

Richard III's Books Observed

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'Whoever . . . claims to be zealous of truth, of happiness, of wisdom, or knowledge, aye, even of the faith, must needs become a lover of books'.

Richard of Bury, *Philobiblon*.¹

WITHOUT AN INVENTORY of Richard III's entire collection little can be said with complete certainty about his tastes. We have surviving eighteen texts in twelve/thirteen volumes (including two dedications and an 'indirect' dedication) most of them second-hand when he acquired them. Are we looking at the total of his books or only at the more modest volumes out of a large and magnificent library, long since dispersed and all signs of Richard's ownership obscured by the *ex libris* of later owners or the loss of flyleaves? It is salutary to remember that the recent discovery in Russia of three texts in two volumes belonging to him – Latin texts signed by him as King – has completely changed the balance of his known, surviving collection, and therefore destroyed any conclusions about his likes and personality that might have been made in their absence.²

The dangers of speculating about any library without a surviving, complete, regularly updated and reliable inventory need to be kept in mind. We do not know precisely when or how Richard acquired any of his books, although we know he acquired five texts when king (his *Historia Troiae*, *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *Prophecy of the Eagle*, his Vegetius and his book of hours). There is no reliable statistical method of computing the size of a medieval library from the surviving books,³ especially when it is composed of secular material liable to be over-used and vulnerable to wilful destruction as well as changes in fashion.⁴ Only an inventory can give information about the breadth of interest of the collector, but even the most complete of inventories may reveal only that the owner wanted his collection to be complete and fashionable, containing what everyone else expected a library to contain. Studies of long inventories produced in Italy, France and England have revealed the uniformity of the contents of Latin libraries, the increasing use of vernacular translations of the classics by the princes of those countries, and that all libraries had similar proportions of Latin, vernacular, scriptural, and other texts.⁵ Large libraries, whether of institutions or princes, inevitably repeated each other then, as they do now.

Faced with a large inventory of a prince certain conclusions can be drawn, but above all warnings taken: the 1424 inventory of Charles V's library contains 1239 manuscripts, of which only 198 were French literary works, the rest being Latin and mostly religious and service books (113 bibles, 5 'liturgies', 43 breviaries and hymnals, 51 missals and gospel books, 57 books of hours, etc.). These did not represent the King's choice but his needs as a Christian prince, the needs of his household, his priests and his private chapel. Charles V's personal interest may have been indicated by the more unusual 80 books on astronomy and 136 on astrology and the occult, but the library also had 171 historical texts and 39 encyclopaedias.⁶ As a *collector* Charles may have been far more interested in acquiring books for their own sake, as prestigious objects, rather than for reading on any particular subject; he could have bought job-lots of other collectors' libraries. The sad conclusion is that if Richard III ever owned such a large collection a full inventory would tell us little about his real interests.

One needs more than an inventory, one needs the books themselves, and other clues, like Charles V's use of royal propaganda and historiography, which informed much of his bibliophilia. Annotations, signatures and personal mottoes help to prove that the owner's appreciation of his books went beyond mere possessiveness. A few of these clues survive to be used and pieced together for Richard III.

Statistics: 1. Richard III's 'Collection'

Richard can be associated with sixteen separate texts in ten volumes and he received two dedications: Caxton's *Order of Chivalry* and William Worcester's *Boke of Noblesse*. Indirectly he also received the dedication of Pietro Carmeliano's *Life of St. Katherine*. Leaving aside the dedications, three of those sixteen texts were straightforwardly religious: his book of hours, his New Testament and the book by Mechtilde of Hackeborn. With these should probably be included the verse paraphrase of several Old Testament stories, but they may also have been regarded as narrative entertainments, teaching the holy writ to a child. He owned four romances – narratives for entertainment in prose or verse – if 'romance' can be defined to both our and Richard's satisfaction: *Palamon and Arcite* and *Griselda* by Chaucer, a prose *Ipomedon* and the beginning section of the *Prose Tristan*. We would classify Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* as another romance, but Richard may well have considered it history. His straightforward history books are Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, the *Grandes Chroniques de France* and the Anonymous or Fitzhugh Chronicle covering England's history from the end of the sixth century to 1199. Advice on the conduct of princes, knights and soldiers, as well as practical military advice, are represented by Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum*, Caxton's translation of Lull's *Order of Chivalry*, Vegetius' *De re militari* and William Worcester's *Boke of Noblesse*. Further useful information for a soldier was contained in his two rolls of arms, but these might also be seen as texts about ancestry and the descent of princes, comparable to the *Historia Regum Britanniae*. The last text, an oddity only by twentieth-century standards, is the *Prophecy of the Eagle* with its

commentary, one of the texts that helped to prove the right to rule of the house of York. Looked at in this way the subject coverage of Richard's books is varied and well balanced for such a small collection.

We can also classify his books by their illumination, or rather their overall lack of it. Only four are illuminated in any way, that is they have painted decoration which includes gold: his book of hours has one page of fine quality illumination, the rest of the decoration being of lesser quality, although few pages lack either colour or gold; his *Grandes Chroniques* is substantially illustrated by five artists of high quality, but the illumination programme was never finished and the work of a sixth 'artist' – unfortunately near the beginning of the book – is abysmally bad; the *De re militari* and the *De regimine principum* are modestly decorated with standard London work of 1483-1484 and of the 1420s respectively; the composite volume of romances and bible stories has painted marginal decoration of cheerful, probably provincial, quality, composed mainly of foliage with a few fabulous animals, but it is also not finished and the series of shields of arms have not been filled in. Richard certainly did not acquire any of these books for the pleasure of looking at their pictures. As regards the *Grandes Chroniques*, some of its illumination was sufficiently disastrous to put off anyone who was a mere collector of books. The decoration in Richard's Hours made it a pleasant book to use every day, no more, and it had probably been chosen with some care.

All Richard's surviving books were second-hand, except for the modest Vegetius, which was possibly given to him or his son or commissioned by him for his son. (For acquisition see below). Second-hand books were, of course, the norm rather than the exception in his day, so it is difficult to be certain that this characteristic is another piece of evidence that Richard was primarily interested in the contents of his books. It does, however, mean we are quite unable to assess him as a patron or commissioner of books on the evidence of what survives. All the books were made in England except the French *Grandes Chroniques* and the volume containing the *Historia Troiae*, *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *Prophecy of the Eagle*.

He had two French texts, eight English and six Latin (excluding the dedications), but this is slightly misleading as five of the English texts were comparatively short pieces for 'light' reading. As far as length is concerned he had more Latin, with French in second place. This emphasis fits in with our other findings on the Yorkist royal family: as far as can be concluded from their surviving books Richard of York and his sons owned a relatively large number of texts by classical and medieval authors in the 'original' language. This apparent 'scholariness' may have been due to a scarcity of English and French translations, but that does not alter the fact that the owners could not have appreciated their Latin texts without a good passive knowledge of the Latin they had been taught in childhood.⁷

All the books that Richard had are on vellum of varying quality, only the composite volume of the *Historia Troiae*, *Historia Regum Britanniae* and the *Prophecy of the Eagle* being on paper. The *Booke of Gostlye Grace* and the New Testament are the most crudely produced, and fairly typical of their date and subject matter: they were designed for serious use by devout people.

The paper volume of the *Historia Troiae* (et cetera), for all its faults, was written for use by a scholar: it has no pretensions to elegance except for the introductory initial of the first section, but it is legible and competently laid out.

Legibility, fine script and competent layout characterise all the other volumes. Several, such as the *Tristan* and the *De regimine principum*, have excellent pen-work initials and decorative flourishing as well as lists of contents.

Statistics: 2. Standard Texts

By Richard's time there were certain generally esteemed texts that anyone with the means to acquire them might be expected to own. Among these were Jean Mansel's *Fleur des histoires*, a convenient summary of world history, of which large numbers of fine manuscript copies were produced in the Low Countries;⁸ Valerius Maximus' *Dicta et facta memorabilia*, an equally convenient collection of stories from Roman history arranged by subject and providing plenty of material for the moralist;⁹ Vegetius' *De re militari*, the standard textbook on the art of war;¹⁰ the *Roman de la Rose*, the long French poem on love by two poets, full of stories, the second half being notoriously misogynic; a 'mirror for princes', usually Giles of Rome's, but there were many other versions.¹¹ Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae*, which gave comfort to all those under constraint or in distress;¹² and a national chronicle of one's own country, such as the *Brut* of England¹³ or the *Grandes Chroniques* of France.¹⁴

Of these titles some were and some may have been owned by Richard. About the *Fleur des histoires* we know, for example, that a man of similar tastes and status, the Burgundian Philip of Cleves (see below), as well as Richard's sister, Margaret of York, had one. As far as Valerius Maximus is concerned, there are two copies of the French translation among the present Royal manuscripts, one has the arms of Edward IV's and his sons, the other bears the royal arms only. The latter manuscript could have been owned by any English king after *circa* 1470.¹⁵ A *De re militari* was owned as a gift or a commission by Richard or his son, but even if this copy had not survived it could be taken for granted that the Duke of Gloucester acquired this text at some stage of his life.

Ownership of the *Roman de la Rose* has to be hypothetical, but again, as many as three copies are found in the library of Philip of Cleves. This prince also possessed several 'mirrors' in contrast to the one *De regimine principum* that Richard owned. A copy of a French translation of Boethius, now in the Royal collection, is inscribed with the fascinating combination of Richard's best-known motto, *Loyalte me lye*, and Elizabeth of York's first name, both in her handwriting.¹⁶

Though many copies or versions survive, no *Brut* chronicle is known to have been owned by Richard, or any member of his family.¹⁷ He did own, however, the original of all *Bruts*, the *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth, his copy so plain, 'cheap', and poor in its Latin that it was certainly acquired by him because he wanted the text. He signed it with his royal signature on the first page. He was interested in the origin of his country

and the British ancestors of the house of York – he signed the book as a descendant of Brutus, the founder of Britain. Despite this lack of survival of any *Brut* for the royal family it is likely that they had one, like 'everyone else', from Edward IV down. It was the most popular secular book in England and it was made even more available by Caxton's edition of 1480 as *The Chronicles of England*.¹⁸

It must also be remembered that in addition to such secular works the Duke of Gloucester, like all his social equals, certainly owned a collection of about forty service books, bibles, missals, graduals, antiphoners, as well as other – less personal but perhaps more magnificent – books of hours.¹⁹

Patterns of ownership were also established by the particular background of the individual; a cleric had more theological works and religious manuals; women might have more devotional material, especially from the female mystics like Mechthild of Hackeborn, or copies of the *Cité des Dames* by the famous champion of women, Christine de Pisan; men might be more inclined to read 'feats of arms', and if actively engaged in military affairs they needed a *De re militari* or Bonet's *Tree of Battles*; heralds needed various rolls of arms; and 'everybody' might be expected to like stories, whether true or fictional, religious or secular, moral or bawdy, in prose or in verse.

Acquisition: Obligatory reading and/or Choice.

Most people acquire their first book as a child. The first books of members of the best documented family of book-owners in the fifteenth century, the Dukes of Savoy, were acquired in childhood, for the schoolroom or by gift. The noble child required educational texts like the *Donat*, the fourth-century grammar of which versions were still in use in the fifteenth century, or the basic religious text of a psalter; later came the collections of moral stories.²⁰ Gifts and inheritance might expand a collection until the owner also began to commission or buy on his or her own account.

A simple picture of the education of an English noble is provided by Sir John Fortescue in his *De laudibus legum Angliae* (c. 1470). It should concentrate on military matters. He praises the king's household as the 'supreme academy for the nobles of the realm, and a school of vigour, probity and manners'. The men trained there will be able to protect the realm. The prince himself should know the laws of his country and be thereby stimulated to justice, but his knowledge should be 'in general terms' only; similarly he should learn holy scripture, but not 'profoundly' like a cleric.²¹ In other words princes were for fighting and they were to leave religion and the law to professional men like Fortescue.

Something of this balance is reflected in Richard III's books; military matters are well represented by the standard texts of *De re militari* and the *Order of Chivalry*, by all the history books which were largely one battle or campaign after another, and by the romances of *Palamon and Arcite* (the *Knight's Tale*), *Ipomedon* and the romance/history of the *Siege of Thebes*. All this is the stuff that knights were made of and Richard's collection as a whole matches in a remarkable way the 'booklist' for the virtuous knight given by the poet Hoccleve in his *Remonstrance against Oldcastle*:

Rede the storie of Lancelot de Lake
 Or Vegece, *Of the aart of chivalrie*,
 The *Seege of Troie* or *Thebes*. The applie
 To thyng that may to th'ordre of knyght longe . . .
 If thee list thyng rede of auctoritee
 To these stories sit it thee to goon,
 To *Iudicum*, *Regum* and *Iosue*,
 To *Iudith*, and to *Paralipomenon*,
 And *Machabe* . . .²²
 More autenik shalt thou fynde noon
 Ne more pertinent to chivalrie.²³

[like]
 [befits]

There are no texts obviously and solely designed for a child among Richard's books and we have to turn to what we know about his son, Edward of Middleham, to try and find Richard's ideas about education. The evidence is very slight, there is really only one personal detail that is of interest: the presence of Anne Idley as mistress of the nursery of young Edward. She was the widow of Peter Idley of Drayton, Oxfordshire, a government official and author of a book of moral guidance for his own son. It is a translation in rhyme royal of earlier Latin and English authorities and covers systematically all the moral issues of life, social behaviour, the vices and virtues.²⁴ Though there is no indication that Anne Idley ever introduced her husband's book into the Gloucester household, its impeccable contents and the fact that it was popular enough to survive in ten manuscripts, eight from the Yorkist period, make it possible that Edward of Middleham's early education was aided by Idley's *Instructions to his Son*. Like so many simple fifteenth-century texts the book has been said to make 'tedious reading', but it is in fact full of small delights:

The most vengeable thing that may be
 Of any man, worm, fowl, or beast,
 I remember it is the little, small bee
 That anon to battle is ready and prest;
 For though an armed man come to her nest,
 She is not afraid him to assail
 And with her little spear proffer him battail.²⁵

[prepared]

Richard's son may also have seen the big Latin compilation of English history, the Fitzhugh Chronicle, which was composed in the north and remained there. The simple, attractive copy of the English translation of Vegetius' manual may have been made for him: the griffin of his earldom of Salisbury is on the first page. He could have learned his family's history from the illustrated Rous Roll and Beauchamp Pageant as well as from the genealogical rolls that Richard probably owned.²⁶

Among Richard's own books there are some that may have been suitable for a growing boy and adolescent, but it is difficult to establish whether he actually acquired any of these in his youth. Most suggestions about the date of his acquisition of his books must be based on his signature, which varies and is sometimes accompanied by a motto. The books he acquired while king are a clearly defined group and present no problems: his Hours, in which he wrote his birthdate as *Ricardus Rex* and had prayers inserted including his kingly

title; his *Historia Troiae* and *Historia Regum Britanniae*, both signed *Ricardus Rex*; and the *De re militari*, which is decorated with his crowned arms, although not signed. Of his other books the one that most readily falls into the category of educational texts is his collection of romances and Old Testament stories: all were chivalric, eminently moral tales, their educational message presented as agreeably as Gower or Caxton advised.

Gower in his *Confessio Amantis* had intentionally attempted to strike such a happy mean between education and entertainment:

... men sein, and soth it is,
That who that al of wisdom writ
It dulleth ofte a mannes wit
To him that schal it alday rede,
For thilke cause, if that ye rede,
I wolde go the middel weie
And wryte a bok betwen the tweie,
Somwhat of lust, somewhat of lore,
That of the lasse or of the more
Som man mai lyke of that I wryte . . .²⁷

[pleasure]

The same idea was voiced by the author known as *Caton*, translated by Caxton in 1483. He advised that no one read 'foule sciences' which are 'ful of errour as ben foles questyons and scyences seculers, ne also the fictions of poetrye', but he also knew very well that it was much easier to learn if the lesson was made palatable and pleasant:

Thou oughst to rede and to receyve and to put in thy memorye that that thou shalt rede, and to take to hit dylectacion and plesure, and that thou forgete hit not lightly, as done many one that rede without takyng of hyt ony plesure, for that that entryth in to one of theyr eerys yssueth out ageyn by theyr other eere.²⁸

That Richard did acquire his collection of romances and Old Testament stories – both 'lust' and 'lore' – early, is suggested by his careful signature with a motto, *tant le desiree*, imitating the script of the book's text. Another early acquisition may have been the English New Testament signed with just his title and another motto, *a vous me lie*. These variations may represent an adolescent's experiments to find both the right signature and the most pleasing motto – a not uncommon activity even among adults. Richard's name in the Fitzhugh Chronicle may have been put there before the death of Henry Fitzhugh in June 1472 as their adjacent signatures seem to go together. The *Booke of Gostlye Grace* bears *Anne Warrewyk* as well as *R Gloucestr'* so presumably dates from after his marriage and before his accession (c. 1472–1483); but if *Anne Warrewyk* is Anne Beauchamp, Countess of Warwick, his mother-in-law, the acquisition could have been by gift in the 1460s.

The neat signature in the *Grandes Chroniques* is fairly mature, but could date from any period. The formal *ex libris* in the *Tristan* is probably not in Richard's hand: it may indicate that he was of an age to request a formal *ex libris* or it may be the result of a tidy-minded servant's initiative. The ownership inscription in the *De regimine principum* is very rubbed: it is formal, its Latin is odd and it has merely the ducal title.

Nothing can be concluded about his changing tastes except that as a boy he was expected to learn from and like a collection of romances and biblical

stories, and that as king his interests in solid history and the origins of Britain and his house was well enough known for someone to give or find for him the *Historia Troiae* and the *Historia Regum Britanniae*.

His habit of signing his books proves that his acquisition was deliberate and conscious. He put his name in the text itself rather than on the more vulnerable flyleaves and thus ensured the survival of his signature. There is no sign that he ever developed a regularised *ex libris* like Humphrey of Gloucester.²⁹ It is possible Richard only signed his second-hand books; those he commissioned might have had his arms or emblems of ownership, long since changed to someone else's. The single commissioned volume that survives, the *De re militari*, is tantalising in its rarity: attractive but uninspired in its workmanship, it provides no evidence to support an argument that Richard wanted to be surrounded by fine books, and it is always possible that it was a gift from someone who could afford nothing better. We lack *any* means by which to discuss Richard's patronage of the decorative arts – his possible patronage of the book as a disseminator of knowledge will be discussed in a later essay.

Caveats: did Richard actually own all the books discussed here and did he read them?

In most cases there is no doubt about Richard's ownership of these books: the presence and the phrasing of the inscriptions or the inclusion of his arms leave no room for argument. It is possible, however, that he never owned, in the full sense of the word, the Fitzhugh Chronicle, which he could have seen at Jervaulx Abbey and signed merely to please the monks who were happy to welcome such noble visitors as the Duke of Gloucester and the Lord Fitzhugh.

The *Booke of Gostlye Grace* by Mechtild of Hackeborn may well have been his wife's. We know nothing about her own books or, for example, her influence on the education of her son. There are some indications that Queen Elizabeth Woodville was 'collecting' her own kind of manuscripts from Flanders in the period that Edward IV acquired his large impressive volumes,³⁰ and it is likely that the Duchess of Gloucester had her own selection of stories for entertainment and improvement of the mind, as well as her religious manuals and service books. Her library must have been similar – though not necessarily as impressive artistically – to that of her sister-in-law, the Duchess of Burgundy, and the *Booke of Gostlye Grace* may be the only survival.

Though a 'Duke of Gloucester' is mentioned in the Latin *ex libris* in the *De regimine principum* there is no initial or Christian name. The manuscript's date of manufacture precludes ownership by Thomas of Gloucester, but it might conceivably have been Humphrey's.³¹ Richard's signature in the New testament is also unusual in lacking initial, first name, as well as title, but neither signature or motto tie in with those of the other two dukes of Gloucester, so Richard remains the most likely owner.

Two of Richard's books were dedications: Caxton's *Order* and Worcester's *Boke*; Carmeliano's *Life of St. Katherine* was merely recommended to him. These must be regarded as only partly reflecting

Richard's interests: the authors wished to bring their work to the attention of the King of England, whoever he was, though they did hope to please him and gain rewards. Whether Richard ever possessed a copy of Caxton's *Order of Chivalry* is not certain, though it is likely the printer formally presented one, either printed or in manuscript, expecting no doubt to sell more copies if his edition had a royal dedicatee. Whatever William Worcester's own aim was when he compiled his treatise on the reconquest of France, his son certainly hoped to profit from 'doing up' the book and presenting it to the new king; it is likely Richard really owned the surviving copy. Pietro Carmeliano, the wandering scholar from Italy, probably needed patrons simply to survive. He had already dedicated books to Edward IV and the Prince of Wales, and his *Life of St. Katherine* had been destined for Chancellor Russell before it received a new dedicatory text addressed to Robert Brackenbury, who was Constable of the Tower and high in Richard III's favour, as Carmeliano well knew. The author calls on Brackenbury to bear witness to the excellence of the King, to whom he had 'consecrated' the work. Like other writers, Carmeliano said, he wished to dedicate his work to 'a prince who honours both knowledge and learned men'. Brackenbury was given a copy - 'this Christmas' - written by the poet's own hand, and asked to recommend it to the King. Why the Italian did not present it to Richard himself, and whether the King ever laid eyes on the book or read it we shall never know.³²

It is, in any case, a truism that book owners do not necessarily read all, or any, of their books and it is possible that Richard did not read his longest and most difficult texts from cover to cover. The enormous Fitzhugh Chronicle could be used merely for dipping into or looking up a particular episode of English history, and Richard of Gloucester and Henry Fitzhugh may have been doing just that on one brief occasion. The inaccurate, messy texts of the *Historia Troiae*, *Historia Regum Britanniae* and the *Prophecy of the Eagle* would have discouraged all but the most determined of readers - though some of the marginalia may have been Richard's. If his collection of romances and bible stories, his *Grandes Chroniques* or the *De regimine principum* were youthful possessions he might still have had time to read them carefully or had them read to him. In the final analysis we can only be certain he knew his book of hours well.

Richard III and his Books

Our research into the books of Richard III has always been conducted out of an interest in what reading material was available during the later fifteenth century, but also in the hope that the books might tell us something about the owner. The same wish to resurrect the owner motivates most manuscript and incunabule researchers, and a current project is actually collecting on computer, 'all' contemporary owners of incunabula.³³ Both the statistics and the personal details help to identify contemporary interests.

Some aspects of Richard's book ownership can only be considered by looking at analogous cases. Where, for instance, did he keep these books he had acquired over the years? Few details are known about the location and care of books under the Yorkist kings: from the records of their predecessors it is known that book-rooms or libraries existed at some of the major palaces such as Eltham,³⁴ and the ordinances made for Edward's own household show

that a yeoman of the crown had special responsibility for the royal books.³⁵ When Edward's books were transported they were carefully packed in wooden crates. ('cofyns of fyrrre'); many were bound in sumptuous velvets and decorated with silk tassels and laces and metalwork.³⁶ Once he was king, these details apply to Richard III, but there is no information about the care of his books when he was still duke. The King had enough books to warrant a special official to look after them, whether the Duke had we do not know. He may have had a book-room in each of his major residences, as carefully set up as those created by Jacques d'Armagnac, Duke of Nemours; or he may have had a single book-store from which a small travelling collection could be extracted to suit the occasion, like that taken by John Howard on the expedition to Scotland in 1482.³⁷ The best comparison so far found is the collection of Philip of Cleves (see below) of which an inventory was made after his death covering the books in his 'house in Ghent'; it is an impressive list but he may have had other collections kept at other places.

We have tried elsewhere to create as far as possible a general picture of the taste in books of Richard's father and other members of his family, giving some idea of how their choice compared to each other's and to that of their social equals at the court of the Valois Dukes of Burgundy.³⁸ A man very close to Richard himself in age, status and perhaps in interests, was Philip of Cleves, Lord of Ravenstein,³⁹ for whom a detailed inventory of a number, if not all, of his books remains. He and his books serve as examples of what Richard and his library 'might have been'. Philip was born in 1456 of royal and ducal blood, brought up at court, in the proximity of Mary of Burgundy, and in the service of Charles the Bold whose sudden death in 1477 brought about as traumatic a change in the lives of courtiers and relatives as did Edward IV's early death. Philip was a cultured man who became a soldier and who was forced into momentous choices and harsh action from an early age. It is still a matter for argument whether his choices were always right and honourable.

Towards the end of his life he wrote a treatise on the art of war, both on sea and land. It allows us glimpses of what mattered to him and what aroused his emotions: the issues of the crusade – he was still willing to go on one when already an old man; the importance of practical military experience – he wrote that a war council should not comprise clergy and learned men who only knew war from books; the splendour of war – he took pleasure in chivalric ceremony, martial music and the magnificent beauty of a fleet of triumphant galleys. The books he owned at his death reflected his interests as an educated man, a courtier and an active soldier. Most of them were in French, quite a number in Latin, a few in Italian. Practical, informative books, mainly on military matters and chivalric display (c. 20) were outnumbered by works on classical and contemporary history (c. 35);⁴⁰ classical literature and philosophy (c. 17) were balanced by Christian religion (c. 16). Didactic books, both narrative and 'plain', were present in the same number (c. 17); romances were few (c. 8). Liturgical texts were not mentioned in this inventory, except for a bible in French and one book of hours; the fact that at least two of his books of hours survive, again proves the unreliability of such lists, particularly as regards liturgical texts. The inventory

also included paintings of cities of military importance and a large number of documents concerning his lands and revenues.

It is likely that Richard's library – or one of his libraries – if inventoried at the time of his death would have shown similar proportions and emphases.

A unique clue about Richard and his books and his attitude to them is to be found in the fact that he may have been quoting from William Langland's *Piers Plowman* when he called Nottingham Castle his 'Castle of Care'.⁴¹ The phrase is only found in the prologue of Passus 1 of *Piers Plowman*, where the Castle of Care, ruled by Wrong, is contrasted to the Tower of Truth. If Richard was quoting directly from the poem he was saying that at Nottingham he had experienced despair and betrayal: he had learnt there of the death of his son and later awaited news of Henry Tudor's invasion.

Piers Plowman is one of the most moving works of medieval English literature:⁴² if it was among Richard's books it considerably raises the literary quality of his collection in modern eyes. A multiple dream poem, it consists of several visions, with intervening waking periods, witnessed and participated in by the author in his search for truth. Its subject is the state of human society, perverted by the power of money and greed; it asks how the human condition can be bettered and how men can lead more Christian, worthwhile lives under a king ruled in his turn by Conscience and Reason.

The number of manuscripts surviving supports the possibility that Richard III could have read the poem and known it well enough to quote from it, and so does the variety of the recorded owners in the fifteenth century and the kind of reader the poem demanded. Richard would have had no trouble locating a copy if he had wanted one: he could easily have been given one. Copies are known to have been owned by a canon of York Minster in 1396, by clergy of Arncliffe in Craven and Grimston in Yorkshire in the first half of the fifteenth century, by Sir Edward Charleton in 1465 and Sir Adrian Fortescue in 1532, the last making a copy himself.⁴³ Readers from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries came from all classes: members of parliament, lawyers, clerics, as well as dissidents and Lollards. The poem attracted in particular an attentive and literary-minded reader who was interested in the condition of mankind under God, in government, education and the spiritual betterment of the human race.⁴⁴ It was not an easy work to understand as a whole, though it was full of entertaining characters and had sections of lively narrative and 'adventure'. It demanded intellectual involvement: it was 'designed to cast off the slothful reader'.⁴⁵ Looking at the contents of Richard's other books it is fairly evident that he could be an industrious and committed reader.

To these indications of Richard having been a comparatively studious reader it is possible to add other data concerning the level of his education and literacy: the number of Latin texts he owned, the high quality of the text of his book of hours and his ability to write a good hand. Assuming that he did own the *De regimine principum*, with its highly abbreviated text, and did study the large Fitzhugh Chronicle, and considering his apparent appreciation of the authoritative *Historia Troiae* and *Historia Regum Britanniae* and his undoubted ownership of an unusually extensive book of hours and prayers that had been put together for a clergyman, it is tempting to wonder whether

Richard – whose handwriting, when he chose, was also remarkably neater than the scrawls of other members of his family – had perhaps been destined for the church. Such a career could have been fostered by George Neville, Archbishop of York, brother of Richard's mentor, the Earl of Warwick, and a patron of learning who was not forgotten by Richard even when he was out of favour.⁴⁶ The death of Richard's father and one of his brothers, the accession of Edward IV and the family's sudden change in status and prospects would have changed the course of Richard's life whatever his original plans. Vestiges of clerical training and an early acquired scholarly interest may have been preserved during his active worldly career.

If we cannot add any great new dimension to Richard III's personality from our study of his books, it is nevertheless certain we know more than we did about both him and them. The number of surviving books is considerable, their nature is revealing, and they are not the non-committal, arbitrary remnants of an official royal collection, but individually marked, personal belongings. It is justifiable to read their message with care; conclusions, in the past, have been based on far less.

There is enough material to provide an adequate basis for a study and also to convince that even if more survived it would not change the final picture. Admittedly there are subjects on which Richard appears to have owned no books; he had, for example, no works of theology or humanist interest, no medical, agricultural or alchemical texts. It is more relevant, however, that we know he *wished* to own most of the manuscripts that survive and took pleasure in marking each as his own. Particularly revealing is his book of hours with his chosen additions: his birthday in the calendar, the collect of St. Ninian, the crusading litany and the long, hope-giving prayer for comfort. Equally interesting, and perhaps even more unusual, is the Latin compendium of the early history of his race and his country, which he acquired late but was pleased to claim as his own with his royal signature: it is one of the few books to have marginal comments throughout and even if none of them can be proved to be Richard's own, some of them were already there to focus his attention. This volume, in combination with the French and English chronicles he had, allowed him to survey the whole of world history from the siege of Troy to almost his own day.

It is Richard's interest in history and chronicle information, so evident even in his relatively small collection – though not unusual at the time – that impresses most; religion, in the shape of his very personal book of hours and his bible texts, follows; and thirdly, partly overlapping with these two other categories, he owned a substantial amount of narrative entertainment.

All the facts seem to point to Richard, both as duke and king, having a 'positive' attitude to books and being conscious of their existence and their value. He did not collect them as objects but used them for what they could give him and others in the way of instruction, consolation and entertainment:

Books delight us . . . they comfort us . . . no serious judgments are propounded without their help . . . in books we climb mountains . . .⁴⁷

Above all books gave advice and remained to give advice long after formal education had ceased. A prince, more than any other, relied on advice

– mostly from human counsellors, both secular and clerical. Proper education for his subjects, so they might become loyal servants and counsellors, was a prince's everyday concern: his household took boys for a military and courtly education; he patronised places of religious instruction for his clergy, both for the good of his own soul and the state. Books were needed for all men and for all these processes of learning, and books remained to advise the pupil once the teacher had been outgrown. It is arguable that of all those who needed continual advice and impartial counsel princes had the greatest need of books, those most secret, unsleeping and uncritical of counsellors:

no one can rightly rule a commonwealth without books.⁴⁸

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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15. BL Mss. Royal 18 E iii, iv, and 17 F iv.
16. BL Ms. Royal 20 A xix.
17. Caxton's *Chronicles of England* had no specific patron; his edition concludes with a prayer for the welfare of the newly-crowned Edward IV.
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 27. John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, vol. 3 of *The Works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macaulay, Oxford 1901, Prologue, lines 12-20. The translation by Terence Tiller, Harmondsworth 1963, p. 15, reads:

... men say – and truth it is –
 That works of wholly solemn kind
 Will often dull a reader's mind,
 Who studies in them every day;
 So I will walk the middle way,
 If you advise me so to do.
 And write a book between the two –
 Something to please, something to profit – ...
 28. There is no modern edition of Caxton's translation of the French book of *Caution*: BL B 5719, f. ix.
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