PART TWO

THE MANUSCRIPT AND ITS TEXTS
CHAPTER SIX

A TEXT FOR ITS TIME: THE SANCTORALE OF THE EARLY SOUTH ENGLISH LEGENDARY

Diane Speed*

Any literary text is not only a product of its time but also a message for its time. Exploring a text from either point of view will involve a study of the text in relation to its context. The purpose of this chapter is to identify ways in which the sanctorale of the South English Legendary (SEL), found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108 (L), functions as a text for its time. It does so through a study of the text in relation to aspects of its context, for which its codicological environment affords the most immediate evidence beyond the text itself.

The process of compilation apparent in L points to a series of broadly thoughtful rather than haphazard acts, whereby each textual item in the codex is effectively some kind of comment on what the other texts meant to the various compilers and what the compilers expected the texts they were dealing with to mean to their target readerships. The textual interconnectedness scholars have already found disallows any possibility that these texts were bound in a single volume for no other reason than to prevent small units of parchment from going astray. The late thirteenth-century sanctorale is plainly by far the longest of all the L texts and also, arguably, the base text to which all else was added, with the special exception of the preceding temporale that went with this sanctorale to constitute the late thirteenth-century SEL. Yet both the temporale and the other L texts may be understood to offer implicit readings of the late thirteenth-century sanctorale from the various historical moments at which they became associated with it.

A text’s inevitable reflection of its culture and its intended impact on its culture, interrelated as they are through their shared concern with context, may be regarded as issues caught up in the one meta-issue of the text’s literary mythology. In the mid-twentieth century, Roland

---

*I am grateful for permission of the Bodleian Library over the years to consult the manuscript in situ and for the provision of a microfilm for checking.