CHAPTER TWO

TALK IN THE CAMPS: ON THE DATING OF THE SOUTH ENGLISH LEGENDARY, HAVELOK THE DANE, AND KING HORN IN OXFORD, BODLEIAN LIBRARY, MS LAUD MISC. 108

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Noting what seemed to be a surprising degree of variety among the dates posited for the hagiographic and romance portions of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108 (L),¹ I once, informally, generalized that the South English Legendary (SEL) scholars, myself included, have tended to cite only scholars from their own SEL camp and that scholars of the romances Havelok the Dane and King Horn have tended to cite only other scholars of the romances—not only in attempting to date the manuscript that is so important to both our studies but

¹ At conferences I have often heard “Laud Misc.” incorrectly expanded to “Laud Miscellany.” Among the first times I heard the error, the voice was my own. Falconer Madan and H. H. E. Craster explain that the bulk of the manuscripts donated by Archbishop Laud came to be known as the Laud Miscellaneous manuscripts after those manuscripts which came to be known as Laud Greek, Laud Latin, and Laud Oriental were separated from the rest of the collection, the first two about 1790 and the last about 1810–12 (A Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922], 14). In other words, they were the codices not selected for those collections. The designation was confirmed with the publication of H. O. Coxe’s Laudian Manuscripts, Bodleian Library Quarto Catalogues (1858–85; reprint, R. W. Hunt, Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1973). Coxe uses “Codices Latini” and “Codices Miscellanei” as titles of his catalogue’s two parts. The principle of categorization may seem imprecise, especially as most of the “Miscellaneous” manuscripts are, in fact, in Latin. Madan and Craster explain that the selected Laud Latin manuscripts were biblical and classical in subject. But that distinction seems not to have been consistently followed. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Latin 31, for example, contains works by Augustine, Bernard, Jerome, and a life of St. Ignatius. On the other hand, many of the Laud Miscellaneous manuscripts, in Latin, are devotional, hagiographical, or liturgical. Language, however, was a surer principle. I would have been left among the “Miscellaneous” codices because it is primarily in English. It should further be noted that there are among the Laud Latin manuscripts (e.g. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Latin 86) those that might be described as miscellanies, and there are, indeed, manuscripts with a single item, and thus clearly not miscellanies, among the Laud Miscellaneous manuscripts (e.g., Oxford, Bodleian Library, MSS Laud Misc. 7, 36, 70, and 590). I suspect that some scholars’ assumptions that the manuscript is a miscellany are based on little more than this misinterpretation of “Misc.”
also, more generally, in interpreting the works it contains, in particular when manuscript context is relevant. These tendencies, if real, would obviously be unfortunate, for each camp has much to learn from the other.

Like most generalizations, I later found that mine was not entirely true. But here is a sample of its basis: in his 1977 article “The Date of Havelok,” George B. Jack cites Kenneth Sisam’s second edition of W. W. Skeat’s Havelok, Joseph Hall’s edition of Horn, and Max Deutschbein’s and Herlint Meyer-Lindenberg’s studies on the dating of Havelok, as well as other works on romance and the history of the period.2 Similarly, in his 1979 article “Additional Evidence for a More Precise Date of the ‘South English Legendary,’” Thomas J. Heffernan cites the discussions of the SEL’s date in Carl Horstmann’s edition of the L SEL text, Beatrice Daw Brown’s edition of The Southern Passion from the SEL, Charlotte D’Evelyn’s and Anna J. Mill’s later SEL edition, analyses of the SEL by Manfred Görlach, O. S. Pickering, Beverly Boyd, and Minnie Wells, and other works relevant to saints’ lives, liturgy, and history.3 It is not my purpose to censure these two scholars whose studies make significant contributions to their respective subjects, especially because doing so would be self-incriminating. In my own 1989 article “MS Laud. Misc. 108 and the Early History of the South English Legendary,” while I did cite Rosamund Allen’s edition of Horn and Gisela Guddat-Figge’s Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Middle English Romances, I overlooked G. V. Smithers’s edition of Havelok and any and all other editions of and articles on the romances.
