used manuscripts, the folios of this book do not show wear or discoloration at the lower, outer edges.²⁸ Moreover, that kind of wear tends to create a shiny and smooth surface, rather than the rough one we have here. It seems clear that this damage was not the result of everyday use, and thus compels us to consider the ramifications of this defacement's effects.

Affected myself by the visceral experience of handling this manuscript, I am struck by the powerful resonances of my own experiences and those I am trying to access from another historical moment. The manipulated nature of manuscripts like this one provides a remarkably tangible link to the past, even more so than other medieval objects, because the defacement acts as an indexical marker of previous handlers. This link between past and present requires us to consider how we, as twenty-first-century scholars, can access medieval experience through the phenomenology of handling old books. To reconsider this manuscript and its history in these terms necessitates that we interrogate the tactility, the physicality of historical inquiry. Especially pertinent to this volume on materiality, the historical value of our own responses to the study of the past is an arena that invites specific theoretical consideration.

The investigation of audience and response is not especially new in art history, although the question of what an historian's own responses bring to bear on such research has been less thoroughly interrogated. For example, in art historian David Freedberg's *The Power of Images*, he addresses the "failure" he sees in his field, the failure to deal with the ways people have responded to images.²⁹ Although fully cognisant of the "obstacles in the way of assessing past responses", Freedberg nevertheless proposes that

²⁸ For an excellent study of such markings, see K.M. RUDY, "Dirty books: Quantifying patterns of use in medieval manuscripts using a densitometer", *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 2 (2010), at <http://www.jhna.org/>.

²⁹ D. FREEDBERG, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago, 1989; paperback edn. 1991), p. XIX.

There still remains a basic level of reaction that cuts across historical, social, and other contextual boundaries. It is at precisely this level – which pertains to our psychological, biological, and neurological status as members of the same species – that our cognition of images is allied with that of all men and women.³⁰

These shared experiences are not only visual, but also material, and in the case of the Munich *Life* of St. Margaret, the materiality of the object is precisely what fosters the present's link to the past. The fascination that I have felt with this manuscript stems directly from its material state today, constructing a scenario where my hand touches the places where past hands have been. My visceral experience seems to share a very precise resonance with the extreme response of the book's past handlers as well.

The exploration of these ideas has also been represented in the work of a number of well-known medieval historians. Their inquiries acknowledge the problems of attempting to objectively separate ourselves, and our points of view, from our study of the past. Caroline Walker Bynum has described historians themselves as hybrids, "monstrous combinations of past and present", suggesting that the best that we can aim for is something of a mixture, "a simultaneous assertion of past and present, self and other".³¹ This notion of hybridity seems to acknowledge the inevitability that our experiences will inform our perceptions of the past. While Freedberg asserts that we share fundamental characteristics and perspectives with viewers from the past, Bynum further suggests that no one, especially no historian, is ever fully contained within the present.

Both of these constructions demonstrate an acceptance of subjectivity in historical practice. Perhaps more significantly, however, these perspectives also underscore the potential value of precisely this kind of subjectivity. Freed of the expectations of unattainable objectivity, more and more scholars have begun to explore what new modes of interpretation open up as a result. By envisioning a form of 'affective' communities that span time, Carolyn Dinshaw has found a way to explore subjectivities now and in the past through a queer lens.³² And Dyan Elliott has explained that she sees the alternative to introduc-

³⁰ FREEDBERG, *Power of Images*, p. 23.

³¹ C.W. BYNUM, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York and Cambridge, MA, 2001), pp. 34-36.

³² C. DINSHAW, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC, 1999), pp. 12, 14, 34-35. Dinshaw also engages with the notion of touch and touching the past, although her exploration deals more with a kind of textual intimacy between

ing psychoanalytic concepts such as repression into her historical work as “un-thinkable”. She deems it misguided to limit one’s historical description to the “vocabulary in which medieval thinkers were accustomed to describing themselves”, stating that “the refusal to acknowledge impulses, motives, and fantasies incompatible with medieval self-understanding would constitute an unacceptable avoidance of our interpretive responsibility”.³³ As these scholars have articulated, the present is not simply a burden or inhibitor that we must acknowledge and bear. On the contrary, our place in the present is precisely what allows us to propose new methods of interpretation for medieval cultural production.

Indeed, the material substance of the Munich manuscript provides a literal conduit between ourselves as contemporary historians and viewers of the past. More than simply a connection to past readers, this manuscript captures in material form the fundamentally cumulative nature of historical study. Once we accept the necessity of our presence in our work, it is possible to push further the notion of reciprocity in such endeavours. As the Munich manuscript can attest, an historical object’s meaning does not fully reside in the past; on the contrary, its story is made up of its entire period of existence. My relationship with this book today is as much a part of its history as are the exchanges that past users have had with it.

In his recent book *Production of Presence*, theorist Hans Gumbrecht argues that the dimension of presence, in which cultural phenomena and events have tangibility and make an impact on our senses and bodies, is fundamental to today’s historical study by the humanities, which he sees as having become too distanced from the dimension of experience.³⁴ This proposal acknowledges, and even encourages, our own experiences in our study of the past. The continual *presence* of the objects over time should be an essential part of historical analysis, and the tangible connection a scholar has with the object of research must be central to that investigation.

While Elliott has asserted the value of psychoanalysis for her work, I have found that phenomenology and reception theory have been integral to my interpretation of the Munich manuscript and to Margaret’s *Life* in particular. Beyond a scholarly acknowledgement of the desire to connect with the past, phe-

bodies than with our own physical touching of objects from the past.

³³ D. ELLIOTT, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1999), pp. 7-8.

³⁴ H.U. GUMBRECHT, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford, 2004), pp. 224-232.

nomenology explicitly engages the *tangible* experiences we have, as well as how they may be related to the physical experiences of other individuals. Phenomenological studies pursue the affective character of experience, acknowledging that intellectual and visual stimuli can be felt throughout the body.³⁵ Prompting investigations into the essence of what we experience, phenomenology provides a critical apparatus for investigating reception through the notion of a ‘lived body’ that experiences the world and also impacts that world, a notion that resonates with medieval materiality. In an essay on the relationship between the flayed body in medieval narratives and the flayed animal skins on which those stories are written, Sarah Kay wonders if these “inarticulate material witnesses” affected their readers as much as the texts.³⁶ And Nancy Vine Durling has argued that parchment imperfections (already present when the script was written) are often integrated into the meaning of a manuscript, ‘performing’ associations with textual references embodied in wounds, scars, or sewing.³⁷ And Bynum’s recent book on Christian materiality further testifies to the complex power often attributed to objects and images in late medieval Europe.³⁸ Given the tangible immediacy of such objects, it seems likely that such representations phenomenologically impacted medieval audiences and involved them in the production of the images’ meanings.

The exploration of medieval images and their impact on audiences past and present is pertinent because of the special reciprocal and interactive nature of medieval visual theory itself. Medieval understanding of vision and perception involved the entire body of the viewer, engaged all the senses at once and was

³⁵ For example, see M. MERLEAU-PONTY, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. SMITH (London and New York, 2002; orig. *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris, 1945)), p. 202. Feminist reassessments of Merleau-Ponty’s work have also been useful to me, including V.C. SOBCHACK, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, NJ, 1992); J. BUTLER, “Sexual ideology and phenomenological description: A feminist critique of Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*”, in: *The Thinking Muse: Feminism and Modern French Philosophy*, ed. J. ALLEN and I.M. YOUNG (Bloomington, 1989), pp. 85-100; E. GROSZ, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, 1994); I.M. YOUNG, “Throwing like a girl: A phenomenology of feminine body comportment, motility, and spatiality”, *Human Studies* 3 (1980), pp. 137-156; republished several times.

³⁶ S. KAY, “Original skin: Flaying, reading, and thinking in the *Legend of Saint Bartholomew* and other works”, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 36 (2006), pp. 35-73, at p. 38.

³⁷ N.V. DURLING, “Birthmarks and bookmarks: The example of a thirteenth-century French anthology”, *Exemplaria* 16 (2004), pp. 73-94.

³⁸ C.W. BYNUM, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York, 2011).

conceptualised as active exchange between seer and seen. Two theories regarding how sight worked were prevalent in the Middle Ages, theories that relied upon the notion of a physical exchange of matter through space. Extromission involved “the idea that a beam of light radiates outward from the eye illuminating what it falls on”, while intromission was the notion “that all matter replicates its own image through intervening media until the image strikes the human eye”.³⁹ The thirteenth-century scholar Roger Bacon proposed a synthesis of intromission and extromission, through which he emphasised the physical contact of vision “so that looking becomes analogous to touching”,⁴⁰ or what Carolyn Collette has described as a “two-part process involving both seer and seen”.⁴¹ Such ideas emphasise the concept of vision as an exchange in two directions and reciprocal in nature. With the Munich manuscript’s *Life* of Margaret, the spatial continuity of the book itself provides a connection between my own embodied reading of the book and the corporeal response evoked in the visual and tactile experiences of past users. Such access requires a fundamental rethinking of our disciplinary ideals of absolute proof and facts towards something far more nuanced, living, and continuous.

This *Life of St. Margaret* is filled with evidence of the physical interaction between its readers and the book itself. The images directly invoked a physical response, one that may have been solicited repeatedly each time the reader or readers came to engage with the manuscript and its images. What was it about Margaret’s story that drove the viewer to such violent aggression and passionate response? Although we cannot know when the rubbing was done, the specificity of the defacement suggests the markings were by someone who fully understood and was keenly invested in what and who is depicted.

The clearest connection between the many sites of defacement is that the reader attacked the ‘bad guys’ in this story: the pagan father and the idol he worshipped, the prefect, and the prefect’s soldiers. Originally deemed acceptable as content to depict on the *vita*’s pages, the status of these evil entities changed after the initial phase of destruction had taken place. Indeed, as Camille has pointed out, such defacement also ends up bringing more attention to

³⁹ C.P. COLLETTE, *Species, Phantasms, and Images: Vision and Medieval Psychology in the Canterbury Tales* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2001), p. 15.

⁴⁰ S. BIERNOFF, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (New York, 2002), p. 85. For more on Roger Bacon and medieval optics in general, see D.C. LINDBERG, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago, 1976), and ID., *Studies in the History of Medieval Optics* (London, 1983).

⁴¹ COLLETTE, *Species, Phantasms, and Images*, p. 13.

what has been removed.⁴² Although certainly intended to demonstrate the problematic nature of these entities, does such action also grant them more negative power? On the contrary, the hand of the viewer who violently rubbed out the body parts of the wicked throughout this manuscript’s pages simultaneously succeeded in emphasising Margaret’s prominent position.⁴³ Such active destruction of these bodies demonstrates the moral position of the characters, as well as the desire of the reader to be morally aligned with the saint – whose body remained untouched.

In important contrast to the more common depictions of female saints, in which their bodies are often tortured and physically assaulted (see Plate 6), Margaret’s body remains *more* intact than the erased and fragmented bodies of the wicked. This diligent handler succeeded in usurping from them the power that Margaret was denied by the prefect. The handler’s activity reveals the particular tactility and immediacy with which medieval images were engaged, and this reciprocal understanding of viewing implicates the audience in Margaret’s authoritative position. By rubbing and defacing the demons and evil figures on these pages, the reader in a sense re-enacted the heroic, saintly acts of Margaret. Even if it was an independent *libellus* before it was bound into Clm. 1133, the date of the defacement remains unknown. But in that particularly portable form, it may have offered even more intimacy or spiritual fulfilment.

The destruction of many of these figures’ faces succeeds in removing their identity, but it also takes away the signifiers of their capabilities for both sight and communication. Such defacement of figures occurs occasionally in medieval manuscripts, and when the eyes are rubbed out the ‘evil eye’ or powerful gaze of a malevolent figure is also removed.⁴⁴ The erasures of the hands and feet are equally telling. By removing the hands, the reader took away another sense from these bodies, which remain unable to touch or feel. Even more fascinating, the figures that have had their feet erased have become unable to move.

Several of these corporeal sites of communication and motility – the eyes, ears, hands, and feet – are mentioned repeatedly in the text as well. Throughout Margaret’s story, idols are described as “deaf and blind” or “deaf and dumb”,

⁴² CAMILLE, “Obscenity under erasure”, pp. 145–146.

⁴³ Margaret’s transgressive and assertive position in the manuscript is more fully discussed in my essay “Violence on vellum: Saint Margaret’s transgressive body and its audience”, in: *Representing Medieval Genders and Sexualities in Europe: Construction, Transformation, and Subversion, 600–1530*, ed. E. L’ESTRANGE and A. MORE (Farnham, 2011), pp. 67–88.

⁴⁴ CAMILLE, “Obscenity under erasure”, p. 142.

and the pagan characters worship these deaf and dumb gods. When Margaret stands in front of the prefect, she speaks to him “face to face”, and in one case, his wickedness is demonstrated by his covering his face with a cloak.⁴⁵ The tangible temptation was apparently too great for this reader, who seems to have been compelled to reiterate the ideas presented in the *Life*’s text.

This tangibility prompts further questions about the viewer’s perceptions of Margaret’s *vita* and this book. This defacer clearly understood the text, for the identification of the evil figures, and the very particular nature of their dismemberment, seems evidence enough of this fact. And if the overdrawing and labelling took place around the same time as the defacement, it also indicates a reader who was invested in the presence of Margaret, asserting her power by repeatedly naming her on the folio pages where she appears.

These ideas and what remains in the manuscript itself begin to make slightly more visible our intangible, ghostly defacer. The later overdrawing appears to be of the same ink colour and line quality as the identifications, suggesting that both interventions were conducted simultaneously. We cannot be sure they were done in tandem with the rubbings, but the shared disregard for the manuscript’s original state is especially tantalising. The script of the labels is an unrefined version of Caroline minuscule, possibly from the later thirteenth or fourteenth centuries, and is not unlike the script used in the original writing. This later date alludes to a period when Margaret’s cult was even stronger. The indication that this writing and drawing were done relatively soon after the creation of the *vita* is supported by other aspects as well.

This manuscript was likely constructed in the Benedictine monastery at Benediktbeuern, and the readers for centuries were probably monks and nuns.⁴⁶ We cannot rule out the possibility that other visitors may have had access to this manuscript as well. There seems to be a fairly wide range of possible viewers, and this is further complicated by the content of this manuscript as well, specifically, the *Life* of St. Margaret. Near the end of the text, the healing properties of both Margaret’s passion (when read aloud) and her relics are es-

⁴⁵ Elaine Treharne has discussed the connection between evil and the lack of senses in Old English version of Margaret’s *Life* in MS Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 303; see TREHARNE, ““They should not worship devils ...””. I also thank her for sharing with me a forthcoming essay that revisits that manuscript and the ideas explored in the 1990 article, entitled “Sensation and revelation in the Old English *Life* of St. Margaret”.

⁴⁶ There is documentation dated to 1116 of a double monastery at Benediktbeuern, presumably related to reforms enacted by Abbot Konrad (c. 1100-1122); see *Das Bistum Augsburg 1: Die Benediktinerabtei Benediktbeuern*, p. 95.

poused, claiming that “no infant will be born lame, blind or dumb”. A reminder of her associations with successful childbirth, this demonstrates that books were sometimes conceptualised as relics in and of themselves.⁴⁷ If this book or a *libellus* of Margaret’s *Life* was used as a kind of talisman or relic, held and rubbed to conjure the blessings or healing powers of Margaret, a viewer is envisioned who facilitated Margaret’s aid by helping her fight the evil entities depicted.

The actual nature of the rubbing, however, complicates this straightforward reading. The violated condition of the parchment itself suggests that, while the reader(s) may have had Margaret’s victory in mind, that reader also took a very aggressive approach towards bolstering the saint against evil. The parchment, extremely durable and well made, would have only given in to the pressure of the reader’s actions after a lengthy and rather vicious process with sharp tools and significant physical effort. When I first encountered this manuscript I assumed that the damage had been the result of rubbing repeatedly, a kind of slow, methodical touching that would eventually work through the parchment. However, with an improved understanding of parchment making, a result of the seminar out of which this collection of essays has grown, it is clear that a more intentional process as well as a much sharper implement than a finger must have been used – good parchment is just too strong to be worn through by hand.⁴⁸

Any number of possible members of the audience for Margaret’s *Life* or the manuscript could have been enlisted to embark upon such actions, either for their own health or on behalf of another member of society. The intensity of the rubbings indicates significant passion – a very powerful emotional response that was key to the physical treatment evidenced on the folios today. The durability of this manuscript’s parchment is of course one of the reasons for its accessibility now, for despite the damage done to the pages, Margaret’s *Life* has otherwise survived intact. And the nature of this intervention, its violence and aggressiveness, was also necessarily predicated on the quality and strength of the parchment. Finally, the parchment’s particular qualities along

⁴⁷ See M. ELSAKKERS, “In pain you shall bear children (Gen 3:16): Medieval prayers for a safe delivery”, in: *Women and Miracle Stories: A Multidisciplinary Exploration*, ed. A.-M. KORTE (Leiden, 2001), pp. 179-209.

⁴⁸ In particular, a strength-testing demonstration conducted by Timothy Barrett as part of the University of Iowa Obermann Center for Advanced Studies 2008 Research Seminar, ‘Medieval Manuscript Studies and Contemporary Book Arts: Extreme Materialist Readings of Medieval Books’, June 2008.

with its manmade blemishes are both central to our experiences of the book today. The book's resonances would be very different without the damage it has withstood over the centuries. When we touch the book today, we not only connect to the book's moment of creation, but also are reminded of the 800 years of readers, viewers, and handlers who have contributed to the complex network of experiences strewn between then and now. The holes and abrasions of this book bear witness to the manuscript's physicality, emphasising a material presence that forever alters how contemporary users access and touch this particular version of the past.

Parchment, Paper, and Artisanal Research Techniques

TIMOTHY BARRETT

The grouping of stars called the Seven Sisters can be seen more clearly, some say, by looking just to the side of the constellation rather than directly at it. In a similar sense, my own knowledge of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century European papermaking has been much informed by considering certain material aspects of parchment-based manuscript book culture. Is it possible the medievalist familiar with the manuscript period might learn something from a similar consideration of the arrival of paper and its subsequent dominant role in book production and consumption? And, perhaps more important, what might the scholar trained in academic research methods gain from considering the alternative research methods employed by an artisanal specialist during his study of historical papers?

These two lines of thought have driven my contributions during the Obermann seminar discussions and they provide the basis for the discussion that follows.

Paper and Parchment

Between 800 and 1100, papyrus, parchment, and paper were all competing as important writing materials in the Mediterranean theatre. But by 1100, papyrus dropped out of sight due to the incursion of Arab papermaking in the east

Plate 1: *The Passion of Saint Margaret*, MS München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 1133, twelfth century; ff. 63v-64r. Reproduced with permission of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek.

Plate 4: *The Passion of Saint Margaret*, MS München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 1133, twelfth century; ff. 69v-70r. Reproduced with permission of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek.

Plate 5: *St. Dunstan and the devil*, Macclesfield Psalter, the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, Great Britain, c. 1330; f. 140r. Reproduced with permission of Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge/Art Resource, NY.

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SCRAPED, STROKED,
AND BOUND

MATERIALLY ENGAGED READINGS
OF MEDIEVAL MANUSCRIPTS

edited by

Jonathan Wilcox

BREPOLS

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Scraped, stroked, and bound : materially engaged readings of medieval manuscripts. – (Utrecht studies in medieval literacy ; v. 23)

1. Manuscripts, Medieval. 2. Paleography. 3. Parchment. 4. Bookbinding, Medieval. 5. Form (Aesthetics)

I. Series. II. Wilcox, Jonathan.

091-dc23

ISBN-13: 9782503545493

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D/2013/0095/7

ISBN 978-2-503-54549-3

Printed in the E.U. on acid-free paper

Epigraphs

*Litera me pandat sermonis fida ministra.
Omnes alme meos fratres [...] uoce saluta.*

May the letter, faithful servant of speech, reveal me;
greet, O kindly [book], all my brothers with thy voice.¹

Aldred, glossator of the Lindisfarne Gospels,
MS London, British Library, Cotton Nero D. iv, f. 259r

¹ Text from L. NEES, "Reading Aldred's colophon for the Lindisfarne Gospels", *Speculum* 78 (2003), pp. 333-377, at p. 341; translation from M.P. BROWN, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality, and the Scribe* (London, 2003), p. 103. See also J. ROBERTS, "Aldred signs off from glossing the Lindisfarne Gospels", in: *Writing and Texts in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. A.R. RUMBLE (Cambridge, 2006: *Publications of the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies* 5), pp. 28-43.