The Maude Roll

Being a XVth Century MS genealogy of the bristish and English Kings from Noah to Edward IV.

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'The fifteenth-century Maude Roll is one of two medieval manuscripts held by the University of Canterbury Library in Christchurch, New Zealand. A richly illuminated medieval genealogical roll, it delineates the lineage of the English monarchy from their legendary forebear Noah down to King Edward IV, including their Biblical, Trojan, British, Anglo-Saxon, Norman, Welsh, and English royal forebears. The roll is 18 feet long by 13½ inches wide, consisting of six pieces of parchment—each three feet long—joined together and rolled round a wooden cylinder. The first sixteen feet contain the genealogy of the English royal line, while the final two feet of the roll are blank. The genealogy is supplemented throughout by Latin historical commentary upon the important episodes in the legendary history of Britain. Despite its inherent interest to scholars—of manuscript art, medieval history, and literature alike—the manuscript has attracted minimal critical attention since it was first edited and published in 1919.

What little attention that has been paid to the Maude Roll has been due to its pronounced political character. The manuscript is one example of a proliferation of both English and Latin genealogical rolls that were produced during the fifteenth century as part of the ongoing contestation of the English crown that was to erupt in the Wars of the Roses. Such texts were produced in large numbers by both Lancastrian and Yorkist kings and supporters, pointing towards the increasing value of literary propaganda during this period. The fullest examination of this literary phenomenon is found in Alison Allen's 1979 article, in which the Maude Roll features merely as a footnote. Within this context, the Maude Roll is far from unique: however, despite its representative nature, the manuscript remains a fascinating one, offering profound and varied insights into the processes of the manipulation of history and legend in the late medieval period. For the purposes of this chapter I wish to examine the function of the Maude Roll as a historical artefact, and the significances that have been placed upon it by different generations of readers. Emphasising the Maude Roll's textual and physical articulation of historical and cultural continuity, this chapter examines the cultural work performed by the manuscript within two discrete temporal moments: first, the roll's origin, either through original production or scribal emendation, as political propaganda during the reign of Edward IV in the third quarter of the fifteenth century; and second, the process through which the roll came into the possession of the University of Canterbury Library....'