

Travel bursary report: The English Imitation of Christ

Thanks to the bursary offered by the SSMLL I undertook three research trips to examine manuscripts in the following libraries: St John's College, Cambridge; Trinity College, Cambridge; Magdalene College, Cambridge; Cambridge University Library; the Hunterian Library, Glasgow; and Trinity College, Dublin. Circumstances required splitting the originally planned 5-day trip to Dublin and Glasgow into two separate 2-day trips. This resulted in an underspend of the money offered.

The visits enabled me to view all of the extant manuscripts of the first English translation of Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* (in addition to various other works of vernacular devotion) and to draw direct comparisons between them. A particularly interesting feature across the surviving MSS is the way their marginalia shows an emphasis on aspects of the text that deal with interiority and self-denial, indicated by manicules, nota, and under-linings etc. To a greater or lesser degree the reader's attention is drawn to recurrent themes that correspond across the MSS, while in the individual MSS (with the exception of Magdalene MS F.4.19) patterns occur in the passages marked for special attention. The findings from these MSS will directly inform my close analysis of the text in my current book project, which is a study of imitation in late-medieval devotional culture, exploring the importance of imitation to interior reformation and reading practices.

The emphases in these MSS will also inform a comparison of the style and language of the first translation with later printed editions of *The Imitation*. In addition, the structuring features of numerous Latin MSS of the text were examined, as was the Bridgettine Rule and the copy of Bonaventure's *Lignum Vitae* in St John's College, Cambridge, MS G. 20, all of which provide important models for acts of imitation and the relationship of imitation and textuality. I am very grateful to the SSMLL for supporting this work which will enable the completion of two chapters of my monograph.

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