



# Illuminating the *Roman d'Alexandre*

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264

THE MANUSCRIPT AS MONUMENT

Mark Cruse



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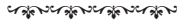
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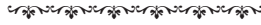
D. S. BREWER

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# Introduction



Behavior that's admired is the path to power among people everywhere.

*Beowulf*<sup>1</sup>

[Any] social production having some marked characteristics, be it an industrial good, a verse, a formula, a political idea which has appeared one day somewhere in the corner of a brain, dreams like Alexander of conquering the world, tries to multiply itself by thousands and millions of copies in every place where there exist human beings and will never stop except if it is kept in check by some rival productions as ambitious as itself.

Gabriel Tarde, *Monadologie et sociologie*<sup>2</sup>

IT IS OFTEN THE FATE of celebrities to be well known for their appearance rather than for their personal histories and inner qualities. The same is true of the many famous illuminated manuscripts whose images are reproduced with little or no discussion of the books' origins, purpose, or written contents. One of the best examples of such a celebrity book is Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264. The first part of this manuscript, completed in 1344 in Tournai, contains the Old French *Roman d'Alexandre* (*Romance of Alexander the Great*) interpolated with the *Prise de Defur*, *Vœux du paon*, *Restor du paon*, and *Voyage au Paradis Terrestre*, and with the *Venjançe Alixandre* appended to the end. The fame of Bodley 264 derives from its myriad marginal images, which since the eighteenth century have been used by art historians, folklorists, and historians to illustrate everything from the history of sport in England to medieval dining practices. Yet the renown of these marginalia has left the rest of the manuscript largely ignored, so that until now there has been no comprehensive study of this monument of medieval culture. To be sure, many different aspects of Bodley 264 have been studied in the past 200 years. M. R. James produced a facsimile in 1933, with a preface that summarily analyzed the manuscript's textual and visual contents, codicology, and history, and which described all of its illustrations and marginalia. Bodley 264's text has provided variants for editions of the *Roman d'Alexandre* and its additions, and it is the primary source for editions of the *Vœux du paon* and *Restor du paon*. Other studies have

<sup>1</sup> Trans. Heaney, lines 24–5.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Latour, 15.

examined Bodley 264's reception in England in the fifteenth century and the possible identity of its patron.<sup>1</sup>

In all of this scholarship, no one has addressed the fundamental questions: why was Bodley 264 produced, and why in such a lavish manner? No external documentation about Bodley 264's production survives. Although it remains very difficult to estimate the cost of manuscript production, it is likely that for the amount spent on Bodley 264 the patron could have commissioned a tapestry cycle, or furnished a chapel, or acquired expensive clothing or armor — all of which would seem to correspond better to the priorities that reigned within the display culture of the late-medieval nobility. Or the patron could have purchased a lavish bible or several fine devotional books instead of this one manuscript about a pagan emperor. That so much expense and effort were devoted to Bodley 264 suggests that it embodies things deeply felt by and highly significant for its patron, its makers, or both. This study attempts to excavate these meanings by approaching Bodley 264 as a multivalent artifact whose messages and purpose are revealed by evaluating its connections to its codicological, literary, cultural, historical, ritual, and social contexts.

Bodley 264 merits our attention because, in addition to containing one of the richest repertoires of marginal motifs in any medieval manuscript, it is a “chivalric bible” motivated by secular veneration for Alexander the Great. It is the apotheosis of his verse legend in Old French: it contains the most textually complete version of the expanded *Roman d'Alexandre*; it preserves the most copiously illustrated copy of this text; it has the largest folios of any manuscript of this text; it contains nine full-page miniatures (of an original thirteen), the most in any French romance manuscript; it is among the most extensive and accurate depictions of knightly costume and heraldry of this period; and it is the only manuscript to have the musical notation for a widely copied rondeau. It recounts Alexander's legend in a fashion unrivalled by any other copy of the *Roman d'Alexandre*, its sumptuousness placing it on a par with the finest devotional books. Bodley 264 has much to tell us not only about the history of manuscript illumination, but also about medieval court life, chivalric spectacle, reading practices, education, the Crusades, and Alexander's reception in the late Middle Ages. Bodley 264 is a monument, in that it is both expansively representative of its cultural moment, and the product of thought and labor that spanned generations and centuries. Like other monumental artifacts, be they architectural or other, Bodley 264 is a material manifestation of a broad spectrum of the beliefs, practices, and social structures of its time.

The goal of this study is to treat Bodley 264 as a whole artifact — a complete signifying system — whose text and images are in continuous dialogue. The meanings of Bodley 264 may only be grasped when the work of authors, planners, scribes, and artists is fused. At the same time, this study places Bodley 264 at the center of a living culture in which books complemented, shaped, and were shaped by ceremonies, rituals, visual art, pageantry, theater, song, and dance. Bodley 264 is significant not only

<sup>1</sup> On Bodley 264's reception in England, see Dutschke; on its patronage, see Melis.

because of its multifarious content, but because of what this content tells us about the development of medieval representational regimes. Through it we may examine the makers' understanding of what was representable and, simultaneously, the ways in which vernacular book culture responded to this understanding by transforming techniques of representation. Bodley 264 is particularly rich in "performance effects" — image–text juxtapositions and intervisual evocations that figure the book itself as a form of performance space in dialogue with contemporary live spectacle.<sup>1</sup> For medieval readers, to read and look at Bodley 264 was to encounter not a silent and static artifact, but a dynamic series of episodes and tableaux summoning the memory of stories, performances, and spaces.

At the center of this book-bound world is Alexander the Great, who was a central figure in medieval European culture and whose legend was an early example of world literature. Alexander's international and enduring celebrity was due to his extraordinary exploits and charismatic persona. As Lydia Ginzburg observes in her study of psychological prose, "People of remarkable gifts carry within themselves a rich fund of the universal, of the socially and historically characteristic."<sup>2</sup> Certain figures, both historical and fictional, speak to all generations because they are representative of perennial human qualities and concerns. Such universality led to multiple versions of Alexander's life, adapted to myriad contexts and cultures over the ages.<sup>3</sup> Alexander was known by later generations not through neutral biographies, but through histories and legends that transformed him into a hero, a villain, an ambiguous moral example, or a symbol adaptable to any number of historiographical or ethical schemes. In medieval Europe, writers and storytellers created several different Alexanders, depending on the period and social context. Moralists viewed the many different episodes in his career as emblematic of a multifaceted character. Rather than casting Alexander as a monolithic example of vice or virtue, as certain ancient writers had, they recognized his positive and negative aspects. A similar breadth appears in the many *exempla* devoted to Alexander in the Middle Ages, which recount scenes of courage, wisdom, vengeance, mercy, wrath, and hubris.<sup>4</sup> Scriptural commentators, on the other hand, were deeply influenced by the negative portrait of Alexander and his legacy in 1 Maccabees. In their works, he became a model of the rash tyrant who defies God, a type for the Antichrist, and the personification of numerous vices.

Bodley 264 springs not from these traditions, which belonged to the clerical realm, but from the secular tradition of the Alexander romance. This is not the place

<sup>1</sup> On performance effects, see Regalado, "Allegories of Power" and "Performing Romance."

<sup>2</sup> Ginzburg, 13.

<sup>3</sup> The breadth of the dissemination of Alexander's legend is evident in Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, which catalogues a vast amount of material. As Ross notes in the preface, he excludes "purely oriental Alexander-books" (p. 2), which constitute a vast body in their own right. Alexander's legend was known from Indonesia to Ireland in the Middle Ages; viewed in this larger context, Bodley 264 — wonderful as it is — is but a drop in the Alexandrian bucket.

<sup>4</sup> See the list in Tubach, 15–19.

to rehearse this text's lengthy and complex history, which begins in antiquity.<sup>1</sup> What is important to understand with regard to Bodley 264 is that its core text, the Old French *Roman d'Alexandre*, is a product of the twelfth-century adaptation of Latin literature and belongs to a tradition that generally celebrates Alexander as a conqueror, explorer, and wise ruler. Completed in the 1180s in northern France, the *Roman d'Alexandre* is one of many works that reflect the rapid development of lay culture in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It heralds a new poetics, combining features of the *chanson de geste*, ancient historiography, romance, saints' lives, and crusade history, reflects the growing interest in Greek history among the ecclesiastical and lay elite, and expresses the enduring appeal of imperial imaginings among northwestern European nobles.<sup>2</sup>

Fascination with the *Roman d'Alexandre* in the centuries after its composition is evident in the additions and interpolations written for it and in the number of copies that survive. Two sequels — the *Vengeance Alixandre* and *Vengement Alexandre* — were composed before 1200, perhaps because Alexander's abrupt demise in the *Alexandre* did not satisfy twelfth-century audiences. In the first half of the thirteenth century two more episodes, the *Prise de Defur* and *Voyage au Paradis Terrestre*, were interpolated into the poem.<sup>3</sup> The manuscript history of the *Roman d'Alexandre* also testifies to the poem's important place in French culture. It was a part of the canon when the production of manuscripts of vernacular narrative increased dramatically in the second half of the thirteenth century. At least twelve fragments or complete manuscripts of the *Alexandre* and its additions date to this period, the work of book producers in northern France and the Low Countries.<sup>4</sup> The poem enjoyed another burst of popularity in the first and second quarters of the fourteenth century thanks to the success of another addition, the *Vœux du paon* (c.1310). Ostensibly written as an interpolation into the *Alexandre*, the *Vœux* circulated both independently and with the larger cycle. The *Vœux* injected scenes of courtly games, elaborate feasts, and amorous badinage into the romance for the first time, creating yet another image of Alexander's world that appealed enormously to late-medieval tastes.

Bodley 264 contains the *Roman d'Alexandre* and all of the texts added to it in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries save two, one of which — a continuation of the *Vœux du paon* — was written after the manuscript was completed.<sup>5</sup> For this reason

<sup>1</sup> On the history of the *Roman d'Alexandre*, see Cary; Gaullier-Bougassas; Meyer, *Alexandre le Grand*; Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*.

<sup>2</sup> On the poetics of the *Roman d'Alexandre*, see Gaullier-Bougassas. On the romance's ties to crusade and empire, see Gosman, and Chapter 4 below.

<sup>3</sup> See *La Prise de Defur*.

<sup>4</sup> These MSS are BnF fr. 375 (late 13th / early 14th c.); fr. 786 (1280s); fr. 787 (last third of 13th c.); fr. 789 (late 13th / early 14th c.); fr. 792 (last quarter 13th c.); fr. 1635 (late 13th / early 14th c.); fr. 15094 (first 270 folios from third quarter 13th c.); fr. 15095 (mid 13th c.); fr. 24366 (mid 13th c.); fr. 25517 (second half 13th c.); Vatican, Reg. 1364 (second half 13th c.); fragment of Saint-Lô (second half of 13th c.).

<sup>5</sup> These two poems are the *Vengement Alexandre* and the *Parfait du paon*.

alone the manuscript merits close study. An encyclopedic biography, Bodley 264 paints a thorough portrait not only of Alexander but of the qualities a medieval ruler should possess. Far from a formulaic and moralizing mirror of the prince, Bodley 264 is remarkable for its topical breadth, varied rhetoric, diverse episodes, and pictorial content. In Bodley 264's text and images, Alexander is a fearless warrior, clever strategist, generous lord, wise judge, quick-witted orator, courtly gentleman, and bold explorer. The manuscript offers an immediate experience of this exceptional life. Its text addresses the reader in the second person, it contains hundreds of verses of direct discourse, and its images depict Alexander as if he were a fourteenth-century knight. Bodley 264 attests to the medieval desire for encyclopedic biography — it is a kind of “Alexander: The Whole Story as You’ve Never Seen it Before” of the Middle Ages.

Beyond the representation of the events in Alexander's life, Bodley 264 seems designed to capture the hero's grandiosity and uniqueness. The book's exceptional textual and material features are a manifestation and extension of its subject, much like illustrated bibles and saints' lives express the sanctity of their narratives, or reliquaries the *virtus* of their contents. Bodley 264 may be understood as a monument to Alexander's charisma and power to overawe, qualities that medieval rulers avidly sought to cultivate. As the *Vœux du paon* states, a great leader's power was believed to flow into his followers:

Et quant li sires est frans de cuer et gentis,  
 Larges et droituriers, deboinaires et pis,  
 Il n'a homme en sa terre qui ne soit acessis,  
 Hardis comme lyons et poi espoëris,  
 S'en vaut bien li uns dis contre les anemis. (lines 2105–9, fol. 123<sup>r</sup>)

And when the lord is noble of heart and generous,  
 is munificent and just, kind and merciful,  
 there is not a man in his lands who is not affected,  
 bold as a lion and little frightened;  
 one such man is well worth ten against enemies.

It is this ability to inspire and thereby magnify one's influence and force that Alexander embodied for the medieval audience, and which drew readers and viewers to his story. With its large folios of fine parchment, its gold leaf, its lush diaper grounds, and its rich colors, Bodley 264 provides a material complement to Alexander's ancient charisma.

In approaching Bodley 264 as a unified artifact whose text, illustrations, and overall design are as important as its marginalia, this study departs from the treatment given the manuscript in most modern scholarship. The closest thing to a comprehensive study of Bodley 264 is the preface to James's facsimile, which provides in fifty-one large-format pages a discussion of the manuscript's history and a thorough description of its illustrations and marginalia. The present study in many ways is meant to build on and complement the invaluable work done by James, who focused strictly on the book

rather than undertaking a study of its cultural context. Since James, it is fair to say that Bodley 264 has served predominantly as a visual catalogue for a host of scholars and others who use its images for a variety of purposes. The most thorough approach to the meaning of Bodley 264's illuminations appears in the work of art historians. Lillian Randall's studies of marginalia, which relied extensively on Bodley 264, opened the door to serious analysis of these motifs by combining anthropology, literature, performance history, sermons, theology, and folklore.<sup>1</sup> Building on Randall's work, S. K. Davenport examined the relationship between Bodley 264's text, column pictures, and marginalia in a 1971 article. Michael Camille has discussed class issues and rhetorical structures permeating Bodley 264's marginalia in *Image on the Edge* and *Mirror in Parchment*, while Jean Wirth has recently published a reappraisal of much preceding work on marginalia, which also draws on Bodley 264. Victor Schmidt discusses Bodley 264 in his study of images of Alexander's flight with gryphons. Jonathan Alexander examines the dance scene on fol. 181<sup>v</sup> (Plate vii) in his article "Dancing in the Streets." This is far from an exhaustive list, but it shows how Bodley 264's vast catalogue of motifs is mined by art historians to many ends.

Bodley 264's incredible visual diversity also attracts folklorists, historians, and others who use its images more for illustration than for analysis. This illustrational spirit was behind the manuscript's "rediscovery" by Joseph Strutt in the late eighteenth century. His *Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* (1801) reproduced many marginal scenes from Bodley 264 and other medieval manuscripts, and remained popular for almost two hundred years.<sup>2</sup> In the twentieth century, Bodley 264's marginalia were reproduced countless times to illustrate books and articles. A typical example is a short article on "Travaux et jeux populaires au xiv<sup>e</sup> siècle" by Roger Lecotté, which appeared in the *Bulletin Folklorique d'Île-de-France* in 1959 and reproduces the image of girls watching a puppet show in the *bas-de-page* on fol. 54<sup>v</sup>. The images of courtiers dancing and conversing on fol. 181<sup>v</sup> (Plate vii), which are discussed by Camille and Alexander (among many others), appear on page 94 of *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades* to illustrate "courtly activities." Page 102 of the same publication reproduces musicians in the *bas-de-page* on fol. 180<sup>v</sup> to illustrate instruments that might have stirred "the medieval military soul." The frontispiece to Malcolm Vale's book *The Princely Court* shows the full-page miniature on fol. 188<sup>v</sup>, with its lavish banquet scene that captures the luxurious court display he describes in his book.<sup>3</sup> Bodley 264's images are also used as decoration. The cover of Evelyn Vitz's *Orality and Performance in Early French Romance* shows a cropped portion of the wedding procession in the *bas-de-page* on fol. 172<sup>r</sup> (Fig. 6); the cover of the *Lettres gothiques* edition of the *Roman d'Alexandre* shows the in-text illustration of Alexander's flight with gryphons on fol. 81<sup>r</sup> (Plate xvi). With Bodley 264's

<sup>1</sup> See Randall, "Exempla and their Influence" and *Images in the Margins of Gothic Manuscripts*.

<sup>2</sup> See discussion in Camille, *Mirror in Parchment*, 30.

<sup>3</sup> Other examples of publications that use images from Bodley 264 for illustration include Barber and Barker; Camille, *Medieval Art of Love*; M. Davenport; Mehl.

reproduction on the internet,<sup>1</sup> it is easy to imagine that its illustrations and marginalia will find their way into even more contexts both academic and popular.

Another class of scholars who have turned their attention to Bodley 264 are the philologists. The first in-depth study of Bodley 264 was published by Paul Meyer in 1882 as part of his foundational “Étude sur les manuscrits du *Roman d’Alexandre*.” In it, the ever perspicacious expert described the manuscript’s textual content and observed that most of its rubrics were in Anglo-Norman, not Picard like the text, and in a different hand from the text.<sup>2</sup> The team that edited the *Roman d’Alexandre* included Bodley 264’s lessons in the variants.<sup>3</sup> In their edition of the *Prise de Defur* and *Voyage au Paradis Terrestre*, Peckham and La Du similarly include Bodley 264’s text in the variants, and also provide a diagram detailing its contents from the end of branch III to the end of the manuscript.<sup>4</sup> Brother Camillus Casey used the text of the *Vœux du paon* in Bodley 264 as the basis for his 1956 edition; Enid Donkin did likewise for her 1980 edition of the *Restor du Paon*. These scholars, however, were not interested in Bodley 264’s visual material, with the exception of Meyer, who briefly discusses the marginalia and notes the location of full-page miniatures dividing the text.

The final group of scholars who have studied Bodley 264 could be called the codicologists, whose interests lie in the history of manuscript production and reader manipulation. Alison Stones, an art historian, has produced numerous studies that illuminate Bodley 264’s formal and stylistic relationships to other manuscripts. Consuela Dutschke, in an article on the Marco Polo texts in Bodley 264 and Royal 19 D. 1, shows how Bodley 264 acquired its present form — the *Roman d’Alexandre* is today bound with an excerpt from a Middle English Alexander poem and with Marco Polo’s *Voyages* in French. Her study offers important insight into how Bodley 264 was read in fifteenth-century England. Keith Busby’s analysis of Bodley 264 in *Codex and Context* situates the manuscript in the larger corpus of the *Roman d’Alexandre* and *Paon* poems, and discusses the evidence for its ownership. Tine Melis too has examined the various clues as to who commissioned Bodley 264, speculating about the possible patronage of Edward III of England. These scholars have analyzed Bodley 264 in a more general and contextual light than the art historians, historians, and philologists, showing that while it is an exceptional object, it is very much a product of codicological tradition.

The present study of Bodley 264 draws on all of these scholarly veins and strives to unite them in a synthetic examination of the book’s meaning, which necessarily involves its relationship to its cultural context. There is, in other words, no single methodology driving this analysis, but an ecumenical approach that aims to coordinate different media and disciplines, and thereby arrive at a coherent and persuasive picture of Bodley 264 in its original environment. My goal is to articulate what Bodley 264

<sup>1</sup> [image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=bodleian&manuscript=msbodl264](http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=bodleian&manuscript=msbodl264)

<sup>2</sup> Meyer, “Étude,” 292.

<sup>3</sup> *The Medieval French Roman d’Alexandre*, 7 vols. in 6.

<sup>4</sup> *La Prise de Defur*, lxiii.

meant, how it signified, and how it was perceived by its users, not to impose a preconceived understanding of medieval culture onto it; or, given that such an imposition is probably unavoidable, to marshal as many perspectives as possible and hopefully limit the conceptual constraints within which I operate.

That said, there are certain assumptions that guide my analysis and should be stated at the outset. I take it as axiomatic that, as Wolfgang Iser observes, “the written utterance continually transcends the margins of the . . . page, in order to bring the addressee into contact with nontextual realities.”<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this study, there most definitely is an *hors texte* in dialogue with the manuscript, which I treat as not only a referential artifact but as the manifestation of social practices and processes that produce meaning. This anthropological approach understands Bodley 264 as one “text” — one assemblage of verbal, visual, performative, and material signs — in relation with others that make its messages possible. Meaning is not inherent and unitary, but a question of how an artifact adapts and contextualizes signs and of how those signs are interpreted by the audience. For this reason, I consider Bodley 264 not a passive semiotic repository but a participant in its culture — a social actor with the power to shape its audience’s perceptions of themselves, the past, the present, space, ethics, and numerous other spheres of thought and experience. I am particularly concerned with the ideological implications of Bodley 264’s contents and design, as this manuscript is one of the more extraordinary examples of how the medieval nobility used objects to idealize its origins and to perform its social superiority.

Another principal assumption of this study is that the visual representation of Alexander in Bodley 264 was motivated by a medieval belief in the power of images to instruct and inspire. This is of course an oft-repeated notion in medieval texts, but one that is particularly relevant to Bodley 264 because Alexander’s image became a motif in medieval literature, appearing in three texts composed between 1190 and 1300. In the *Chevalier au cygne* (c.1190–c.1220), part of the Crusade Cycle, Alexander’s life is painted in an imperial chamber and prefigures the conquest of the Holy Land recounted later in the poem. In the *Faits des Romains* (c.1215), Caesar sees a statue of Alexander and is inspired to perform great deeds. In the *Entrée d’Espagne*, a Franco-Italian poem composed around 1300, Roland encounters Alexander’s life painted in a castle before heading east himself and achieving great feats of arms in the same places Alexander conquered. More than literary devices, these *ekphrases* attest to the importance of sight, and in particular of Alexander’s image, as a vehicle for learning and inspiration. Bodley 264 gives material form to this belief in visual potency, allowing the viewer to apprehend Alexander in the moment and to imprint his example on the mind.

A final notion shaping this study concerns the nature of narrative in manuscripts. Bodley 264 is not the *Roman d’Alexandre* but a *Roman d’Alexandre* — a unique telling, a singular performance. Underlying this study is the understanding that every time a medieval narrative was copied into a manuscript it was retold. Just as no two oral per-

<sup>1</sup> Iser, 55.

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formances ever recount quite the same version of a tale, so do no two manuscript versions of a narrative ever perfectly resemble each other. In both oral and written forms, medieval narrative was a fluid entity. On the discursive level, oral performers respected a basic story structure, but they added descriptions, events, and characters depending on their inspiration and the public they were addressing. Written texts were similarly transformed by an array of discursive interventions. Compilation, interpolation, emendation, and omission recontextualized and redirected narratives to make them correspond to the visions of planners, scribes, and patrons. Moreover, because no discourse can exist without a material context, medieval narrative was always realized with extraverbal means that determined effect and meaning. In live performance, gesture, tone of voice, music, costume, and setting all realized narrative and shaped its sense. In manuscripts, elements such as parchment quality, folio size, ruling, punctuation, abbreviation, decorated initials, and illuminations likewise affected perception of narrative. These broad similarities between live and written modes of transmission remind us that the copying of narrative into manuscripts was itself a kind of performance — an artful arrangement of both text and materials into a meaningful, aesthetically pleasing, and symbolically rich ensemble.

I emphasize the analogies between live performance and Bodley 264 because this manuscript is a remarkable example of narrative staging that uses both the text and extratextual features to shape the reader's perceptions. Nor do I intend this comparison in a merely metaphorical sense. The first two chapters of this study examine Bodley 264 as a performance space in its own right. Chapter 1, "A Monument to *Cortoisie*," discusses the ways in which the manuscript's design, text, and images figure Alexander's world as a precursor to and idealizing version of medieval court culture. Miniature frames and diaper grounds borrow from monumental art and architecture to construct the book as an extension of courtly place. Images of conversation, banquets, musicians, and dancers evoke a genealogy of courtly virtues and pastimes rooted in and legitimized by ancient avatars of *cortoisie*. Numerous features — folio size, *mise en page*, *mise en texte*, authorial voice, illumination, punctuation — suggest that Bodley 264 was intended for public reading within the precincts of the court, making it the vehicle for ritualized and social encounters with the Alexandrian past. In all of these ways, Bodley 264 reinforced the ideology of ancient foundations and natural superiority undergirding noble identity. The manuscript embodies the notion that to be noble is to possess a written and visible past, unlike "historyless" commoners.

Chapter 2, "Urban Conquest and Spectacle," continues this examination of performance and space by considering Bodley 264 as a response to late-medieval urbanism in the north of France and the Low Countries (a region most conveniently designated as "the North," *le Nord*). Bodley 264 belongs to a long tradition of works that assimilated Alexander, a legendary conqueror of cities, to the medieval wars over the cities of the North. Tournai, where the manuscript was produced, was a crucial front in the early stages of the Hundred Years' War, which may indicate that Bodley 264 was conceived as a commentary on the need for a strong ruler able to impose peace on a fractured

political landscape. Just as it is a proxy for ancient courtly place, so does Bodley 264 figure the ancient empire that Alexander assembled, its miniatures and folios standing in for the terrain and cities that he conquered. At the same time, its representations of ancient warriors as medieval knights who perform for spectators evoke the chivalric *festes* of the cities of the North, so that Bodley 264 becomes a celebration of the transfer of chivalric virtue from the ancient world to Franco-Flemish society. Many of Bodley 264's marginalia are also inspired by urban spectacle and commerce, and reflect the growing legitimacy and representability of heterogeneous, and heteroglossic, urban reality.

The second part of this study examines Bodley 264 as a repository of didactic and inspirational history. Chapter 3, "Apraigne d'Alixandre': Illuminating Exemplarity in Bodley 264," shows that in both text and image, Bodley 264 depicts Alexander as the ideal embodiment of four virtues considered crucial for any medieval ruler, the first of these being justice. The *Roman d'Alexandre* frames Alexander's conquests as a form of just war against treacherous tyrants in Asia who have forfeited their right to rule, while his acts of vengeance may also be understood as expressions of the king's prerogative to mete out punishment. Images of violence in the miniatures and *bas-de-page* reinforce the message about the ruler's monopoly on justice and retribution, and may be related to real-life spectacles of punishment. The second regal virtue highlighted in Bodley 264 is military prowess. Alexander is of course an ideal warrior; he almost always wears armor in the miniatures and is depicted in almost every battle scene. Alexander embodies the royal military function, and therefore evokes the late-medieval debate about whether or not kings should fight. Complementing Alexander's martial skill is another virtue, his *clergie*, which is evident in his mastery of languages and rhetoric. Bodley 264 is the only manuscript of the *Roman d'Alexandre* to illustrate Alexander's escape from the perilous valley, in which he literally reads his way out of danger by finding a helpful inscription. Another miniature illustrates Alexander's clever response to a mocking gift sent by Darius, king of the Persians. These images of *clergie* reflect a broader concern with the education of rulers that also informed contemporary images of Saint Louis and Charles v. The fourth virtue is Alexander's curiosity, which leads to extraordinary feats of exploration that inspire *admiratio* the world over and are as crucial to his conquests as his military victories. Alexander not only encounters marvels but is a marvel himself, and in this way embodies another ambition of rulers — to project an image of uncommon, or wonderful, power.

Chapter 4, "Alexander, Crusade, and the East in Bodley 264," discusses the manuscript as a response to another central preoccupation of the late Middle Ages, the Crusades. Scholars have for the most part overlooked Alexander's place in the elaboration of crusade ideology, focusing more on how biblical and medieval figures were made into proto-crusaders. As Chapter 4 demonstrates, not only was Alexander an avatar of the crusader, but the Crusades were without doubt one of the reasons his legend retained its popularity and was copied into manuscripts for such a long period. This chapter begins with a discussion of the Crusades' profound impact on Franco-Flemish

culture, which resulted from direct participation in campaigns by nobles and commoners alike, and from the commemoration of this history in relics, rituals, and chronicles. It goes on to show that Alexander was early assimilated to crusade history in Franco-Flemish manuscript culture. Bodley 264 belongs to a tradition celebrating Alexander as a proto-crusader that goes back to the mid twelfth century, and that influenced both Latin and vernacular, ecclesiastical and lay book production in the Low Countries and northern France. In Bodley 264, both the interpolated *Roman d'Alexandre* and its illustrations articulate the resemblance between Alexander and crusaders. Alexander's foes and battlegrounds in the poem are those encountered by warriors in *chansons de geste* and crusade literature, while images showing Alexander at Tyre and Jerusalem emphasize his presence in the same space later occupied by crusaders. Bodley 264's miniatures also employ traditional signs of Asian otherness — Ethiopian heads, boars' heads, idols — which represent Alexander's enemies as belonging to the same universe as those of the crusaders. Moreover, Alexander's battles with the Babylonian Emir and Gog and Magog inscribe him into salvation history, making his wars a rehearsal of the Apocalypse. While it is ostensibly a treasury of ancient history, then, Bodley 264 can also be understood as embodying medieval nostalgia for conquest *outramer* and medieval anxiety about threats from the East.

Chapter 5, "The Production, Patronage, and Later Reception of Bodley 264," examines the process by which the manuscript was produced, the evidence of where and for whom, and its later reception in England. Not surprisingly, Bodley 264 is the work of professional artisans who applied traditional methods to an exceptional project; what is striking is the smooth coordination of their efforts, since the manuscript was in production for around six years and as many as seven artists may have contributed to its illumination. It is almost certain that these artisans worked in Tournai and were affiliated in some way with the abbey of Saint-Martin, since the hand of Pierart dou Tielt, later keeper of manuscripts for the abbey, is visible in Bodley 264. Saint-Martin and its abbot Gilles li Muisis open the intriguing possibility that Bodley 264 was produced for, or made its way into the hands of, the king of France before being captured by the English at Poitiers. In England, Bodley 264 was expanded by a fifteenth-century patron who added a Middle English *Alexander and Dindimus* and Marco Polo's *Voyages*, in French, to the *Roman d'Alexandre*. In the Conclusion, I argue that these additions suggest that, at least in this case, the *Roman d'Alexandre* was still read in the fifteenth century, and still viewed as relevant testimony to the history of East–West contacts. Bodley 264 was eventually marginalized by the emergence of English as the literary language of England, by the rise of exploration, and by the humanistic privileging of ancient historiography, all of which made its Alexander an old-fashioned relic. The Afterword offers a brief reflection on what Bodley 264's presence in cyberspace says about the present and future of medieval studies.

In the Middle Ages, books and narratives were both conceived as things made, crafted, constructed. We sometimes miss this fact when we discuss "medieval literature" as if it were different from other artistic and artisanal pursuits in the Middle Ages.

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Arguably, there was no such thing as “literature” in this period; certainly there was no such thing as “art” in the modern sense. To the medieval mind, the text was an object to be worked on — adapted, amplified, translated; and to be realized — performed in the etymological sense of “given form.” Bodley 264, like all manuscripts, was one more step or stage in the making of the texts it preserved. Its illumination and copying were not separate from the work that went into the composition and elaboration of the *Roman d’Alexandre*, but rather a necessary continuation and materialization of this work. It is Bodley 264 as something elaborately designed and crafted — as an exquisite monument to imaginative labor — that I hope to have portrayed in the following pages.

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