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Daniel Williman and Karen Corsano, *The World Chronicle of Guillaume de Nangis: A Manuscript's Journey from Saint-Denis to St. Pancras*. Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter / Medieval Institute Publications, 2020. xii + 238 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$109.99 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-5015-1871-3; \$109.99 U.S. (eb). ISBN 978-1-5015-1001-4.

Review by Kathy M. Krause, University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Divided into two uneven and somewhat dissimilar parts, this is a challenging book to review and at times a frustrating one to read: its wealth of erudition and meticulous detail, as well as extensive references to both primary and secondary sources, are offset by a somewhat disconcerting narrative style. At its best, however, the study offers a lively account of the travels of a codex (London, British Library, Royal 13 E IV) via several major events of the late European Middle Ages and early Renaissance.

The authors describe their project as the “biography” of London, British Library, Royal 13 E IV, a manuscript of Guillaume de Nangis’s universal chronicle (generally known by its Latin title as the *Chronicon*), which remains unedited to date.[1] The first section of the book, however, provides a broader look at the creation and evolution of the *Chronicon*: its author Guillaume de Nangis, the “historical studio” at the abbey of Saint-Denis (where Guillaume was a monk) at the end of the thirteenth century, the continuations of the *Chronicon* by Guillaume’s fellow monks after his death in 1300, and the other manuscripts of the text.

In addition to an overview of the writing of history at Saint-Denis, chapter one offers a short discussion of the various “editions” of Guillaume’s *Chronicon*, as well as a brief introduction to his major sources (Guillaume identifies them in his Prologue as Eusebius, Jerome, and Sigebert of Gembloux.) The chapter also considers why Guillaume felt the need to compile yet another universal chronicle, and the first reason the authors attribute to him is a desire to provide “the ability to establish or to nullify claims of prescriptive right, and to strengthen or weaken privileges” (p. 9). After noting other motivations (e.g., history as *exempla* for right living, or as teacher of *contemptus mundi*), they elaborate on the initial reason, claiming that “Guillaume gives yet another reason for writing history, a reason that is implicit in chronicles written in monasteries and constantly on his own mind as *custos cartarum*...[T]he monks could use their chronicle or book of annals to defend their ‘prescription’ of such a farm, bridge-toll, mill, or parish. The written record substantiates legal claims to property, including the ownership of privileges and authority, when those are just and true, and the record will help demolish such claims when they are false” (p. 10). The ways religious institutions such as monasteries used their annals is well known; however, nothing in any of the citations provided from Guillaume’s prologue

indicates that this was a reason for writing the *Chronicon*. Either the authors are referring to a section of the prologue they do not cite (entirely possible), or perhaps they are anticipating their later discussions of how the Royal manuscript of the *Chronicon* was (according to them) used; in either case, it would have helped their argument significantly to provide readers with the textual evidence for this particular claim. It is not perhaps a major issue, but it conditions the reader to be wary of further conclusions, which is unfortunate.

Chapter two changes from narrative to philology to "take on the genial drudgery" (p. 15) of establishing a *stemma codicum* charting the relationships between the copies (based on collating textual variants). As part of this work, the authors briefly describe all twenty-two extant manuscripts, adding ten witnesses to those collated by Leopold Delisle.[2] This chapter and the next, which offers stories of ownership of varying length for about a dozen of the manuscripts, will be quite useful for scholars of either Guillaume's *Chronicon* or any of the manuscripts that contain it. Some of the anecdotes contain significant amounts of historical information, and clearly involved many hours of research. Of particular interest, for example, may be the discussion of Vatican Library, Chigi G VIII 233 for the identification of Jeanne de Monbaston as the artist who painted the opening historiated initial, as well as for its travels to arrive at the Vatican.

The last chapter of part one, chapter four, offers a catalog description of the manuscript at the heart of the book, London, British Library, Royal 13 E VI (a copy of the second version of Guillaume's text), followed by an explanation of *dictio probatoria* (a means of identifying specific volumes used in medieval (and later) library catalogs based on the first sentence on the second folio). Why, one wonders, include a detailed explanation of how *dictio probatoria* works (and the difficulties of utilizing it) as a way to identify specific codices or copies of a text? Because it was Williman's extensive database of old library inventories, using *probatoria*, that allowed him to discover that the British Library manuscript was the book indicated in the ca. 1415 inventory of the holdings of the Duc de Berry, and it was this discovery that led the authors to write "the life and times of British Library, Royal manuscript 13 E IV" (p. 68).

Occupying some two-thirds of the volume, part two includes seven chapters that trace the Royal manuscript of Guillaume de Nangis's *Chronicon* from its creation to more or less the present day. The mostly shorter chapters utilize a lively narrative style, full of anecdotes and imagined scenes of the codex being used by its possessors. Chapter five focuses on the abbey of Saint-Denis where "the ur-manuscripts of both editions (MS Reginensis and MS A) were copied at the beginning of his [Gilles de Pontoise's] abbacy from the massive file of notes that Guillaume and his historical confreres had compiled, in the studio that Guillaume had provided, and Paris scribes and color painters were brought in to give the books a professional polish" (p. 73). We next observe a professional scribe named Guillaume Lescot at work as he writes Royal 13 E IV, which, when finished, "was put to work in the abbey of Saint-Denis where...it served as a solemn, copious, objective monument, instructing the monks and their pious and curious visitors about the lives and battles, virtues and failings of those kings and queens." (p. 80).

Chapters six, seven, and eight jump to the early fifteenth century. First we learn that the codex may have been used as evidence as the Council of Paris debated (in December 1406) whether or not to subtract obedience from the Avignon pope. It was definitely this codex that was called upon (once again before the Parlement de Paris) during the famous argument between the Abbey of Saint-Denis and Notre-Dame de Paris as to which possessed the true skull relic of St. Denis in

1410. We also know that Jean, Duc de Berry borrowed the codex from Saint-Denis in 1415 thanks to inventories of his possessions, one of which notes not only that he “caused [the book] to be borrowed from the church of Saint-Denis” but also that he did so “to show to the emperor and also to have it copied” (p. 103). This kind of detail about the movement of a manuscript and about the borrower’s intentions for it is such a rare find that one understands how the authors of the study were inspired to follow the codex’s travels through time and space.

The emperor in question was Sigismund of Luxembourg, and chapter seven recounts at length and in detail his political maneuverings in order to become Holy Roman Emperor, leading up to his presence in Paris in 1415-16. The authors view Sigismund as the means by which the Royal manuscript moved from Paris to London, for shortly after he would have been shown the codex by Jean, Duc de Berry, he traveled to England and remained there as Henry V’s guest from May to August 1216. As the events are presented in chapter eight, the codex was among the gifts Sigismund offered to the College of St George at Windsor when he was inducted into the Order of the Garter. The codex remained at the College until 1525, when it was bestowed upon Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk. Here, manuscript evidence proves his ownership: his *ex libris* remains on f. iv and his signature on f. 445v.

The narrative style of these three chapters (and the book more generally) presents the account of the travels of the Royal manuscript as fact. We read, to offer just one example, “The Chronicle manuscript was Sigismund’s gift to the Chapel, in imitation of a grand donation of books by King Henry on the same occasion” (p. 130). How do the authors know such details? It is not until the last section of chapter eight that we learn that they do not in fact know them: they note that “from the date of the inventory of Jean de Berry’s jewels to the numbered list of Henry VIII’s books in 1542 we have no positive written notice of our codex. But the circumstances are strongly suggestive” (p. 132). The re-creation of the codex’s travels is plausible, based on logical inferences from information such as that about Jean, Duc de Berry wanting the Royal manuscript to show to Sigismund. However, the authors should have made clear from the beginning that the story they are telling is their extrapolation.

The account of Henry VIII’s interactions with the codex does rely on more substantial evidence, even as it retains the earlier sections’ lively narrative style. As chapter nine notes, we know from an *ex-libris* (f. iv) and a signature (f. 445v) that the Royal manuscript was in the possession of Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk by the early sixteenth century. Norfolk then (apparently) gifted the codex to Henry VIII in early 1530. It is here, in chapter ten, that the wealth of details from the authors’ meticulous examination of the historical record, their observation of the codex itself, and their copious reading of earlier secondary sources create a narrative that truly illuminates the story of Royal 13 E IV.

The narrative closes with a last chapter summarizing the years between Henry VIII and the British Museum Act of 1753 which brought all the Royal manuscripts (among others) to the Museum and concluding with one last anecdote about Leopold Delisle, the author of the original study of the manuscripts of Guillaume de Nangis’s *Chronicon*, who apparently never saw Royal 13 E IV during his extensive research at the British Museum in the 1870s.

In addition to the eleven narrative chapters, the volume includes five appendices containing primarily source material: excerpts from the *Chronicon* in Royal 13 E IV (Appendix A, edited, one supposes by the authors), arguments from the Rouleau de Saint-Denis submitted to the

Parlement de Paris in 1410 (Appendix B) as well as a selection of the historical references made by Guillaume Fillastre during the 1406 council (Appendix C), and (Appendix D) a list of the expenses paid for the books of Henry VIII (from the Privy Purse Warrants). The last appendix (E) takes the history of Royal 13 E IV into the future, with a request to readers to help find the codex's missing folios, including a description of the missing folios and a transcription of the missing text (based on BnF lat. 4817).

Overall, the feel of much the book is that of a wonderful storyteller who gets a bit too caught up at times in the details and in filling in the back story and at others, in creating an engaging tale from somewhat thin material. What shines through it all, however, is the delight of the scholarly hunt and the thrill of making unexpected connections between people, events, and manuscripts. Although one is not quite sure who the intended audience is for such a volume, there is much in it that will be of interest to readers of *H-France Review*, particularly for scholars of chronicles and how they were read in the Middle Ages (and later), but also book historians and those interested in the historiography of Saint-Denis. The authors have done an astounding amount of research and collation of information from both primary and secondary sources. Even at its most speculative moments, the narrative remains firmly anchored in primary source accounts of the events it recounts (whether or not they can be firmly tied to the codex itself).

## NOTES

[1] The portion of the *Chronicon* that covers the period 1226 to 1300 was edited in the *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France. Gesta sanctae memoriae Ludovici regis Franciae, auctore Guillelmo de Nangiaco*, ed. Pierre-Claude-François Daunou et Joseph Naudet, in *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France* vol. 20 (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1840), pp. 543-582.

[2] Léopold Delisle, "Mémoire sur les ouvrages de Guillaume de Nangis," *Mémoires de l'Institut national de France* 27 (1873): 287-372.

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