

FURTHER EXTERNAL EVIDENCE FOR DATING THE YORK REGISTER (BL ADDITIONAL MS 35290)

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The dating of the manuscript of the York Corpus Christi play (BL MS Additional 35290) remains a problem. The current tendency is to date it much later in the fifteenth century than has hitherto been thought, but there are signs of this going too far. Dr Margaret Rogerson has recently argued that external evidence points to a date after 1485, and perhaps near the beginning of the sixteenth century, for the manuscript.¹ Briefly her argument is as follows: because the scribe failed to register the lost *Fergus* pageant,² and indeed made no provision for its registration by leaving blank leaves for it to be added later, the manuscript must date from after 1485, the year in which the guild of Linenweavers was discharged from the obligation of performing it, and when, therefore, "*Fergus* was no longer part of the Corpus Christi play".³

The first objection to Dr Rogerson's argument is that it is an over-simplification to say that *Fergus* was "no longer part of the Corpus Christi play" after 1485. *Fergus* was given up by the Masons in 1432⁴ and no more is heard of it until 1476 when it became the responsibility of the Linenweavers. The rise and fall of the Linenweavers' involvement with the pageant was as follows: in 1476 they "of paire fre mocion and will haue bounden payme and payre Craft perpetually to kepe bryngforth and plaie or make to be plaied yerely vpon Corpus christi day a pageant and play Called ffergus".⁵ This agreement was made after Corpus Christi day 1476,⁶ so the first year of performance would have been 1477. It was also agreed in 1476 that the Linenweavers should be free of their 6s contribution to the Tapiters' pageant.⁷ In 1479 ways were found of increasing the revenue of the Linenweavers for their pageant,⁸ but even so by 1485 they are again contributory to the Tapiters (and Cardmakers), and *Fergus* is described as "late broght furth".⁹ This arrangement was, however, dependent upon *Fergus* being "laid apart" by the Linenweavers. In 1486 the Linenweavers are listed as paying a forfeit to the City Chamberlains of 5s "de non ludendo pagine Vergus", which implies a change from the 1485 arrangement and that they were still expected to play their pageant.¹⁰ In 1493, as the Cutlers were said "of Auncien tyme" to have been receiving through the Chamberlains 5s pageant money from the Linenweavers,¹¹ it looks as though the 1486 arrangement became the normal one and the 1485 one was abortive. Finally, early in 1518 the last mention of the Linenweavers and *Fergus* occurs in an elaborate agreement between Woollen and Linen weavers (suggesting, incidentally, that one of the main points at issue between them was the payment of 5s to the Cutlers):

. . . And that the said Lynweuers shall yerly pay & Content that fyve Shellynges whiche the Weuers of this Citie hays paid affore this whiche yerly is payd to the Cutlers pageant / And of that v s. by yere clerly discharge the said Wollen Weuers vnto suche tyme as the said lynweuers will play or cause tobe played the pageant somtyme called Vergus pageant And then the said lynweuers shall reteyn & kepe the said v s. towards yer awn Charges for the bringyngfurth of the said Vergus pageant . . .¹²

Though in fact there is no evidence that *Fergus* was ever played again after the failure of the Linenweavers to bring forth the pageant in 1485, it would clearly be wrong to assume that it was no longer thought of as "part of the Corpus Christi play".

The second objection to Dr Rogerson's argument stems from her statement that

With the exception of *Fergus*, space was allocated for the registration of all the episodes included in the 1415 *Ordo Paginarum* and the c.1420 list of pageants.¹³

This necessitates a re-statement of the situation in the Register. The main scribe of the manuscript follows a somewhat irregular pattern of spacing between pageants, but in only five places does he exceed three blank pages. These are between the Cardmakers' *God creates Adam and Eve* IIIb and Coopers' *Man's disobedience and fall* V (6 pages); the Tilehatchers' *Journey to Bethlehem* XIV and Chandlers' *Angels and shepherds* XV (9 pages); the Smiths' *Temptation* XXII and Curriers' *Transfiguration* XXIII (9 pages); the Curriers' *Transfiguration* and Capmakers' *Woman taken in adultery* XXIV (9 pages); and the Sledmen's *Travellers to Emmaus* XL and Scriveners' *Incredulity of Thomas* XLII (9 pages).¹⁴ Two of these spaces are now taken up by pageants entered by John Clerke in the mid-sixteenth century;¹⁵ that between Cardmakers' and Coopers' is partially filled by the Fullers' *Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden* IV, and that between Sledmen's and Scriveners' is overfilled by the Hatmakers', Masons' and Labourers' *Purification* XLI, an additional leaf having been inserted between quires xxx and xxxj to enable Clerke to complete the text. The first of these, the Fullers', appropriately occupies the space left for it, but the second, as all users of Lucy Toulmin Smith's edition know, is totally misplaced.

Two of the other spaces left by the main scribe are allocated by him to missing pageants; that between Smiths' and Curriers' to the Vintners' pageant of the marriage at Cana, and that between Curriers' and Capmakers' to the Ironmongers' pageant of the meal at the house of Simon the Leper. Neither of these was ever entered despite the order of 1567,¹⁵ though the first two(?) lines of the Vintners' pageant appear on f.92v and a running title on ff.93v and 94r, and the *Ordo Paginarum* description of the Ironmongers' pageant appears on f.101r and a running title on ff.100v and 101r.

What then of the other space left? It falls between the episodes of the birth of Christ (XIV) and the announcement to the shepherds (XV), where there is no obvious incident missing. And what also of

the space which is now filled by the Hatmakers', Masons' and Labourers' pageant? It falls between the travellers to Emmaus and the incredulity of Thomas, and again there is no obvious incident missing between the two.¹⁶ Nevertheless a series of nine blank pages was left deliberately in these two places in the manuscript. In view of the general areas of the manuscript in which these two spaces occur it is perhaps not too far-fetched to suggest that they were intended for the two missing pageants, the *Purification* and *Fergus*. The former space is three pageants early (16 leaves), the latter four pageants (12 leaves) early. But in view of the precision with which he placed the Vintners' and Ironmongers' spaces (even correcting the *Ordo Paginarum* in the case of the latter),¹⁷ why is the main scribe so far out in placing these two unregistered pageants? Apart from simple mismanagement, one possibility especially suggests itself. If at the time of the main compilation of the manuscript neither the *Purification* nor *Fergus* was being played, there is the chance that the main scribe was little concerned with the precise placing of the two pageants which for him were at the time "laid apart".

Whether the two unallocated spaces were left for the *Purification* and *Fergus* or not, these two pageants were clearly on a different footing from the two for which space was precisely allocated, and the reason for this difference may well have been regularity and irregularity of performance. The history of the Linenweavers and *Fergus* shows that between 1432 and 1477 the pageant was "laid apart";¹⁸ a number of details in the history of the *Purification* amongst the civic documents at York suggests that the same may well have been true of that pageant.

In the *Ordo Paginarum* (mainly 1415) the *Purification* is the only pageant listed which is not performed by a trade guild.¹⁹ It was brought forth by the Hospital of St Leonard, in its day one of the largest and most important institutions of its kind.²⁰ The briefer description in the second (c.1420) list agrees in assigning the pageant to the same body.²¹ Both entries, however, have been altered by a later hand to indicate that the Hospital was no longer responsible for the *Purification*, and that it had been taken over by a guild, namely the Masons.²² It is not known why or precisely when the Hospital gave up control of the pageant,²³ but another entry elsewhere in the A/Y Memorandum Book states plainly that the pageant was put in the hands of the Masons in 1477.²⁴ The agreement appears also in the City Chamberlains Books for the same year:

That the pagiant of the purification of our lady from nowe furth shalbe plaed yerely in the fest of corpus christi as other pageantes and vppon that it was agreid that the Masons of this Cite for tyme beyng bere the charge and expensez of the pageant aforesaid and that pageant in gude & honest maner yerely tobe plaed bryng furth at suche tymes as they shalbe perto warned and like as the said Masons afore the Mare for tyme beyng will answer . . .²⁵

The Masons continued to bring forth the *Purification* from this time

into the sixteenth century, in association with other guilds. When Clerke registered the text after 1567 it was headed "Hatmakers Masons & laborers".²⁶

From these references in the A/Y Memorandum Book and elsewhere it appears that the *Purification* was regularly performed by the Hospital of St Leonard between 1415 and c.1420. It may have continued in their hands until well into the fifteenth century. However, the implication of the 1477 entries establishing the Masons as the guild responsible for the bringing forth, is that the pageant was not being performed annually along with the others at that time. Clearly, at some time between c.1420 and 1477 the Hospital gave up performing the *Purification*. As with *Fergus*, the lack of performance may very well bear on the initial absence of the text from the Register, and also on the scribe's failure to leave room for it in the appropriate place, between the Goldsmiths' and the Marshals'. Had the scribe been at work after 1477 he would have had no reason not to set down a copy of the text in its correct place assigned to the Masons, or to leave a space in exactly the right place for it. As we have seen, the scribe of the Register did neither of these things. On the contrary, as far as he was concerned the guild of Masons was responsible for the *Herod* pageant (XVI) performed in association with the Goldsmiths' *Three Kings* (XVII). Another reference in the Memorandum Book tells us that the Masons took over responsibility for the *Herod* pageant in 1432,²⁷ and the Register as we have it reflects this state of affairs, not the circumstances after 1477. The safest conclusion to be drawn from these facts is that the Register was compiled after the Masons had begun to perform *Herod* in 1432, but before they moved on to the *Purification* in 1477.

For some years before 1477, it appears that neither the *Purification* nor *Fergus* was being played. In 1476-7 the city authorities seem to have found occasion to tidy up certain loose ends in the cycle by re-assigning these pageants, and the Register must have been compiled before these changes were made.

The history of one other pageant has a bearing on the dating of the Register, that of the Ostlers' *Coronation of the Virgin* XLVII. As Dr Rogerson has shown, this pageant was originally the responsibility of the Mayor.²⁸ At some time between 1462 and 1468, however, this responsibility was handed over to the Ostlers or Innholders. In 1462 there is recorded in the City Chamberlains' Rolls a payment of 2s to Robert Leche "pro lusione pagine Coronacionis beate Marie Virginis";²⁹ in 1468 this has become 2s "Scrutatoribus Ostillariorum Ciuitatis ad conductionem pagine Coronacionis beate Marie virginis in festo corporis Christi".³⁰ The change from payment to an individual to payment to the searchers of the Ostlers' guild clearly marks the transfer of responsibility. Unfortunately there is no evidence for the period between 1462 and 1468. The 1468 entry, however, does not sound like a new arrangement but rather the continuation of one already established, and it may be that the Ostlers had become responsible for the *Coronation* pageant as early as 1463. What is important about this change of responsibility is that as the Register records the Ostlers as bringing forth the *Coronation of the Virgin*, the compilation of the manuscript must have been made after that change had

taken place, that is after an unspecified date between 1463 and 1468. Where the *Purification* and, to a lesser extent, *Fergus* provide a *terminus ad quem* for the Register, the *Coronation* provides a *terminus a quo*.

A number of other problems still exist in the histories of the individual pageants mentioned in this article, but none seems to bear directly upon the dating of the Register. With the evidence of the *Purification*, *Fergus* and the *Coronation*, it seems that we can at least fix the limits of 1463-1477 for the main compilation.³¹

NOTES

- 1 M. Dorrell, "The Butchers', Saddlers', and Carpenters' Pageants: Misreadings of the York *Ordo*", *ELN*, 13 (1975) 3-4; M. Rogerson (née Dorrell), "External Evidence for Dating the York Register", *Records of Early English Drama, Newsletter*, 2 (1976) 4-5. The palaeographical dating for the Register which is often quoted is 1430-40, as given by L. Toulmin Smith, *York Plays* (Oxford, 1885), pp.xvii-xviii. W.W. Greg believed it to be rather later, c.1475: *The Library*, 3rd. Series, 5 (1914), pp.26, 28 and note.
- 2 *Fergus* was the popular name for the pageant on the apocryphal subject of the burial of the Virgin.
- 3 Rogerson, "External Evidence", 4.
- 4 It is not possible to be sure whether they performed it in 1432 or not. Their agreement with the Goldsmiths by which they gave up *Fergus* and accepted responsibility for a Herod pageant (XVI) was made in the mayoralty of Thomas Snaudon, that is between February 1432 and February 1433. Certainly therefore by the performance of 1433 the Masons had relinquished *Fergus*.
The agreement between the Masons and the Goldsmiths appears in *York, Records of Early English Drama*, ed. Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, 2 vols. (University of Toronto Press, Manchester University Press; 1979) I, pp.47-8. It is there dated 1431-2, a split dating derived from the term of office of the mayor. In the *Register of the Freemen of the City of York* (ed. F. Collins, 2 vols., Surtees Society 96 and 102 (1897 and 1900) I, p.145) Thomas Snaudon's mayoralty is dated 1430-1 O.S., and, by regnal year, 10 Hen.VI. 10 Hen.VI runs from September 1431 to August 1432, and a term of office beginning in that regnal year would run from 3rd February (St Blase's day) 1432 to 3rd February 1433. The date of the agreement should therefore be 1432-3.
- 5 *York, REED*, p.110. The agreement is contained in the earliest of the surviving House Books, B 1.
- 6 The entry is dated 21 June (*York, REED*, p.110), and Corpus Christi day in 1476 fell on 13 June (see *Handbook of Dates*, ed. C.R. Cheney, (London, 1970) p.131).
- 7 *York, REED*, pp.107-8, where it is dated 1475-6. The agreement is contained in the A/Y Memorandum Book and the dating derived from the term of office of the mayor Thomas Wrangwish. His mayoralty ran, however, from February 1476 to February 1477, and this agreement is closely connected with (if not the same as) that recorded in House Book B 1 which is dated 21 June 1476, just over a week after Corpus Christi day. There is little doubt that the Linenweavers accepted responsibility for *Fergus* from 1477 onwards, and that the Memorandum Book agreement should be dated 1476-7.
- 8 *York, REED*, p.123. This entry is part of the Linenweavers' ordinances.
- 9 *York, REED*, p.136.
- 10 *York, REED*, p.143. It is just possible that the disagreement between the Sawyers and Carpenters over *Fergus* ("the mater hanging in travaux betwix the Sawers and Wrightes concerning the bringfurth of the padgeant of ffergus", p.136) was because one or other of them had made a move to take over the pageant. If this move failed it would explain why the 1485 arrangement for the Linenweavers, making no mention of *Fergus*, gave way to the 1486 one which did.

- 11 York, REED, p.169. It is worth bearing in mind this "of Auncien tyme", which cannot be more than eight years, when interpreting the "antiquitus assignatis" of the 1394 station ordinance (see York, REED, p.8).
- 12 York, REED, pp.215-7 (passage quoted is on p.216, ll.14-22).
- 13 Rogerson, "External Evidence", 4. For the two lists of pageants drawn up by the common clerk and entered in the A/Y Memorandum Book, see York, REED, pp.16-26.
- 14 In the current foliation of BL MS Additional 35290 the Cardmakers' pageant ends on f.13r and the Coopers' begins on f.16v; the Tilehatchers' ends on f.55r and the Chandlers' begins on f.56r; the Smiths' ends on f.92r and the Curriers' begins on f.96r; the Curriers' ends on f.100r and the Capmakers' begins on f.102r; the Sledmen's ends on f.212v and the Scriveners' begins on f.218r. Owing to the irregularity of the foliation, only the space between Cardmakers' and Coopers', and Sledmen's and Scriveners' is correctly indicated by the numbering. Between the Tilehatchers' and Chandlers' there are two unnumbered leaves, and the central bifolium of the quire is missing. As the quires are regular eights, there is no reason to believe that the missing leaves were not originally present. Between the Smiths' and Curriers' there is one unnumbered leaf, and between the Curriers' and Capmakers' three. A full collation and a new foliation of the manuscript will appear in *The York Play: a facsimile of BL MS Additional 35290*, edited by Richard Beadle and Peter Meredith, to be published in *Leeds Texts and Monographs, Medieval Drama Facsimile series*.
- 15 John Clerke was paid 12d in 1559 "for entryng in the Regyster the Regynall of the paygant pertenyng to Craft of ffullars whiche was never before Regestred", presumably as a result of the order of 1557 for the entering of all pageants not registered in "the Cite booke" (York, REED, pp.330 and 324). In 1567 a further order asked for the Vintners', the Ironmongers', the latter part of the Tilers', and the Labourers' to be registered, and the Cappers' to be "examined with the Register & reformed". "And Iohn Clerke or oyer taking payne to be honestly recompensed for there payne", (York, REED, p.351). The Labourers' Purification was clearly the only one to be brought in, and it was entered by Clerke. Why he entered it towards the end of the manuscript rather than in the more appropriate space between Tilehatchers' and Chandlers', is not clear. But if the missing central bifolium of quire g had already gone when Clerke came to enter the pageant, it would mean that the space available was too small for the text and the later space, between Sledmen's and Scriveners', was the only one large enough, or nearly so.
- No mention is made of Clerke's entry of the addition to the Glovers' *Cain and Abel VII*, though fairly certainly this was a result of the same efforts of the city council for a complete record of the play.
- 16 Neither the *Ordo Paginarum* for the play, nor, for an example outside it, the *Pepysian Gospel Harmony* (ed. Margery Goates, EETS OS 157, (1923)) lists any incidents between these.
- 17 The *Ordo* places the Vintners' before the Smiths' pageant. This has been later corrected by a letter code in the left margin: B Vynters, A ffeuers (Smythes), C Coureours, D Irenmongers, E Pouchemakers, Botellers, Capmakers (cf. York, REED, p.20).
- 18 See above pp.
- 19 York, REED, p.19. Some of the entries in the *Ordo* have been erased and re-written at a later date, but the *Purification* is part of the original compilation.

- 20 D. Knowles and R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales* (2nd ed., London, 1971) p.407; *Victoria County History: Yorkshire*, III (London, 1913) pp.336-45.
- 21 The undated list of pageants, thought to be c.1420, follows the *Ordo* in the A/Y Memorandum Book; *York*, REED, pp.25-6.
- 22 *York*, REED, pp.19 and 25.
- 23 The Hospital went into a long and deep decline in the fifteenth century. This began in the last decade of the fourteenth, when a royal commission of 1398 revealed disastrous corruption and mismanagement. By 1515 the church and other buildings were described as in ruins, and the house could only command a third of the income it had in its heyday (VCH: *Yorkshire*, III, pp.340-3). It is not surprising that the Hospital relinquished or lost control of its pageant in this period.
- 24 *York*, REED, pp.112-13.
- 25 *York*, REED, p.115.
- 26 BL MS Additional 35290, f.212v; Toulmin Smith, *York Plays*, p.433. On f.70, as Miss Toulmin Smith pointed out (p.433n), is written in John Clerke's hand, "Hatmakers Maysons and Laborers / purificacio Marie the Laborers is assigned to bryng furth this paygant It is entryd in the Latter end of this booke / next after the Sledmen or palmers / and it begynnyth / by the preest / All myghty god in heven so hye /". Miss Toulmin Smith does not however mention that Clerke's addition is superimposed on the erasure of another inscription by a late hand. This is partially recoverable under ultra-violet light and will be discussed in the forthcoming facsimile of the Register, mentioned in note 14 above.
- 27 See note 4 above for a discussion of the dating of this agreement.
- 28 Margaret Dorrell (now Rogerson), "The Mayor of York and the Coronation Pageant", *Leeds Studies in English*, 5 (1971) 35-45.
- 29 Dorrell, "Coronation", 38; *York*, REED, p.94.
- 30 Dorrell, "Coronation", 39; *York*, REED, p.101.
- 31 It would be unwise to assume that the Register was necessarily compiled continuously over one short period. The general impression of the manuscript is, however, one of regularity with minor variations; the pattern of rubrication, for example, varies quite considerably between the earlier and later parts of the manuscript. But the presence of the sixteenth-century entries (Fullers' and Masons') and the continued absence of some pageants (Vintners' and Ironmongers') shows that not all guilds brought in their pageants for registering when asked, and there is the possibility that some variations in the original entries (e.g. the smaller script of the Hosiers') are to be accounted for in this way. The uniformity of most of the manuscript nevertheless makes it likely that the majority of the pageants were entered at one time.