

Cut and Paste: Re-arranging British Library Additional MS 39564

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Abstract – London, British Library Additional MS 39564 is an anonymous collection of English lessons for the two-handed sword, tentatively dated to the first quarter of the sixteenth century. This manuscript is peculiar in several ways, aside from it being one of only three such texts known to scholars. This paper discusses two aspects of this manuscript that speak to its origins and its survival in its present form. The lessons appear to be out of order and while there is no challenge in rearranging them in a logical fashion, this paper explains why that disorder tells us that Add. MS 39564 is a copy made from loose bi-folds from a now lost exemplar. This also explains the placement of the ‘Amen Quod J Ledall’ formula between lessons, rather than at the end of the text (where such an attribution is traditionally placed). Finally, this paper explains the significance of that attribution, suggesting it does not identify an original composer or user of the text, only the name of the scribe who produced the unbound sheets that acted as the exemplar for our surviving text. Both of these points remind us that these texts were part of a complicated community of composers, scribes, and readers and that the path of survival is often indirect and meandering.

Keywords – Additional MS 39564, fight books, manuscript studies, codicology, paleography, J. Ledall, English fight-texts

I. INTRODUCTION

I.1. Content and contexts of London, British Library Additional MS 39564

A gift to the British Museum by Reverend Alfred Fuller, May 1917, Additional MS 39564 is a small parchment (or vellum) roll, measuring 150 x 613 mm.¹ This English text is

¹ *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts 1916-1920*, p. 46. Rev. Fuller (1832-1926) was educated at St. John's College, Cambridge, and was an amateur antiquarian and anthropologist, an interest he passed to his son, A.W.F. Fuller, who became a major collector of Pacific anthropological artifacts, many of which he gave to the Chicago Field Museum (Force and Force, *The Fuller Collection of Pacific Artifacts*, p. 13). Rev. Fuller made a few small gifts to the British Museum but medieval material was never his principal interest. The roll is first described in the 1933 supplement to the British Museum Manuscript Catalogue. At the same time, Fuller donated Additional Charter 62243, a rental agreement for English tenants of the manor of Maynooth, county Kildare, dated to 1451 (*Catalogue of Additions*, p. 348). These are Fuller's only donations to the British Museum.

arranged in the ‘exchequer’ style where the text on the dorse of the roll is inverted, relative to that on the face.² The advantage of this format for financial and legal records was that several such rolls could be bound together at the head (each sheet being a *rotuli* in the resulting collection) and the reverse could be read once the reader reached the foot of the roll, and turned it over.³ The scribe has used an informal but practiced secretary hand in a form common to the first half of the sixteenth century.⁴ This was a popular hand for routine correspondence, record keeping, and legal records.⁵ There are ample abbreviations, which is common for a hand designed for rapid use, and there are no corrections of the scribe’s work, although that is not to say the text is without error. The roll has some damage to the foot of the dorse from handling, as this part of the parchment formed the outside when rolled, and where it was handled. Some text is therefore illegible, but no significant passages are missing. The hand, as mentioned, cannot be dated any more narrowly than to the period in which it was commonly used in this form, which was from the last years of the fifteenth century until the last quarter of the sixteenth.⁶ In an earlier text one could perhaps narrow a geographic search based on some word forms but by this period English lost much of its diagnostic regionalisms, so any close analysis of the differences in spelling which could indicate a place of origin will give misleading or contradictory results.⁷

Reverend Fuller did not include any provenance data with his donation, so any discussion of date and place of production must come from internal evidence, of which

² Conversely, text arranged such that both face and dorse are oriented the same way is referred to as ‘chancery’ style and was used where each sheet of vellum was sewn at the foot to the head of the next in order (as used in the English parliamentary rolls). A hybrid system was used in the central courts of King’s Bench and Common Pleas where the face and dorse had the same orientation but individual sheets were bound together at the head.

³ Clemens and Graham, *Introduction to Manuscript Studies*, p. 258.

⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 167 for fifteenth-century forms. The later form is characterised by fewer pen-lifts within and between letters.

⁵ Ioppolo, ‘Early Modern Handwriting’.

⁶ Accounting for individual differences in a single scribe’s technique, the hand used in Add. 39564 is largely the same as that found in datable manuscripts of the first half of the sixteenth century. See for examples, London, The National Archives, STAC 2/14 and E 318/11/507 (two sample documents used by TNA for their online palaeography tutorial.

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/paleography, documents four and six).

⁷ The standard work for this type of text analysis is McIntosh, *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*. Brandon Heslop and Benjamin Bradak have claimed that linguistic forms support production in London but no evidence is given as to what forms those are. See Heslop and Bradak, *Lessons on the English Longsword*, p. 32.

there is precious little.⁸ If there was any interest in this manuscript between the publication of the 1933 catalogue of additions and its mention in Sydney Anglo's 2000 *The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe*, it has not come to the attention of any scholars.⁹ As a sign of how thorough the process of cataloguing was for Add. 39564, the 1933 catalogue cross-references the only known analogues in English, both also in the British Museum at the time. These are BL Harley MS 3542, ff. 82-85, and Cotton MS Titus A xxv, ff. 105. The Harley text was known in part, or whole, as early as the mid-nineteenth century and was transcribed by Alfred Hutton in 1901.¹⁰ However, there is no mention of the instructions in MS. Titus A xxv anywhere before its citation in the 1933 catalogue, and nowhere after, until its mention by Anglo.¹¹

I.2. Identifying bi-fold divisions in lesson groupings

The text of Add. 39564 consists of two-hundred-and-twenty-eight lines of text (one-hundred-and-sixteen on the face and one-hundred-and-twelve on the dorse) representing forty-one individual titled lessons.¹² Many of the lessons are numbered, although it is clear that the order on the roll does not match the numerical order of the titles. There is also the inclusion of a phrase 'amen quod I Ledall' that appears at line one-hundred-and-thirteen (between the lesson called 'The Dragonnys tayle wt the pendante' and 'the iiiijth callyd the Rabett wt a downe right stroke'). The last line on the dorse, likely an addition

⁸ There is a chance that provenance data survives among the personal and family papers of the Fuller family, now in the West Sussex Record Office (Acc5523). The present author has not had the opportunity to search this collection.

⁹ Anglo, *The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe*, p. 17. Contrary to popular commentary, Professor Anglo did not 'discover' this manuscript, nor does he make such a claim (which is made by Bradak and Heslop in *Lessons*).

¹⁰ The verse passage of MS Harley 3542 (ff. 84-5) was transcribed and printed in *Reliquia Antiqua*, pp. 308-09. The full prose passage appeared in Hutton, *The Sword and the Centuries*, pp. 36-40.

¹¹ The entire booklet (ff. 94-105) that contains the fight-text on the final leaf is either omitted, or only partly described, in the earlier and contemporary catalogues of Cotton's collection. So far, it appears that the cataloguer responsible for the 1933 description, cross-referencing Titus, did so because of their own personal knowledge of the collection (see Geldof, 'Forewarned and Forearmed: Contents of BL MS Cotton Titus A xxv, ff. 94-105').

¹² Several transcriptions of this text (of varying quality) are available online but for this essay the edition prepared for the author's Masters thesis is used instead: Geldof, 'De Herte De Fote De Eye to Accorde: Procedural Writing and Three Middle English Manuscripts of Martial Instruction'. However, the line numbering used here includes the titles, which the thesis edition does not. Contrary to Bradak and Heslop, 'A Brief Introduction to the Boon of the English Flourysh', p. 198.

by the present scribe, is the word ‘fine’, informing the reader that there is no further text to look forward to.¹³

In form and function the lessons in Add. 39564 resemble that of a dance choreography for a single swordsman and the structure of the text itself strongly supports this as it follows the same patterns of procedural instruction as contemporary dance manuscripts and, more generally, recipe literature, in late medieval and early modern English.¹⁴ However, this is not the place for a detailed discussion of the text itself, rather the goal of this short paper is to explain the significance of the miss-ordered lessons and the meaning of the ‘ledall’ passage.

In seeking the correct order of the lessons in Add. 39564, it is possible to identify three groupings of lessons that are, internally, in order. The groups are, as one reads down the roll:

Group A: lines 1-105 (from ‘the fyrste fflorysh’ to the last line of ‘the thyrdre Countyre callyd the shorte spryng wt fallyng stro[ke]’)

Group B: lines 106-133 (‘the stopping Rabetts’ to ‘Amen Quod I. Ledall’)

Group C: lines 134-228 (‘The iijth callyd the Rabett wt a downe right stroke’ to ‘fine’)

Producing a correct order is fairly straightforward — simply move group C between A and B. This also places the ‘Amen’ passage at the end of the text, as one would expect. What is important here is what that order signifies for the origins of this text, in the form we have it.

If this were an original composition one would not expect an error of this scale. One or two lessons out of order could make sense, but not lengthy passages. And one would never find an attribution phrase such as ‘Amen quod’ in the middle of a text. If, however, the scribe was working from a collection of loose leaves, specifically loose bifolds from an unbound gathering, it would be possible to produce this kind of accidental arrangement and not notice it before it was too late to correct. A similar error of arrangement appears in University of Cambridge Library MS Ff. 5. 48, where ‘Quod Dominus Gilbertus Pylkington’ appears in the middle, rather than at the end, of a transcribed text. The interpretation is that this passage was present in an exemplar, and then copied, from mis-ordered leaves, into the new transcription.¹⁵

¹³ Incidentally, the 1933 catalogue entry cited above, does not mention this disorder of the entries, instead describing the text as ending with the phrase ‘Amen, quod J. Ledall’.

¹⁴ For an expanded discussion see Geldof, ‘Forewarned and Forearmed.’

¹⁵ Foster, ‘Was Gilbert Pilkington Author of the *Secunda Pastorum*?’, p. 125. Foster also provides many examples of the ‘amen quod’ formula used by scribes, rather than authors.

Speculating that Add. 39564 is a copy from a lost exemplar, and that said exemplar was originally part of a codex, allows for a re-arrangement of the lessons into groupings that would fit onto three bi-fold sheets. When folded and collated into a gathering of a codex, the text on the outside of the folded sheet would form two different leaves, each containing a recto and verso. Bi-folds from inside the gathering would only have continuous text on one or the other side of the fold.

If these leaves were loose (that is to say, no-longer stitched together into a gathering), the scribe would be confronted by three sheets with two columns of text on each side, but likely covering only one entire sheet, and large parts of the other two. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to each of these bi-fold sheets as I, II and III and the groupings of lessons on each as A, B and C. Each bi-fold would, therefore, represent two leaves in a bound booklet, each with a recto and verso. Thus, bi-fold I represents ff. 1-2, containing lesson group A. The following table may make this arrangement clearer:

Bi-fold I f. 2v (lesson group A)	f. 1r (lines 1-aprox 50)	Bi-fold I (inside fold) f. 1v (~50-105)	f. 2r
Bi-fold II f. 2v (lesson group C)	f. 1r (134- ~170)	Bi-fold II (inside fold) f. 1v (~170-228)	f. 2r
Bi-fold III f. 2v (lesson group B)	f. 1r (106-133)	Bi-fold B (inside fold) f. 1v	f. 2r

Table 1

Our copyist began with what would be f. 1 recto of bi-fold I, and copied the text continuously until reaching the bottom of f. 1 verso, where the relevant material (lesson group A) ended. Picking up bi-fold III, the scribe copied what was relevant there, which was lesson group B, concluding with the ‘Amen quod’ formula. Finally, the scribe copied the material on bi-fold II (lesson group C, which completed the roll. The implication is that the scribe who wrote out the text of Add. MS 39564 was unfamiliar with the material before them, or, did not care to make sure the arrangement was correct.

II. SCRIBAL ATTRIBUTION FORMULAS IN ENGLISH MANUSCRIPTS

II.1. The meaning of ‘Amen quod I Ledall’ for Add. MS 39564

The ‘Amen’ or ‘Amen Quod’ formula is an occasional feature of medieval manuscripts most often interpreted as a statement of scribal labour. It is found at the end of discrete

texts or compositions and identifies either the scribe who copied the text or, occasionally, it names the source of the text used by the (unnamed) scribe. Neither usage is really an indication or claim of authorship of an original composition, rather it identifies who is responsible for the reproduction (or supply of) a given scribal product.

Examples that follow this pattern include the fifteenth-century British Library Add. MS 88887 (the Macclesfield Alphabet Book), where the phrase ‘Amen quod Fryer [erased] Baldry’ appears. This is confidently read as the identity of the scribe who made this particular manuscript but it is less clear if it also claims responsibility for the designs themselves. There is no such ambiguity with the meaning of the phrase as it is used in Cambridge, Cambridge University Library MS DD. 4.24. This fifteenth-century compilation of selected stories from Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* includes two instances of this phrase, concluding ‘Quod Qytton’ and ‘Amen quod Wytton.’ Neither is a claim to authorship, only a notice of the scribe’s contribution. While ‘Wytton’ did make some editorial changes to his source text, he makes no claim to the stories themselves. Likewise, the nineteen occasions where ‘Amen quod Rate’ and its variations, that appear in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 61, give credit only to the scribe who made the manuscript, and not the text itself. That this attribution applies only to the physical copy of Ashmole 61 is confirmed by the absence of any such attribution in another copy of the same work (Cambridge University Library MS Ff.2.38).

On rare occasions, the scribe may invoke both themselves, and the original authorial source (known or presumed) as part of personalising their own copies of works. For example, the fifteenth-century copyist who contributed to Bodleian Library MS Astor A. 2, William Perseuale, added an ‘extra-stanzaic line’ to a fourteenth-century poem: ‘Amen quod Gouer and Perseuall’ in the belief that the original work was that of the poet William Gower.¹⁶ This is relevant to the wider question of attribution for Add. MS 39564 because of attempts to identify a likely candidate for its composition, and by extension, the survival of a domestic English tradition in fight-text composition in the early to mid-sixteenth century.

Stevie Thurston has argued that the I/J Ledall was the successful York merchant and city officer of that name (c. 1535-1582), based largely on the comparative rarity of the name, the correspondence between his active years and the assumed date of the text production, and the sound association of these kinds of learned texts with established urban craftsmen, merchants, and the lesser gentry.¹⁷ However, as explained above, the

¹⁶ Cited in a review by Norman Davis. See Davis, ‘Supplement to the Index of Middle English Verse, Carleton Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins, by Rossell Hope Robbins and John L. Cutler’, p. 445-46.

¹⁷ See a summary of Thurston’s identification of Ledall in Jaquet, ‘Martial Arts by the Book: Late Medieval and Early Modern European Martial Arts’, pp. 48-49. Although Thurston was not the only investigator of possible Ledalls. The York individual is spelled ‘Ledale’, see *The Register of the Guild of Corpus Christi in the City of York*, p. 224

'amen quod' formula is ambiguous but common usage is only an attribution of the work of scribal copying. Even if we reduce our expectations to simply identifying a scribe, and not an author, a search for possible candidates turns up rather more than just our York merchant. However, if one were determined to identify someone named Ledall (or derivatives) they would need to fit a fairly simple criterium. Candidates should have a high chance of literacy (based on probabilities for social class, profession, or evidence of education and text production); they must have flourished in the latter half of the fifteenth century or the first half of the sixteenth; and some military experience, or association with it, would be likely, but not essential. Finally, they must have a name similar to J. Ledall.

A far from comprehensive search of available sources suggests at least four men named John Ledall (Lydal, or Ledde) who served in various military capacities in the fifteenth century, all of whom received letters of safe travel or were specifically named on muster lists, which suggests a certain degree of social or economic status. Lesser men, vagrants, and unpropertied men, do not seek or receive such letters, or appear in formal muster rolls.¹⁸ Stronger candidates include a John Ledall (or Ledale) who studied civil law at Oxford, from 1508, and owned a fifteenth-century Latin text on the office of the dead in the use of Sarum (ecclesiastical rules for the performance of certain services) and added annotations and inscriptions. He was rector of Birchanger in Essex. A John Ledall of Southwark (a suburb of London), craftsman and merchant, left instructions in his will that granted certain shop signs (sound evidence of literacy) to a servant.¹⁹ The 1538 muster for Northumberland lists a John Ledall of Dotland who was 'able with horse and harness' suggesting some capacity for armed combat, and suitable social standing to support it.²⁰ Any one of these individuals could have been a source for Add. MS 39564, but without more information on the manuscript itself, there is little chance of identifying the specific Ledall, and doing so may not explain who actually composed these lessons in a textual form.²¹

¹⁸ These individuals were located through searches of 'The Soldier in Later Medieval England' database hosted by the University of Southampton (medievalsoldier.org/database/): John Ledall, archer, who served with Lord Willoughby in 1427. John Ledde (a possible variation of Ledall) served with Hugh Courtenay, Earl of Devon, in 1418. John Lydal served with Lord Talbot in 1439. And J Lydall signed on to serve Sir Ralph Grey in 1441.

¹⁹ Salter, *Cultural Creativity in the Early English Renaissance*, p. 138.

²⁰ *A History of Northumberland*, p. 40.

²¹ Other possibilities include John Ledale of Wiltshire who, in 1460-5 sued John Rake in Chancery for the theft of goods to the value of £10, a substantial value for someone identified as a husbandman (The National Archives, London, C1/27/387, see also Abram, *Social England in the Fifteenth Century*, p. 163, where the case is mentioned). A John Ledale acted in a land dispute in Northumberland, 1495 (*Report on the Manuscripts of Colonel David Milne Home of Wedderburn Castle, N.B.*, p. 27). John Ledale of Sunderland, county Durham was fined for owning hunting dogs in

III. CONCLUSIONS

While the preceding discussion may seem an awful lot of words without many answers, this exercise is part of the process of studying primary sources that exist largely in isolation. The corpus of Middle English fight-texts constitutes around 2,000 words spread unevenly across three unrelated manuscripts, each of which represents its own peculiar set of contextual and material features. Explaining, as best as possible, theories accounting for some of those traits, such as the misplaced ‘amen quod’ formula or the process of identifying a particular J. Ledall, out of all possible Ledalls, has a value all of its own. Exploring the limits of our sources, even if it strongly suggests that no satisfying conclusion is possible, is a conclusion on its own. Historians of material culture and the lived lives of historical actors are comfortable with ambiguity, so long as that ambiguity is tested fully. This is an aspect of the study of martial culture, and its textual products, that its scholars must come to terms with.

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