Fragmentology

A Journal for the Study of Medieval Manuscript Fragments

Fragmentology is an international, peer-reviewed Open Access journal, dedicated to publishing scholarly articles and reviews concerning medieval manuscript fragments. *Fragmentology* welcomes submissions, both articles and research notes, on any aspect pertaining to Latin and Greek manuscript fragments in the Middle Ages.

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Review

Kathryn M. Rudy, *Image, Knife, and Gluepot: Early Assemblage in Manuscript and Print*, Cambridge: Open Book Publishers 2019, 374 pp. ISBN 9781783745173.

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This review concerns a very original book that deserves to be read by all students and scholars in the history of manuscripts and early printed books. It is not easy to pin down what kind of book it is, because it is, in fact, several kinds at the same time. I could, if I weren't afraid that some of you may stop reading this review, describe Rudy's book as a 350-page blog post. I emphasise that I mean this in a very positive way: the book is informative at several levels, it is highly readable, it is funny, and it is richly illustrated, partly with reproductions, partly with thumbnails linking through to online images. A very pleasant surprise of this book is that it has been published by OpenBook Publishers, Cambridge. Therefore it is not only purchasable in a hardcover and paperback version, it is also, from the day it was published, available as a digital file for free (pdf or xml) or for a small price (epub or mobi): https://www.openbookpublishers.com/product/806. Art historian Kathryn Rudy, whose writing style makes this multi-layered study into a genuine page turner, leads us through three interwoven storylines.

The first storyline, historically speaking, traces the coming about of a later medieval book of hours and prayers in Dutch, an object that is not simply definable as a manuscript or as a printed book. The book was made around 1500 by Beghards in Maastricht. Beghards are lay men, organized (since the twelfth century) into semi-religious communities; in the fifteenth century, they became members of the Franciscan third order. Jan van Emmerick and at

least one other Beghard scribe copied a prayerbook and probably started to paste in images only in the course of the writing process. Some of these images were drawings, but most were prints. Indeed, at the turn of the sixteenth century, prints had been available for over fifty years and had become widespread. They were used as models for drawings, but also as handy cut-and-paste-in illustrations.

This "hybrid book production" (p. 165) of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, mixing manuscript and print techniques, has become a popular topic for research over the last decades, but has, particularly in the Northern-Netherlandish context, often been seen as something specific for female communities. Rudy shows that the Maastricht Beghards also produced at least two books in this way and she analyses the images that were available for such a venture at that time and place. This was not an easy analysis to carry out because of the book's current condition. It is here that the second storyline comes into the picture

This second story is mainly a nineteenth-century one. The book of hours and prayers probably remained with the Maastricht Beghards until the French Revolution and, after the ensuing confiscations and spoils, ended up on the art market. Although it is unclear where the book was kept in the first half of the nineteenth century, the British Museum bought the book in 1861 from the Paris book dealer Edwin Tross. Rudy's research shows that the book was at that moment already partly mutilated. It may have been a Paris book dealer who started to dismember the book by cutting out images. "When the dealers prepared manuscripts for sale, the objects often changed shape. A few items were allowed to remain intact, or relatively intact" (p. 137).

Indeed, by 1861 a series of (printed) images had already been removed, being soaked off rather than cut out. At the British Museum, this process was completed in the typical nineteenth-century spirit of categorising art-forms: a manuscript would go to the manuscript department, but prints were supposed to be kept in the print department. "This is also the story of a curator who, in 1861, cut the prints out of the manuscript in order to mount them, according to their style or 'school', thereby giving them a completely different function" (p. 11).

Rudy reconstructs not one, but two (partially) cut-up Beghard books. The fact that one of these (the one the lion's share of Rudy's study is dedicated to) had an original foliation of 541 Roman numerals, as well as a nineteenth-century foliation of 487 Arabic numbers, significantly helped the reconstruction process. Still, according to Rudy, from the original book, 146 folios have disappeared whereas 63 (blank) folios have been added. The rump manuscript is now in the British Library in two parts, 54 leaves (or fragments of leaves) are now in the Department of Prints and Drawings of the British Museum, whereas no less than 83 leaves and 41 prints are still missing, in spite of Rudy's investigations in Paris and elsewhere.

These details are summarized in the appendix, a 14-column, 645-line Excel sheet, which is available on the publisher's website (on the page where the book is also downloadable). Though one may justly say that an Excel sheet is handy for any use any reader would like to make of it, this online appendix looks more like a work-in-progress and could have received a bit more polishing.

The bulk of the main prayer book is now MS Add. 24332 in the British Library. In spite of all the removed leaves, it is still bound between the two original wooden boards covered with blind-tooled leather from around 1500, though the spine has been re-done ("a detail that later proved important", p. 18). As Rudy discovered and explains, a smaller part only came to the manuscript department in 1926 and became MS Add. 41338.

In Chapter Three, the analysis of a second prayerbook, also from the Maastricht Beghards and quite similar in its afterlife and now also in the British Library (MS Add. 31002), allows Rudy to broaden from the single case to more general and comparative observations. In the fourth and last chapter, some more comparisons are made.

Throughout the book a third story line regularly surfaces, concerning the research the author has undertaken in order to write this book. As she sets out "I have written this book in the first person because it is about my process of research as much as it is about the content of what I learned" (p. 7). This autobiographical strand is a very original aspect of the book. Rudy describes in a very direct way the often winding and steep paths she has taken in order to carry out the research for the book. These accounts are lively, funny, almost

always very interesting to read and at many instances frankly rather baffling.

Rudy explains her approach: "When art historians write up their research, they usually just report on the solutions and conclusions, without revealing how they arrived there. They skip some steps, in which they look bumblingly stupid, and move directly to the climax. I'd wager that moments of epiphany occur only in the movies: the lightbulb goes on in the fantasy versions of our research, but rarely in reality. This set of discoveries I have been chronicling happened slowly: wrong ideas were eroded when they rubbed up against many small grains of evidence, until their shape changed into more correct notions. Events unfolded slowly. During the time it took me to finish the research for this book, I completed three others. In the down times, sometimes I connected pieces of information that led towards reconstruction. Sometimes I simply forgot things. And I had to stare at the evidence several times before accepting it, or even realising that it was evidence. Perhaps you, my reader, would have seen Christ with the orb pop out from the matte, spotted the difference straight away and known the solution. But I did not" (p. 256).

Part of this report is about the research itself in its scholarly sense: "Rather than write a catalogue of manuscripts and the prints they formerly harboured, I have written a narrative about the process of discovering fragments and reuniting them with their former substrates" (p. 6). Methodological questions, the checking of hypotheses, and the like are thus explicitly discussed, which is a great feature of the book. Part of it discusses the more down-to-earth practical circumstances: "This strongly motivated me to redouble my efforts to escape to sunlit urban culture, and in the autumn of 2011, I applied for a fellowship from the Neil Ker fund — for the study of medieval manuscripts — administered by the British Academy, to go to Paris to look for the prints. The BA awarded me the fellowship but gave me only a third of the money I had requested. This put me in a bind: accepting the grant meant that I still had to go to Paris and do the work I had laid out, but do it on a third of the budget I had estimated, and make up the rest myself. I had already spent tens of thousands of dollars/euros/pounds on this project. I realised that a project such as this can only be completed by people with

private funding. For their art history projects, the other 99% have to confine themselves to theoretical arguments about objects that have already been published or do web-based studies of digitised objects. To do original research on previously unknown manuscripts that are spread around Europe is a pricey sport" (p. 140).

The spirited, sometimes blunt and very funny account is a very honest one. If at first it may seem that the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) in Paris is just described as a terrible place where administrators do everything to prevent researchers to be able to do their research ("I braced myself for the traumatic experience of applying for a BnF reader's card", p. 141), a few lines later a curator is introduced who "aided my research tremendously and made it much more efficient than it otherwise would have been" (p. 141).

It is Rudy's honesty that makes this book such a great read for students, revealing how trial-and-error is normal in scholarly research: "That is typical of my experience with primary evidence. I need to study it, reflect on it, and return to it months or years later before I can grasp its working even partially. Funding councils never understand this: it takes multiple trips to Paris, London, Maastricht, and elsewhere to work out such relationships" (pp. 205-206). These valuable lessons not only apply on the carrying out of research. They also make us return to the objects we study: "Institutional limitations are methodological ones, for me as much as for the nineteenth-century curator" (p. 8).

Inevitably, in a book that does so much at the same time, the various things it does cannot always be done as thoroughly as when the author would have concentrated on it. At some instances, Rudy's study has a tendency to become a bit too much of a narrative and less of a scholarly study. Though this in itself does not bother me, a certain tendency to a scarcity of references and footnotes should be noted. As with every study, this one too stands in a context of much other work that could sometimes have been used and mentioned more thoroughly. Rudy gives due references in the bibliography and in the footnotes, particularly in the introduction, but some more discussion, for example, of the religious communities in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Low Countries or of comparable cases of hybrid books could have been better integrated.

This is a highly recommendable book, as a scholarly study in book history focusing on the transitional period from manuscript to print, but also as an excellent and entertaining account of how art historical research can and should be carried out in the early twenty-first century and what difficulties one encounters on the way. The three story lines – respectively situated at the turn of the sixteenth, in the nineteenth and in the twenty-first centuries – have been neatly interwoven on the author's loom, not in the last place by the her personal style: "Just as a wall with a small amount of graffiti attracts more graffiti, a manuscript with one thing pasted to it often attracts many more things, and a book with items cut out of it also attracts further mutilations" (p. 132).

As to fragmentology, this book brings together many strands, but leaves many more strands open, or rather, offers them to the readers. Rudy gives us clues, a lot to think about, many methodological reflexions, but also a lot of work to do. The appendix available on the publisher's website shows numerous blank spaces: many of the missing images may still be lingering in libraries, archives or private collections. Rudy's last chapter shows that many more mutilated hybrid books wait for investigations into their reconstruction. So now that *Image, Knife, and Gluepot* is there as your guide, reader, what are you waiting for?