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Heather Blurton and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, eds., Rethinking the "South English Legendaries" . (Manchester Medieval Literature and Culture.) Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011. Pp. 517; 8 black-and-white figures and 6 tables. £70. ISBN: 978-...

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Malory adopted stylistic features of the Bible does not hold. Indeed, like the Bible, Malory employs both narrative and syntactical parataxis—stringing together episodes in the narrative and phrases and clauses in its syntax without the use of connectors in the narrative or subordinating conjunctions in the syntax. But these techniques are not original to Malory, they were carried over from Malory's sources, and they are so common in medieval writing that it is difficult to say whether they are features of biblical style specifically, or whether they are features of orality that emerged coincidentally in different places and in different historical periods. What does emerge from this chapter—and what deserves closer analysis—is the debt of the Arthuriad, in whatever language, to the Old Testament's profound study of the human aspirations and failures that led to the tragedy of empire in the Deuteronomistic history (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings). Although this is not that book, at least *Biblical Paradigms* points the way for it.

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HEATHER BLURTON and JOCELYN WOGAN-BROWNE, eds., *Rethinking the "South English Legendaries"*. (Manchester Medieval Literature and Culture.) Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011. Pp. 517; 8 black-and-white figures and 6 tables. £70. ISBN: 978-0-7190-8434-8.

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Any new work on a tradition as extensive and relatively understudied as that of the South English Legendary/-ies (SEL) is welcome: with "over sixty manuscripts and some three hundred separate items in circulation in various textual combinations and types of books" (3) from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, of which no two are exactly alike, the SELs can certainly lay claim to considerable interest in their own time. This has begun to be matched in modern criticism, and the present volume makes a valuable contribution thanks to its breadth, its combination of new essays and reprinted classics, and its engagement with key predecessors, particularly Manfred Görlach, Klaus Jankowsky, Annie Samson, and Anne B. Thompson (who contributes the volume's afterword). Throughout, as the title suggests, the volume aims to do justice to the complexity and multifariousness of the SEL tradition, with its combination of saints' lives and temporale material on other church feasts. It acknowledges, both explicitly and implicitly, the "philological vertigo" (190) induced by sustained contemplation of the SEL's textual manifestations, and attempts not to master or map these, as some valuable earlier work has done, but rather to think with them, taking account of variety while also considering what holds this "congeries of narrative" (4) together as something we can provisionally call the SEL(s).

While the nineteen essays are as wide-ranging as their objects of study, they show a consistent and timely interest in audiences, reception, and manuscript culture; the vexed question of the "Englishness" or nationalistic tendencies of the SEL tradition is another recurrent theme, though as a whole the collection stresses regional, urban, and civic allegiances rather than a coherent national identity, with particular attention to lay affinities (see, for example, the essays by Chloe Morgan, Thomas J. Heffernan, and Sarah Breckenridge, as well as Wogan-Browne, "Locating").

The strong first group of essays, "(Re-)situating the *South English Legendary*," lays the groundwork for a more respectful and capacious attention to this "first multi-part narrative in Middle English" (212) by considering the tradition as a whole: we get incisive treatment of liturgical sources (Sherry Reames), style (Oliver Pickering), and vernacular manuscript culture (John Frankis), as well as Thomas R. Liszka's very useful scene-setting chapter, which provides helpful definitions of key terms and an orientation to the phenomenon of the SELs. Throughout this section the idea of "open texts" is important (see,

for example, 41, 90) and echoes the pervasive emphasis on audience by stressing the degree to which later compilers felt able, even encouraged, to rework, expand, and modify the tradition.

In later sections, chapters that excavate particular lives, manuscripts, or episodes are thoughtful and engaging, but the essays that particularly stand out are those that take up the challenge of using the SELs to contribute to our understanding of late-medieval literature and manuscript culture more broadly. William Robins, in the second group of essays (“Manuscripts and Textual Cultures”), offers the most extended consideration of the openness mentioned above, noting the “dynamic interplay between item and collection” as a compelling and indeed “ineluctable” aspect of the SEL (193). The “modular dynamics” that he sees informing the SEL—whereby texts could be recombined while remaining recognizably part of a “large repertoire” characterized by “certain usable configurations”—offer a model vocabulary for dealing with manuscript culture more broadly (205) and some useful caveats on the potentially obscuring effects of modern editorial practices. In the following section on “Textual Communities,” Catherine Sanok’s essay argues that in both the SELs and the communities they aim to form “the category shift from the individual to the collective is defined not by synecdoche but by multiplicity” (215). The organizing principle of the calendar, that is, of time, allows for “separate, but non-exclusive and overlapping, categories of identity” (216), highlighted in the life of Thomas Becket, which, as she notes, is privileged by the SEL’s beginning with January 1. Robert Mills, in the section on “Contexts and Discourses,” finds this legend useful from another angle, exploring the famously elaborated narrative of Becket’s Saracen mother as a way to approach the tension that translation creates between effacement and repetition, and to think about the overlapping demands of genre, language, and “different modes of exemplary biography” (382). All three essays provide a useful and provocative context for others in their sections: Robins’s points about editorial attempts to compensate for textual complexity resonate with Stephen M. Yeager’s investigation of the competing demands of history and literature in the life of Saint Egwine; Sanok’s ideas about overlapping communities interact productively with Gordon Whatley’s discussion of the differing representations of Gregory the Great and Augustine of Canterbury in their relations to the English people; Mills’s close questioning of translation and multiple identities picks up themes from Heather Blurton’s argument that the experience of conversion is haunted by the fear of counterfeiting in the life of Judas/Quiriac; examples could be multiplied.

This volume repeatedly invokes Chaucer—especially the *Canterbury Tales*, that most famous narrative grab-bag—in an effort to shake up our sense of the SELs’ place in literary history (263, 403, 473). By conveying not only the particular riches of this “textual domain” (187) but the ways in which it navigates and meditates upon its own variegated evolutions, these essays more than make their case for the SEL as a tradition with significance well beyond its own, already capacious, borders.

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DAVID BRAKKE, DEBORAH DELIYANNIS, and EDWARD WATTS, eds., *Shifting Cultural Frontiers in Late Antiquity*. Farnham, Surrey, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012. Pp. xii, 286; 26 black-and-white figures and 1 table. \$119.95. ISBN: 978-1-4094-4149-6. doi:[10.1017/S0038713414001687](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0038713414001687)

The essays in this volume are based on papers delivered at the Eighth Biennial Conference on Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity, held at Indiana University in the spring of 2009. In his introduction, David Brakke acknowledges the “diversity of . . . subject matters and . . . scholarly approaches,” but proposes that the volume finds its coherence “by

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