

**‘Morgan 818 and *Piers Plowman*’s East Anglian Circulation’**  
**Project Report, Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature**

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### **Project Objectives**

My doctoral research at the University of Oxford investigates the manuscript transmission and circulation of *Piers Plowman* in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The present study was part of a chapter on the contexts of the East Anglian A Text manuscripts of *Piers Plowman*. In this corpus, one *Piers* manuscript, Pierpont Morgan Library, M 818, remained particularly understudied. Morgan 818, traditionally dated to the middle of the fifteenth century, contains an A Text of *Piers Plowman* (sigil J) alongside the alliterative *Susannah*, Rolle’s *Form of Living*, and administrative Latin notes in a second, contemporary hand. Apart from the manuscript’s catalogue description (available on the Morgan Library’s ‘Corsair’ catalogue), very little had been recorded or studied. From my preliminary research on the manuscript’s existing scholarship, however, the manuscript seemed to present some interesting codicological and textual features, which were in need of further study. In this research trip, I sought to provide a comprehensive analysis of the manuscript’s features, which could be both useful to my own research and a valuable resource for future manuscript scholars.

### **Research Results**

With the funds from the SSMLL, I spent five days in New York City, studying Morgan 818. During my time at the Morgan Library, I was able to complete a thorough codicological analysis of the manuscript, which revealed a great deal of important and unrecorded features. As the manuscript is on paper, I was able to identify a series of watermarks from two separate paper stocks intermingled throughout the manuscript, which are both identifiable in Briquet’s *Les Filigranes*. I was also able to complete a paleographical analysis of the scribe (who copies the three texts in their entirety), and in so doing, offer a slight revision to the traditional dating of the manuscript. Finally, some fragments of recycled ecclesiastical manuscripts used in the binding of Morgan 818 (which had gone unnoticed, or at least un-discussed) offered a convincing indication of the small parish in which the manuscript may, in fact, have been copied.

My analysis of the texts in the manuscript also allowed me to record the numerous annotations and emendation made by the scribe throughout *Piers Plowman*. The emendations show an intricate care in the reading of the text, correcting mistakes in the original exemplar against what is usually the majority reading. The annotations thus indicate that the scribe may have been using a separate copy of the poem to emend his own exemplar.

The final step in the analysis was to complete a thorough dialect profile for all of the texts in the codex. Although Morgan 818 is included in the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English* (*LALME*), it is often forgotten that *LALME*’s linguistic profile covers only 5v–15v, eleven folios out of the manuscript’s fifty-four. This analysis also covers only one text, the *Form of Living*, offering no dialect insight into the other two items. My analysis revealed that the dialect of *Piers*

*Plowman* does not, in fact, correspond to *LALME*'s localization, but does closely correspond to the majority of other *Piers* manuscripts grouped in East Anglia.

This research has contributed greatly to the above-mentioned chapter of my doctoral thesis. The data collected from Morgan 818 has offered some very interesting insights into the other A Text manuscripts in this area, and has opened several intriguing new lines of enquiry. I am extremely grateful to the SSMLL for their generous contribution to the project, without which the trip would not have been financially feasible. My thanks go also to the librarians at the Morgan Library, who were extremely gracious and helpful to my research.