RECOGNISING CARTULARY STUDIES THIRTY YEARS AFTER *LES CARTULARIES*[1]

Una valoración de los estudios sobre cartularios treinta años después de Les cartularies

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ABSTRACT: This article begins by considering the achievement of the *Les cartulaires* volume of essays (1993), particularly in launching a field of inquiry. It reflects on how this field has developed since the early 1990s, especially what has characterised the research and the kinds of themes and questions historians have explored. It situates the latest work on cartularies within the broader development of the field, such as long established interests in cartulary function, typologies, codicology and scribes, and the influences of editorial practices, as well as emerging ideas about reading cartularies. The article highlights how varied and multi-dimensional all of this work has been, and addresses some questions that arise from this. As a result, it offers fresh ways to understand and conceptualise the field.

Keywords: cartularies; *Les cartulaires* book; medieval; manuscripts; charters.

RESUMEN: Este artículo comienza analizando los logros obtenidos por el volumen titulado *Les cartulaires* (1993), especialmente en relación con el impulso de un nuevo campo de investigación. Se reflexiona sobre cómo se ha desarrollado ese tema desde comienzos de la década de los 90, especialmente en referencia a lo que ha caracterizado la investigación y a los temas y cuestiones que los historiadores han indagado. Posteriormente, dentro de la evolución de este campo de estudio, se sitúan las últimas investigaciones relacionadas con intereses establecidos desde largo tiempo sobre los cartularios, como la funcionalidad, las tipologías, los escribas y las influencias de las prácticas editoriales, así como con los nuevos planteamientos sobre la lectura de estos códices. Este artículo subraya la diversidad y

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multifuncionalidad de estas investigaciones y aborda algunas cuestiones que derivan de ello. Como resultado, se ofrecen nuevas formas para comprender y conceptualizar este campo de estudio.

Palabras clave: cartularios; libro *Les cartulaires*; Edad Media; manuscritos; diplomas.

SUMARIO: 0 Introduction. 1 Reviewing the field of cartulary studies. 2 Conclusion. 3 Works cited.

0   INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to overstate the significance of the École nationale des chartes round-table in December 1991 for cartulary scholarship in western Europe. Thanks in a large part to the publication of its proceedings, *Les cartulaires* (1993), it is possible to talk of «cartulary studies» as a field of inquiry[2]. The volume arguably still represents the primary point of reference for modern scholarly understandings of the cartulary. This status is partly due to its unparalleled range of contributions, not just in quantity (twenty-six chapters, plus foreword and conclusion) but in the insights achieved by each author. The inclusion of «remarks and discussion» at the end of certain chapters provides glimpses into the reception of these presentations and their novel ideas at the roundtable itself thirty-two years ago.

The significance of *Les cartulaires* has been rehearsed many times in print, with numerous subsequent studies lauding its achievement[3]. While each reader will take something different from the volume, perhaps its most powerful contribution is a deceptively simple one to us today: that cartularies can be analysed as a text. This is not to say that before 1991 historians mindlessly plundered cartularies for their individual charter texts, without a thought to the whole entity; nevertheless, the prevailing experience of cartularies was as repositories of documents[4]. *Les cartulaires* drew wider attention to the cartulary as something that could be analysed in the same way as other kinds of extended text, in terms of, for example, the motives of its compilers, their choice of inclusion (and exclusion), and the arrangement of the material. In other words, the cartulary was recognised for the first time as a «genre» of writing[5]. They could therefore be considered comparatively, in relation to a more visible —and more international— corpus. Historians

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[2]   Guyotjeannin, Morelle and Parisse (eds.), *Les cartulaires*.

[3]   For a particularly useful account, see Chastang, «Cartulaires».

[4]   Notable exceptions to this in English language publications prior to 1991 are Walker, «The Organization», and Foulds, «Medieval Cartularies». Both remain heavily cited in Anglophone scholarship. Two other articles from before 1991, both in French, which captured ideas that would be developed in *Les cartulaires* but have not generally been picked up in Anglophone scholarship are Flammarion, «Une équipe de scribes», and Genet, «Cartulaires, registres et histoire».

[5]   The term *genre* is used in the foreword: Guyotjeannin, Morelle and Parisse, «Avant-propos», 8. See also the remarks in the conclusion about the cartulary as a particular kind of text reflecting «a moment» («le cartulaire, reflet d'un moment»): Parisse, «Conclusion», 510.

could look across this corpus and situate particular examples within it to see how diverse groups of people engaged with the practice of making a cartulary at different periods and with varying results. *Les cartulaires* therefore launched a field devoted to unearthing the contexts of cartulary production.

Three decades on, we are able to assess the evolution of cartulary studies research. Many of the ideas first aired at the roundtable have been developed through an expanding range of work. Cartulary studies is arguably grounded on individual case studies. Detailed investigation is particularly suited to the scale and scope of a PhD dissertation, where many editions and studies have originated[6]. There are also a large number of essay collections dedicated to cartularies, often derived from conferences at which speakers have presented their individual research projects[7]. Interest has been sustained by the cartulary's appeal as a source for local histories based on particular institutions, families or regions. Cartularies have also contributed to studies of broader phenomena, such as «everyday» writing practices[8]. Today, the «field» (or we might say «fields») is largely de-centred, with a wide distribution of people writing about cartularies in a number of different languages. It has been largely driven by Francophone scholarship, perhaps thanks to the influence of *Les cartulaires* in which all essays were in French and most related to cartularies from French speaking areas[9]. More recently, there has been a burst of activity relating to Iberian cartularies, with publications written in Spanish and Portuguese (and occasionally in English), and also increasingly studies relating to Italian cartularies in the same conferences and publications[10]. It might be observed that Anglophone scholars have largely looked to works in English, and so particular publications have played a more substantial role in shaping their outlook on cartulary studies[11]. While a national

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[6]   A search on EThOS, the national thesis database for institutions in the UK (https://ethos.bl.uk/Home.do), for the term «cartulary» serves 42 records from 1961 to 2023 (search conducted on 3 August 2023). Many include an edition as part of the study. Those with «cartulary/cartularies» in their title are studies of (with year of submission in brackets): Meaux Abbey (1965), Kenilworth Abbey (1966), Leiston Abbey (1977), Vicars Choral of York Minster (1978), the leper hospital of Saint Gilles de Pont-Audemer (1978), Thurgarton Priory (1984), Scrope of Bolton family (1987), Lanercost Priory (1991), the Seagrave family (1997), St Mary's Collegiate Church Warwick (1999), Wherwell Abbey (2003), Nostell Priory (2005), Binham Priory (2005), Alvingham Priory (2010), Kelso Abbey (2011), Lindores Abbey and Glasgow Cathedral (2017), the Okeover family (2017) and Arbroath Abbey (2023).

[7]   For examples, see below, nn. 9 and 10.

[8]   Most notably, see how cartularies are embedded into the wide-ranging discussion of «everyday writing» in Bertrand, *Les écritures ordinaires*. This is part of the successful Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy series, which has included other influential contributions to the broadening of cartulary studies, such as Heidecker (ed.), *Charters and the Use of the Written Word*.

[9]   Three subsequent collections of essays relating to cartularies from French regions are: Le Blévec (ed.), *Les cartulaires méridionaux*; *Les cartulaires normands*; and Renault (ed.), *Originaux et cartulaires dans la Lorraine médiévale*. There has also been a long tradition of German language work on documents that has fed into much of this French cartulary scholarship: see, for example, the references in Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance* (chapter 3), and more recently various chapters in Brown *et al.*, *Documentary Culture*.

[10]   Rodríguez Díaz and García Martínez (eds), *La escritura de la memoria*; Escalona and Sirantoine (eds), *Chartes et cartulaires*; Lamazou-Duplan and Vaquero (eds), *Les cartulaires médiévaux*; Furtado and Moscone (eds), *From Charters to Codex*.

[11]   Notably for the early middle ages, Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance* (especially chapter 3, «Archival memory and the destruction of the past», 81-114); and Declercq, «Originals and Cartularies». Other

frame of reference is common enough (it seems natural to speak of French cartularies, English cartularies, Scottish cartularies[12], Croatian cartularies[13], and so on), it will be obvious to those in the field that other aspects are usually more meaningful —the manuscript's date of production, its immediate locality, and the nature of its creators (whether an individual or a religious community or another kind of community).

We might also acknowledge a limitation of cartulary studies today. The strength of *Les cartulaires* was that it recognised cartularies as a single type of text worthy of comparison across time and place. This focused minds and created a community (or communities) of scholars which arguably gave rise to the activities and publications described above. The creation of a research community has, however, continually thrown up the issue of how to define the genre, a task so delicate that it sometimes brings into question whether we should talk of cartularies —*les cartulaires*, *los cartularios*, *das chartular*, *kopialbücher* etc.— as a corpus or genre at all, especially one so wide ranging which spreads across a millennium (the subjects in *Les cartulaires* stretched from the ninth to eighteenth centuries). There have, of course, been attempts to define the cartulary. Indeed, the foreword to *Les cartulaires* offered «a strict definition», namely that the cartulary was «an organised transcription (selective or exhaustive) of diplomatic documents, carried out by the holder of them or on their behalf»[14]. Many aspects of this definition could be challenged by particular examples of cartularies (not all are «organised», not all are full «transcriptions» of documents, many contain other texts beyond diplomatic documents held in a single archive, and so on). We might ask whether there is a need for a definition. One context is the production of catalogues where strict criteria are required for their policy of inclusion. Indeed, the roundtable in 1991 coincided with the diplomatic section of the Institut de recherche et d'histoire des textes (IRHT) reviewing Henri Stein's 1907 catalogue of cartularies related to France[15]. Catalogues are the main space where taxonomies hold a real implication. In other settings, while there may still be unease about the conventional definition (quoted above), discussions of cartularies have nevertheless progressed unhindered, incorporating a relatively wide variety of manuscripts.

This article will not attempt to summarise all of the scholarship since 1993. Instead, it will consider the broader dynamics within the field. This exploration takes as its starting point that through cartulary studies, we can reflect more widely on what sorts of

significant influences in Anglophone scholarship have been Walker, «The Organization»; Foulds, «Medieval Cartularies»; and Bouchard, «Monastic Cartularies». It is also an almost routine custom in Anglophone scholarship to cite, as a launch for a discussion of records like cartularies, the seminal Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*.

[12] Tucker, «Understanding Scotland's Medieval Cartularies».

[13] Galović, «Historical Circumstances».

[14] Guyotjeannin, Morelle and Parisse, «Avant-propos», 7. My translation of: «une définition stricte du cartulaire, transcription organisée, sélective ou exhaustive, de documents diplomatiques, réalisée par le détenteur de ceux-ci ou pour son compte». See also Guyotjeannin, Pycke and Tock, *Diplomatique médiévale*, 277.

[15] Stein, *Bibliographie générale*. The development work is described in Vérité, «Les enterprises françaises». Stein's work was further developed for an online catalogue. In the context of that enterprise, ways of dividing the overall «typology» of cartularies were discussed in Bertrand, Bourlet and Hélary, «Vers une typologie». The resulting online catalogue is *CartulR*: https://telma-repertoires.irht.cnrs.fr/cartulr/page/presentation (accessed 07/07/2023).

issues drive historical study, what questions historians seek to answer when examining or representing texts like cartularies, and how this has been evolving since the early 1990s.

1   REVIEWING THE FIELD OF CARTULARY STUDIES

The nature of any study is, of course, primarily determined by the kinds of cartularies that scholars choose to focus on in their work. In general, there is a strong tendency to pay particular attention to the earliest examples from a given country, region or institution[16]. Tracing the earliest manuscripts makes sense if there was indeed a shared genre of cartulary making and writing since the first examples would, presumably, have been the most influential. This tendency necessarily goes hand in hand with a focus on ecclesiastical cartularies, and especially those of larger churches. This is no coincidence since it was these communities that typically acquired large numbers of charters which sustained cartulary creation and growth over a long period. It is also the major monasteries and cathedrals that tend to have the best survival of manuscripts. The smaller numbers of «lay» cartularies have tended to be overlooked[17]. To pay them further attention would beneficially challenge our terms of reference in the field, especially ideas of communal identity, history-writing and memory, as well as aspects of the codicology and palaeography of cartularies. There are also potentially underexplored questions surrounding cartularies from female ecclesiastical institutions. All of this means that, within the field, the range of experiences of cartulary production that have been explored are not especially diverse[18]. In fact, in some ways, cartulary scholarship has become more narrowly focused. With attention firmly on cartulary manuscripts and their makers, we are perhaps more hesitant now about reaching through cartularies to the wider society that their texts depict, given our heightened awareness of the cartulary's potential selectivity and creativity[19].

As well as expanding its scope, the field has also been digging much deeper into individual examples. Studies of cartularies are now so detailed even a monograph might only manage to incorporate one or two examples[20]. Because of such extensive work in the field, especially methodologies for analysis and frameworks for interpretation, it is

[16]   See, for example, the contribution to this special issue by David Peterson.

[17]   This is also identified in Robert F. Berkhofer III's contribution to this special issue.

[18]   The content of cartularies has been used recently to illuminate medieval women and their experiences (though not as producers of cartularies). A recent study of the presentation of women in Spanish cathedral cartularies argued «Though cartularies were deeply ideologically driven, they can also be mined for information about women's involvement in the medieval social order, beyond the spiritual»; Wearing, «Holy Donors, Mighty Queens», 105. A recent edition of the Prémontré Abbey cartulary also emphasises the insights from the text about the role of contemporary women: Wacha and Seale (eds), *The Cartulary of Prémontré*.

[19]   An effective example of taking an abbey's cartulary as the starting point for exploring their wider networks and relations is Jamroziak, *Rievaulx Abbey*. More recently, see Kathryn Dutton's study of Kirkstead Abbey's cartulary: Dutton, «The Cartulary».

[20]   For example, Tucker, *Reading and Shaping Medieval Cartularies*, is a detailed study of two manuscripts.

now possible to attempt larger scale studies of, for example, a single institution's entire cartulary corpus[21]. This approach allows questions to be pursued about communal manuscripts, scribal communities across generations, differences in how texts were copied, and overlaps between manuscript content, all while keeping the institutional setting as a constant factor. The results of these studies offer further encouragement for work in this mould.

Another question rarely posed (in print, at least) is who did *not* produce a cartulary that we might otherwise expect to. If we accept that «cartularisation» (a term coined by Pierre Chastang[22]) was a wide-ranging activity in the later middle ages, then major churches which seemingly did not create a cartulary become noteworthy. Admittedly, it is incredibly difficult to investigate this or be confident that any cartulary has not simply been lost. We are reliant on catalogues, which in turn often rely on sporadic antiquarian references to known manuscripts[23]. Nevertheless, it begs the question: was a cartulary necessary, or ever expected, at a given institution? This can flip our normal line of questioning about the function of cartularies on its head: what was lost for contemporaries by not having one? A comparative perspective where there are large archives but no cartulary would perhaps begin to provide some illumination.

What themes are prioritised in cartulary scholarship today? Despite the cartulary now being regarded as a discrete project with its own context of creation and use, the relationship with an archive of diplomatic documents remains central. This has been a defining thread throughout the cartulary's history, and naturally so if the cartulary is taken to be a transcription of some documents from a specific archive. For those engaged in the field, any ideas of cartularies as an uncomplicated snapshot of an archive are long buried. What has been cultivated is a much more sophisticated understanding of cartularies as something creative, nuanced and shaped by their own particular environment. They are

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[21]   A recent monograph which studied all of the cartulary-related materials from Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire (ten extant discrete manuscripts), especially focusing on the later examples, is Spence, *The Late Medieval Cistercian Monastery*. A recent article-length example is Hélène Sirantoine's study of seven cartularies from Toledo Cathedral, remarkably all produced between 1190 and the mid-thirteenth century: Sirantoine, «Cartularization». Another fruitful example has been Hilary Stevenson's study of Arbroath Abbey's four cartulary manuscripts from across the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries: Stevenson, *Reading across the Manuscripts*. Other examples of studying multiple cartularies produced at the same institution can be found in Furtado and Moscone (eds.), *From Charters to Codex* (in particular, the essays by Francesca Tinti, Leticia Agúndez San Miguel and David Peterson).

[22]   Chastang, «Cartulaires». The concept has since been headlined in Verpeaux, «Les cisterciens et la cartularisation», and Stevenson, *Reading across the Manuscripts*.

[23]   A well known example from the continent is the abbey of St Gall, which has a remarkable survival of early originals but seemingly no cartulary. Some scholars have suggested a link (i.e., because they were not copied the originals were better conserved): see Declercq, «Originals and Cartularies», 150. A notable case from Scotland is the major Augustinian royal monastery at Holyrood (founded in 1128). Despite Scotland's long tradition of antiquarian interest in medieval records (from the seventeenth century to the twentieth), there is no known record of a cartulary created at this monastery, though around 84 original charters do survive: Tucker, «Survival and Loss», 92.

not primarily file copies diligently created and kept for the benefit of modern-day historians recreating a lost archive (hope as we might)[24].

One of the historian's core concerns is elucidating the context of those who created certain texts, their written and unwritten motivations. To answer this involves establishing when the manuscript was created and by whom. (With cartularies, the association with a particular institution or family or individual usually means its place of origin can be readily identified.) In pursuit of this, it is entirely with the grain of the discipline of History (as traditionally conceived) to look for «events» to provide the context which triggered the act of cartularisation. Of course, the more high profile and contentious these events are the more compelling it can seem to be. While there are certainly cartularies which emerged from a particular predicament, when applied to the entire genre as a whole the rationale becomes cyclical: the more we situate cartularies in specific contentious situations, the more we accept that cartularies *in general* emerged from conflict and crisis. This is despite the fact that most cartularies are difficult to date precisely and usually give no explicit reason for their initial production[25]. Could this mean that it is, in fact, perfectly feasible to suppose that most cartularies tended to be begun during periods of relative calm, rather than uncertainty?

Perhaps one of the most significant developments since the publication of *Les cartulaires* has been the integration of «materiality» into analyses of textual production and use. This incorporates aspects of codicology (including the manuscript structure in quires and its binding history) and palaeography (particularly distinguishing different hands or scribes and dating their writing). *Les cartulaires* certainly featured chapters which took a holistic view of the manuscript[26]. Since then, however, it has become more common for a study to include detailed codicological descriptions of the manuscripts in question (much as might be expected for an edition), though there is some variation in how far this is integrated into the analysis itself[27]. While this attention to detail is necessary for furthering our understanding of individual examples and therefore the genre as a whole, the «material turn» admittedly poses a challenge for creating readable, engaging prose with conclusions which are of palpable value to a broader audience[28].

My own work has drawn attention to the multi-scribe nature of many cartularies, and the significance of this for telling us how the manuscripts were initially conceptualised

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[24]   This point has been finessed by many individuals, including within *Les cartulaires*. Particular credit may be given to, in an Anglophone context, Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance* (chapter 3); and in a Francophone context, Chastang, *Lire, écrire, transcrire*, and Morelle, «Conclusions».
[25]   Some cartularies do contain prefaces about the immediate impetus for creating a particular manuscript. A renowned example is the late-eleventh-century cartulary from Worcester Cathedral Priory, discussed in Tinti, «From Episcopal Conception», and Tinti, «*Si litterali memorię commendaretur*».
[26]   For example, Zerner, «L'élaboration du grand cartulaire».
[27]   See, for example, the levels of codicological detail in the essays in Furtado and Moscone (eds.), *From Charters to Codex*. A recent edition which integrates materiality effectively into the introductory essay is Seale and Wacha, *The Cartulary of Prémontré*.
[28]   A recent review remarked on the density of this kind of writing, elaborating that: «it seems like cartulary scholarship is ready for a next step, one that draws on these and many other detailed studies to explore whether the trees add up to a forest or, as is more likely, forests». Kosto, «Review».

and then later used in the decades and centuries after their initial creation[29]. In this, I have tried to shift the idea of cartularies (in the minds of historians at least) away from a strict typology of text to which we can apply standard criteria and frameworks, and towards a more open and flexible view of cartularies as sites of «scribal interactions». This is not intended to muddy the concept of the cartulary; on the contrary, it is hoped that an emphasis on scribal activity allows the genre to become more plainly inclusive, without the need to patrol the boundaries of the corpus. By centring the scribes, we can accept all their forms of engagement with the manuscripts as part of cartularisation (in their own eyes). Cartularisation, in other words, becomes more explicitly about the activity, not the end product. There are two ways in which this idea of «cartularies as an activity» can be explored: copying and reading.

If «cartularisation» would have signified anything to contemporaries, it was surely the act of copying text, typically charter documents. This act is what unites all of the manuscripts and scribes in our wide corpus of «cartularies». Yet often our attention rests on the final «product», what we are looking at today and how that object was «used» rather than its process of creation in real time[30]. This is entirely understandable. Original «exemplar» documents are not always available to collate with the cartulary copies, and the identities of the cartulary scribes and their processes are so often obscure. Moreover, as historians, we are perhaps especially drawn to questions surrounding the cartulary's wider social function and significance (at its moment of conception, and then once it was completed). It may also be that, since it is so obvious that cartularies are copied text, we feel the need to probe further and in other directions, theorising on their usage and their significance as completed texts. Isolated work has been done on aspects of the copying process. Laurent Morelle's contribution in *Les cartulaires* remains a standout guide for how to approach this question at a fundamental level[31]. More recently, it has been shown that copying practices and individual scribes can be glimpsed through the orthography of names in cartularies[32].

One of the defining, and yet invisible, features of text is that its primary function was to be read, whether for education, pleasure, defence of rights, or to remember something. The role of reading is, like copying, perhaps so obvious that we often neglect to say explicitly that any «use» of a cartulary involved it being read, or imagined as being read in the future. Much has been written instead elaborating on the contexts for this use, some classic explanations being that they were either for memorialising or for administrative purposes[33]. This speaks to the historian's role in assessing the «utility» of text. The cumulative effect of these broad interpretations, and the emphasis on the cartulary as a particular kind of text, is that the text itself has been objectified: cartularies are objects that are used. For cartularies, because charters are routinely viewed in administrative terms (in

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[29] Tucker, *Reading and Shaping Medieval Cartularies*.

[30] The act of copying is more explicitly foregrounded in the context of forgeries in cartularies, for example most recently Berkhofer, *Forgeries and Historical Writing*.

[31] Morelle, «De l'original à la copie».

[32] Tucker, «Copying Names».

[33] This is necessarily a simplification, but the two concepts have been largely dominant in studies of cartularies to date. For background, see Tucker, *Reading and Shaping Medieval Cartularies*, 16-25.

relation to the acquisition and management of property and privileges), the association with practical utility runs deep. In this, we tend to forget about the immediate purpose which, in all of these scenarios, involves reading. The obvious point to make here is that most cartularies do not make for engaging reading; nor do they fit, for example, the idea of monastic *lectio divina* (reading for spiritual enhancement)[34]. While readers of cartularies may have homed in on one or two texts in a consultative way, it was also possible for some of them to have regarded the cartulary as a single work, as it were, to be read as a whole. In cartularies, there seems to be an opportunity to develop our understanding of reading in different contexts.

It can be difficult to set the cartulary within any wider reading and writing practices. For early manuscripts, survival of other library books or archival materials is typically minimal and so opportunities to situate a cartulary within broader reading traditions, or to compare scribes, are limited. The cartulary has also remained mostly within the purview of charter scholars, rather than codicologists, palaeographers, book historians, literary scholars or others[35]. There may, therefore, be a faint disciplinary hurdle to overcome in how we perceive the cartulary as a text and artefact. Spotlighting cartularies as objects in their own right has, it seems, had the effect of marking it out as a distinct manuscript context, blinkering us to other useful comparisons to, for example, commonplace books or miscellanies[36]. Our reading of particular cartularies can certainly be enriched by viewing them as a site of scribal activity similar to others.

To illustrate this approach to cartularies as a reading and copying activity, we might consider some contrasting characteristics. At one end of an imagined spectrum there are formal, neat cartularies that seem to have been single-scribe projects with highly organised contents; at the other end are the more «messy», multi-scribe manuscripts which have grown through additions of text and folios and have lost any sense of logic in the ordering of texts. This distinction might usually be characterised in terms of the different contexts of «use» (including whether it was commemorative or administrative, and the perceived formality of the manuscript). Such thinking, however, relies on assumptions about the manuscripts since we rarely have evidence of their actual usage. Instead, we might capture this distinction by thinking in terms of copying and reading practices: the «messy» end represents a kind of copying activity that was potentially quite casual, open to a number of people, and the manuscript was physically flexible enough to accommodate or encourage further copying activity, as opposed to an exercise in copying that was more pre-planned; similarly, the «messy» end potentially represents examples where many people have contributed after reading the manuscript, as opposed to the more formal ones which were perhaps bound early on to enable easy reading of the cartulary as a single «work». Many cartularies moved along the spectrum over time: initially

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[34]   This, and what follows on reading, is more fully explored in Tucker, *Reading and Shaping Medieval Cartularies*, 216-8.

[35]   An exception which takes an art historical approach, although still with documents framing the study, is Berenbeim, *Art of Documentation*.

[36]   For miscellanies, for example, see Connolly and Radulescu (eds.), *Insular Books*. The spectrum of cartularies and miscellanies is also alluded to in Sirantoine, «Cartularization», 203.

conceptualised as a distinct text after a stint of organising and single-scribe copying, but then grew once they were consulted, possibly with new gatherings added and by the hands of many scribes.

It has to be acknowledged that in order to progress many of these questions about the cartulary as a particular reading and copying activity, a significant obstacle is the comprehensive analysis of the manuscripts themselves. A particular challenge is distinguishing all of the scribes if there are a large number. This is, inescapably, very labour intensive. A recent innovation designed to make this more manageable is the concept of «scribal profiles». The expectation here is not that each is a person but is simply a distinct palaeographical profile in relation to a single manuscript[37]. The hope is that this will allow more studies of the creation and growth of complex manuscripts and by researchers from a diverse range of disciplinary backgrounds. In focusing on scribal activity, we can potentially break away from overly strict categories of text and instead centre our attention on activities such as copying and reading, which represent the experience of cartularisation in all its forms.

One of the most striking aspects of cartularies that is useful to continually return to is the lack of contemporary references to the manuscripts or the activity itself: cartularies were rarely written about or described in the period during which they were being produced. Different historians have noted that there are few if any contemporary references to the genre or commentaries on it[38]. Modern Anglophone scholarship has subsequently oscillated between «register» and «cartulary», and some Latin equivalents (*registrum*, *cartularium*, *liber*)[39]. For medieval contemporaries, cartularisation was, seemingly, so ubiquitous or unremarkable that it need not be highlighted in any great detail. This perhaps reflects the private, internal nature of these manuscripts for their compilers rather than any deliberate attempts to conceal the act. This broader point should be kept close at hand when studying any cartulary manuscript: that for contemporaries, there was not necessarily any explicit, shared sense of what «a cartulary» was or what «cartularisation» meant. Various understandings of cartulary function and form could co-exist.

Another point that has been recognised is the influence of editing cartularies. Editions are the moment when a text receives its greatest level of attention and scrutiny. It is to editors that we owe so much of our awareness of particular texts and their relationship to others. A stark comment on this influence can be found in an early review of *Les cartulaires*. The author critiqued the idea that cartularies were a genre in a broad literary sense, attributing this line of thinking to the peculiar practice in French, English and Italian scholarship of editing single cartularies of an institution, as opposed to the German and Belgian practice of orientating editions around charters (originals and copies)[40].

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[37]   Explained in Tucker, *Reading and Shaping Medieval Cartularies*, 54-60. It is similar to identifying «hands», but without the sense of palaeographic performance that characterises that concept.

[38]   Discussed in *ibidem*, 10-1.

[39]   Modern scholarly terminology is discussed in Tucker, «Understanding Scotland's Medieval Cartularies», 143-8. See also Robert F. Berkhofer III's discussion of this in this special issue.

[40]   Prevenier, «Review», 495 (I am grateful to Tanita S. Davis for her help with the Dutch translation): «This volume suggests all too much for my taste that a cartulary is a genre. I know that one can view a cartulary equally as an archaeological object, and maybe sporadically as a cult object of the (mostly counterfeited)

Editorial history certainly has had an impact on cartulary studies. As a subject, cartularies are particularly well suited to the «documentary» edition, given that there is usually only one «artefact» rather than a broader «work» to which it relates (this is especially true when there are few or no original charters with which to collate the text)[41]. One of the imperatives for the twenty-first century, then, has been how to express and represent the materiality of cartulary manuscripts in editions. There have been few examples of digital editions of cartularies. An exception is the *Becerro Galicano* digital edition which sets an example of what can be achieved, how cartulary text and its «data» can be presented and interrogated[42].

As well as innovative web-based editions, advanced Digital Humanities techniques could offer more to cartulary studies including, but not limited to, optical character recognition or geospatial mapping[43]. Admittedly, however, some of the most effective digital resources are those which make a wide range of basic information available such as bibliographies or databases of metadata. For cartularies, a fruitful example of this is *CartulR*, which expanded upon the work of Henri Stein[44]. For Great Britain and Ireland, perhaps it is time for an equivalent digital database to be produced based on the latest printed catalogue from 2010[45]. The move by institutions to publish images of their manuscripts (including cartularies) is certainly a significant step for wider access to, and exposure of, the corpus, especially where these images are compatible with the emerging standard for web image publishing, the International Image Interoperability Framework (https://iiif.io). There is substantial scope, it seems, for more comparative consultation of images of cartularies: this may, indeed, address some of the issues identified above relating to how to communicate effectively each manuscript's codicology and palaeography.

This leads to a final thought. While cartulary studies might encompass a wide geographic area and many scholars within it, it can be humbly acknowledged that the field is a particular niche. How to engage with wider public audiences about medieval cartularies is a question rarely asked. Perhaps the assumption is that cartularies are too esoteric, unlike other medieval texts which naturally have a broader appeal such as histories,

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oldest histories. Nevertheless, most cartularies are ordinary collections of day-to-day charters, representing one genre of copy among many others, such as the vidimus, the loose copy, the signed copy, the scholar's copy. There is an explanation for this «overestimation». France (also England and Italy) has a strong tradition of integral editions of «cartularies» from a single institution, without even the use of other textual traditions and the original charter (in that obsolete philosophy, indeed, the cartulary is treated as if it were an «original»). In the German (and also Belgian) tradition, people have long since moved to editions that start from a charter, or, if they take the addressee as a criterion, then at least using all available originals and copies». For Prevenier, the purpose of an edition was, he continues, «the least flawed restoration of a source as the most faithful mirror of a piece of reality». There are, of course, modern editions of German cartularies, for example Molitor, *Das Reichenbacher Schenkungsbuch*.

[41] To borrow the language of the «new philology»: see Driscoll, «The Words», 93.

[42] *Becerro Galicano Digital*: http://www.ehu.eus/galicano (accessed 07/08/2023). Another example is *Le cartulaire de la seigneurie de Nesle*: http://telma.irht.cnrs.fr//outils/nesle (accessed 07/08/ 2023).

[43] For an example of digital tools used to compare the arrangement of cartularies, see Escalona, Pérez-Alfaro and Bellettini, «Two Graphical Models».

[44] *CartulR*. Another is *RegeCart*: http://regecart.irht.cnrs.fr (accessed 07/08/2023).

[45] Davis, *Medieval Cartularies of Great Britain and Ireland*.

chronicles, poems or even charter documents which can be displayed in an exhibition to represent a tangible «moment» or a «relationship». Cartularies have significant local appeal: they are often the earliest source for a placename or for its history in relation to a particular institution or family; they contain countless names of local people often otherwise unattested in the historical record. They also might be the earliest manuscript known to be produced in a certain place, and therefore provide a window into the varied experiences, functions, formalities and scribes of medieval manuscripts. Nevertheless, their content and form are undoubtedly rather complex. A first step to any wider engagement therefore requires a fair amount of mediation in editing and contextualising the text, as well as crafting a picture of their significance in the historical record. The work of cartulary scholars has certainly taken many strides in that direction in the past thirty years.

2   CONCLUSION

While the *Les cartulaires* volume cannot be credited with the identification of cartularies as a widespread phenomenon, its influence on how this is recognised has been substantial, arguably launching a field of inquiry and shaping its character. Because of that work, it has been possible to think of cartularies with greater clarity as a corpus of manuscripts. This has itself inspired a bustle of further research concerned with investigating this corpus and the «genre» it represents. At the same time, the implied notion of a type of manuscript — *le cartulaire* — with its own name has encouraged expectations that the cartulary can be defined and that creators of these manuscripts had a shared understanding which we as historians are trying to unearth and piece together once more. While it is unlikely that any historian working on a cartulary today would argue that there can be, or ought to be, an exact definition which could stand for all examples of what we today call «cartularies», to talk of a category of text and its associated field of inquiry does nevertheless shape the questions that we pursue: for example, about the «origins» of the genre and its subsequent «spread» and «development» across time and place. The power of a single term is that so much can be hung upon it. Oftentimes, it seems as though cartulary studies can accommodate any manner of new insights, precisely because the corpus itself is so amorphous.

This article has suggested that the field of cartulary studies is, if anything, a powerful context for looking across medieval societies and institutions, above all at their particular activities and experiences in relation to the copying and reading of documents and codices. A few final aspects of the field might be recognised. First, the case study approach which is so embedded means that personal experience is particularly pronounced in cartulary studies: scholars who have entered the field have nearly always cut their teeth by completing a particular concentrated study of one or more cartularies. Our individual views of the genre are in turn fundamentally influenced by the manuscripts with which we are most familiar. It can be easy to lose sight of this, especially when questions of the entire genre arise and we are asked to summarise or define the essence of «the cartulary».

Another aspect to recognise is that, as with any kind of historical material, we are habitually drawn towards the parts that make sense, or which we feel we can make sense of. The impulse is strong when writing about a cartulary since we are also hoping to craft a compelling discussion. This has sometimes meant that studies have focused on the earliest portions created by a single scribe, and not the later «messy» sections. It is here, in the «organised» sections, that we can sketch a single, plausible picture of the manuscript in a wider historical and social context, even if this does rely on an element of speculation. The persistent challenge for those who work in the field is to keep the full range of potential forms of «cartularisation» in view all at once.

Finally, though it is an obvious point, it is important to recognise that we are shaped by the resources at our disposal and, crucially, what we do with these resources —whether previous editions, microfilms, digital images, catalogues (digital and print), and even collections of essays like *Les cartulaires*. All of this is in turn shaped by personal engagements and experiences, and the distinct legacy of scholarship in a particular place. In thirty years' time, while our resources will no doubt expand in exciting and unpredictable directions, we will likely still be talking of a field of cartulary studies and its distinct approaches to an amorphous group of manuscripts defined by modern eyes as «cartularies».

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