

*Textiles, Text, and Intertext: Essays in Honour of Gale R. Owen-Crocker.* Edited by Maren Clegg Hyer and Jill Frederick. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2016. Pp. 265. ISBN: 9781783270736.

The essays in *Textiles, Text, and Intertext* celebrate the work of Gale R. Owen-Crocker, on the occasion of her retirement as Professor of Anglo-Saxon Culture at the University of Manchester and Director of the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies. Few people studying early English material culture have not consulted Dr. Owen-Crocker's work, particularly her magisterial *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England*, first published in 1986, which, as Maren Clegg Hyer states in her introduction, "altered the trajectory of costume history, material culture research, and Anglo-Saxon studies" (2). Now in its second printing, this book remains notable for its interdisciplinary approach to textiles, combining archaeology, manuscript studies, and gender history. In addition to her pioneering work on textiles, which includes founding DISTAFF ([www.distaff.org](http://www.distaff.org)), a process her co-founder Robin Netherton outlines in a personal reminiscence, Owen-Crocker has contributed extensively to other areas of Anglo-Saxon history, namely the study of Old English poetry and women's work.

To reflect her diverse research interests, the editors have divided the eleven essays into three sections: Dress, Text, and Intertext. The first five chapters make up the section on Dress, the first two chapters of which pay particular attention to language. Louise Sylvester, who, along with Owen-Crocker, co-directed the production of a searchable database of dress and textile terminology, here catalogues textiles from Old English wills, demonstrating the highly developed vocabulary that existed for clothing and hangings. She also traces the evolution of this vocabulary in documents of the post-Conquest period and argues for a "relexification" of English textile terms in favor of Anglo-French ones. Elizabeth Coatsworth, Owen-Crocker's co-director for the Manchester Medieval Textiles Project, examines several Latin terms for embroidery that appear in A. G. I. Christie's *English Medieval Embroidery* (1938). With the aid of several extraordinarily helpful diagrams, she attempts the complex task of matching the Latin terms to the techniques themselves.

The subsequent two chapters deal specifically with the Bayeux Tapestry, a subject on which Owen-Crocker has written some of her most innovative work, both in terms of technical analysis and symbolic interpretation. In keeping with the latter, Michael John Lewis studies dress in the Bayeux Tapestry as "examples of the designer's narrative strategies" (70). He considers how the designer, following a tradition of insular manuscript illustrations, used attributes

such as jewelry, cloaks, and embroidered bands, to identify particular characters according to status and position. Carol Neuman de Vegvar focuses particularly on the Tapestry's depictions of magpies, birds associated with negative qualities such as thoughtless chatter and pride. She considers the relationship between magpies and Harold Godwinson and makes a strong case that the designer of the Tapestry critiques Harold's leadership through the deliberate positioning of magpies around crucial scenes.

In the final chapter of the section, Christina Lee asks some fascinating questions about the role of women and the healing process. She uses examples from medical books such as *Bald's Leechbook* to demonstrate how thread and cloth, and thus women's work, would have been a necessary implement for straining and sifting medicinal ingredients as well as for the application of medicine and the stitching and binding of wounds.

The next section, Text, begins with a chapter by Maren Clegg Hyer that establishes the theme for the rest of the book. She evocatively describes how the physical process of weaving, which involves joining diverse threads into a single creation, works as a perfect metaphor for the composition of narrative. This process, she argues, would have been familiar to anyone living in a preindustrial world, and relevant metaphors run through ancient and medieval texts. Here, she specifically focuses on Aldhelm, who, as she demonstrates, not only contributed to this tradition, but also bequeathed it to later admirers, particularly those writing to and on behalf of women.

Marilina Cesario's article in the same section explores this exact process of weaving narratives, through a consideration of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's* entry for 793, famously describing the sack of Lindisfarne by the Vikings and the accompanying omens. She argues for a literal rather than allegorical interpretation of the annal's depiction of fiery dragons in the sky and suggests that the writer was working with multiple traditions regarding astronomical observation. Jill Frederick also considers the complex ideas represented in a familiar text, in this case, the "textile-riddles" of the Exeter Book. Going beyond traditional technical analysis, she addresses how both feminine and masculine imagery intersect and complement each other in the riddles. In the last chapter in the section, Donald Scragg, inspired by Owen-Crocker's work on borders, discusses the thousands of writings visible in the margins of Old English manuscripts.

The five authors of the third part of the book, Intertext, ask readers to approach Anglo-Saxon sources as tapestries—that is, as a dense amalgam of image, language, object, and story. Catherine E. Karkov examines the Ruthwell Cross, an eighth-century carved stone cross that combined color, texture, image, and

language to create multiple narratives for both the literate and the nonliterate onlooker. Paul E. Szarmach utilizes interdisciplinary scholarship on the *Dream of the Rood* to approach another text from the Vercelli Book, Cynewulf's *Fates of the Apostles*. He examines contemporary insular representations of the apostles in sculpture and manuscript to make the case that Cynewulf modeled his written depiction on panel paintings. Joyce Hill examines the interwoven authorial traditions, including patristic and Carolingian writers, of two of Aelfric's homilies and demonstrates how Aelfric implemented his sources in a process Hill terms "textual interweaving" (213). Elaine Treharne's chapter on "Invisible Things" draws inspiration from Owen-Crocker's many efforts to highlight the hidden hands behind material objects. In this case, Treharne strives to make "textually and contextually visible" the Southwick Codex of British Cotton Vitellius A. xv (which also contains the eleventh-century *Beowulf* manuscript). By examining the scribal hand, which she describes as "a very conscious and venerative imitation" (235), Treharne challenges the traditional dating of the mid-twelfth century and argues for a later date between 1160 and 1175. The final chapter, by Martin Foys, considers "the weaving of historical truth," practiced by historians, in particular the author of the *Vita Haroldi*, an early thirteenth-century life of Harold Godwinson and William of Malmesbury. Their narratives conflict about the death of Harold, who, the author of the *Vita* insists, did not die at Hastings, but lived to become a hermit.

It is a fitting tribute to Owen-Crocker's intellectual diversity that this book offers rich resources for every scholar of Anglo-Saxon England—textile historians, certainly, but also archaeologists, philologists, art historians, literary scholars, and paleographers. The authors of these essays not only illuminate many of the untapped resources that still exist for English history, but also compellingly demonstrate that familiar sources can still yield surprises.

Laura Diener  
Marshall University