**Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 656 (L)**

**Date:** Laud Misc. 656 is likely the oldest of the manuscripts in the Siege of Jerusalem corpus, rivaled only by perhaps the Princeton Taylor MS (P), as Doyle notes when he attributes the poem "to the fourteenth century with confidence, from the earliest-looking copy, in Bodleian Laud misc. 656" (93). Hanna-Lawton concur, dating the manuscript to the end of that century. Guddat-Figge erroneously dates it to the middle of the fifteenth century.

**Support:** Parchment

**Extent:** i + 133 folios

**Format:** 210 x 150 mm

**Foliation:** Foliation in both ink and pencil, both rather early. The foliation in ink numbers each leaf 1-5 and thereafter in intervals of 10 (i.e. ,10, 20, 30, etc.). At a later date, numbers were added in pencil to the unfoliated leaves by a second hand. In quire X, the second hand corrects an error in counting by his predecessor, striking through “110” and replacing it with the correct “111.” Note also that the first hand returns to number the final leaves of Booklet I individually, but misnumbers 113, 114, 115, and 116 due the earlier error at fol. 110. The later foliator strikes through these and uses 115a and 115b to reach number 116 at the same point as his predecessor.

**Collation:** One parchment flyleaf precedes quire I. As Hanna-Lawton note, the codex contains two booklets, the first comprising ii + fols. 1-116 and the second comprising fol. 117 to the end. The following collation refers to the extant modern pencil foliation.

Booklet I:

I ii-13 (quire of 14 leaves; a single parchment leaf precedes this quire)

II 14-25

III 26-37

IV 38-49

V 50-61

VI 62-73

VII 74-85

VIII 86-97

IX 98-107

X 108-116 (115 counted twice as 115a and 115b)

Booklet II:

XI 117-124

XII 125-131 (a quire of ten with three leaves wanting – one after fol. 126 and two after fol. 130)

No quire marks or signatures. Catchwords at lower right, booklet I only.

**Condition:** Parchment in sound condition, but often soiled and with the margin frequently cut away.

**Page layout:** In Booklet I, bounding lines in brown ink on top, left, and bottom of text blocks; no rulings for individual lines. A few prickings, usually one hole at the juncture of the bounding lines, remain (e.g., fols. 11, 15, 39, and 51). No ruling or prickings in Booklet II. Ruled for 33-41 lines per leaf in *Siege of Jerusalem*, 37-46 lines per leaf in *Piers Plowman*, and 38-40 lines in Booklet II. In Booklet I, text block 175-180 mm in height in *Siege of Jerusalem* and 170-180 mm in height in *Piers Plowman*; the width of the text block varies in both. In Booklet II, text block 170-180 mm in height, 120 mm in width.

**The scribe: Script and dialect:** The text is in an anglicana script using brown ink throughout, and is likely the work on one scribe. Russell-Kane believe the entire manuscript to be the work of the same scribe, whereas Hanna-Lawton note that one scribe copied Siege of Jerusalem with "perhaps a second for the remainder." There are no running heads in *Siege of Jerusalem*, but *Piers Plowman* features running heads starting on fol. 69 and going through until the end, e.g., “Dowel,” “Dobet,” and “Dobest.” The first few of these (58v to 63r) appear to have been added later; the rest are contemporary with the text. Corrections are sparse, with subpunction on fol. 5r, erasures on 9r, and a few supralinear additions by the main scribe (e.g., folios 3v, 7v, 9r).

Kellogg's dissertation is an especially useful tool for the study of the dialect of Laud Misc. 656; whereas the dialect features of the other manuscripts are documented in appendices, the features of L are the focus of his dissertation and are discussed at great length. He concludes his work with a summary of the relationships of the dialects found in the manuscript, noting that L is the westernmost dialect of the group (Kellogg did not know of P or the Exeter fragment):

"On the whole the MSS are pretty consistent in displaying East Midland traits. Western features are mainly limited to one MS: L. It alone shows any retention of OE. eo as a rounded vowel. It alone has ȝo for 'she' or preserves OE. y as a rounded vowel in more than a score of instances. U has seventeen instances of this last; E had nine" (61).

Although Kellogg's documentation and characterization of L's dialect are accurate, his conclusion that L represents the dialect of the poet is much less convincing than Hanna-Lawton's argument for an authorial dialect from the Barnoldswick-Earby area (see xxvii and following).

In "Langland's Dialect," Medium Ævum 54 (1985) M. L. Samuels also comments on the dialect of the manuscript, although his focus is on the C text of Piers Plowman rather than SJ. He lists Laud Misc. 656 as originating in "north Oxfordshire," offering as evidence the forms hure, hear; ȝo, she; myche, much; silf, self; þuder, thither; to gadres, together; forȝutte, forget; and laste, lest (p. 239 and n. 39). Hanna-Lawton cite Samuels in identifying the manuscript as the work of “northwest Oxfordshire scribes,” but it should be noted that in the brief list provided above the SJ scribe exhibits different forms from those found in Piers in three out of six instances:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Piers |  | Siege |
|  | hure |  | hure |
|  | ȝo |  | ȝo |
|  | myche |  | myche |
|  | silf |  | self |
|  | laste |  | lest |
|  | to gadres |  | to gedris |

(Forms of þuder and forȝutte do not appear in SJ.) A fuller comparison of the forms found in the Siege with those in Piers Plowman may illuminate the debate of whether more than one scribe worked on this manuscript, although some differences may of course be attributable to the exemplars.

**Decoration:** There are few decorative features in the manuscript. *Siege of Jerusalem* has rubricated initials 3-5 lines in height at fols. 1v, 7v, 13v, and 16r. *Piers* has spaces and guideletters for rubricated initials, e.g., 19v, 25r, but these have not been realized; the same is true in Booklet II, e.g., fol. 119v.

**Binding:** 15th c., English. Binding is 215 mm in height and 170 mm in width as measured center of spine to the fore edge. Bound in reddish brown calfskin, rebacked but otherwise original. Wooden boards, sloped at edges. Four raised bands as bound, rebacked spine utilizing original bands. Additionally, two slightly raised sewing structures, one at top and the other at bottom of spine, detectable. Flat spine. Turn-ins at front and back are raggedly cut, glued to boards with no endpaper or other coverings. Grooves with recessed leather thongs visible in both boards. The binding is not decorated. Remnants of a strap and clasp, including bits of metal, present on front cover. The strap apparently hooked to a metal piece at center of back cover, where there is now a hole and corresponding discoloration in the leather. Single vellum flyleaf in front only.

The binding and boards bear several ownership labels:

A small yellow paper label is attached to the spine, on which is written “MS Laud / Misc. 656” in modern handwriting.

Paper label, inside front cover, top left: “ S.C. 1059” (a reference to the Bodleian’s *Summary Catalogue* entry.

Written in ink on binding turn-in, inside front cover: “F. 22” and “Laud / 656”. Added to the right of “Laud” in pencil at a later date: “MISC”. According to the *Summary Catalogue*, F. 22 refers to the old shelfmark: “In 1641, the Laudian MSS. were arranged in eleven compartments, lettered A-L, occupying the whole of the S.W. gallery at the Selden End” (14).

**Contents:**

Booklet I:

Fol. 1v- 19r *The Siege of Jerusalem*

Fol. 19v-114r *Piers Plowman*

(Fols. 114v-116v mostly blank)

Booklet II:

Fol. 117r-118r – exposition of the Creed concerning Genesis 15

Fol. 118r-124v – exposition of the Decalogue

Fol. 124v-125v – Biblical excerpts

**Provenance:** Contains signature of John Cempe of Ticehurst, on fol. 126v, which Hanna-Lawton date to the end of the 15th century. On fol. 131v, the signature “John naseby hemyngford”. Fol. 2r contains the *ex libris* of William Laud: “Liber Guilielmi Laud Archiep[iscop]i Cantuar[um] : / et Cancellarij Vniuersitatis Oxon[iensis] . / 1633 .”

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Hanna-Lawton and Russell-Kane give accurate and thorough descriptions of L, including information on its physical condition, contents, collation, and hand. Guddat-Figge gives a similar description, but notes that she wrote her entry through reliance upon Coxe and Skeat and that she had not seen the manuscript in person. Hopper and Zetterson offer descriptions in the context of studies of other poems appearing in the manuscript, and their descriptions are much less detailed than those of Hanna-Lawton and Guddat-Figge. Doyle and Millar discuss the manuscript briefly. The dialect of the manuscript is the focus of Kellogg's dissertation. Where it would merely be redundant to repeat these works, I briefly summarize them below.

