Faulkner, Review of Doane and Stoneman, *Purloined Letters* (2011), *RES* 63 (2012), 841-2
Pre-Print

A. N. DOANE AND W. P. STONEMAN. **Purloined Letters: the twelfth century reception of the Anglo-Saxon illustrated Hexateuch (British Library, Cotton Claudius B. iv)**. Pp. ix + 396 (Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 395). Tempe: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2011. Cloth, $70 / £53.

The twelfth-century annotations to the Old English Illustrated Hexateuch are profoundly disconcerting. Comprising 360 discrete interventions, ranging in length from a few words to several hundred, and using both Latin and English, the annotations challenge both the easy periodisation of medieval literature into Old and Middle English, and the literary historical commonplace that the use of English was rare in the twelfth century. A. N. Doane and W. P. Stoneman's new book-length study is accordingly an intriguing prospect.

Almost half of *Purloined Letters* is given over to the first full edition and translation of these fascinating annotations, superseding S. J. Crawford's partial printing of the English notes in *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch* (EETS o. s. 160, 1922) and *Anglia* 47 (1923). Developing Stoneman's 1984 discovery that many of the annotations derived from Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*, the authors have now sourced almost all the notes, convincingly tracing many of those outstanding to a collection of the minor works of Jerome. The edition, though not without errors, shows solid scholarship. Chapters V and VI, which discuss the annotator's use of his sources, are also valuable.

The remainder of the book presents, somewhat convolutedly, an interpretation of the annotations. Though admitting that the script frequently assumes a 'crazy appearance' (242), Doane and Stoneman argue that the annotations are the work of a single hand. Palaeographical considerations and the annotator's demonstrable use of a recension of the *Historia scholastica* unavailable much before 1180 date the project to the second half of the twelfth century. The annotator's hand is identifiable as the main scribe of a reject leaf, reused in a thirteenth-century St Augustine's chronicle and now London, BL, Cotton Nero A. viii, fol. *34v. This, combined with an entry corresponding to the Old English Illustrated Hexateuch in the fifteenth-century St Augustine's catalogue, suggests the project was carried out at St Augustine's. Several of the annotations are attributed to a 'Normannus'; a Normannus appears in the list of St Augustine's monks participating in the election of abbot Roger in 1176; therefore this Normannus was responsible for the project. Since there was so little active interest in English in the twelfth century, since the annotator unsuccessfully attempts to produce standard Old English, and since the script of these annotations is 'hyper-insular' (214), Normannus's use of English must be symbolic. St Augustine's had been unlucky in its abbots in the second half of the twelfth century, and had been required to resort to forgery to defend its privileges against royal and papal doubts; therefore Normannus's annotation of the Hexateuch, itself an act of forgery, should be understood as an attempt to 'assert the abbey's dignities and rights' by linking 'the old book, the new learning, and the antiquity of the house owning this artifact' (358).

Some of this argument is sound. The annotations probably are the output of a single hand working in the 1180s or 1190s at St Augustine's. However, many of the premises and much of the logic are questionable. For example, much of the argument depends on the false premise that English had little currency as a written language in the twelfth century and the inference that the use of English was therefore deliberately antiquarian (an argument first developed in the late 1970s by Michael Clanchy from Richard Southern's famous 1973 paper on the sense of the past in the European historical tradition, but debunked repeatedly over the past ten years by Elaine Treharne and others). There is, in fact, a considerable amount of English writing from this period, much of it oriented, like the annotations in the Hexateuch, to cutting-edge continental theology; it's just that convention dictates we call these writings 'early Middle English' rather than 'Old English', and they have thereby evaded Doane and Stoneman's radars. For example, the *Ormulum*,

completed in the 1180s, makes extensive use of the *Glossa ordinaria*, while several of the Trinity and Lambeth Homilies draw on new exegetical techniques like the *divisio* and the *distinctio*. Much of this has only become apparent to scholars recently, but it is scholarship *Purloined Letters* has unjustifiably ignored.

The arguments which follow from this false premise are equally unsatisfactory. Spellings like *hisyen* (lWS *geseon*) and *hidraan* (lWS *gedragan*) show the annotator's language is closer to early Middle English than Old English. The authors' insistence that the English notes are not spontaneous translations of the Latin but derive from the sedulous but clumsy imitation of earlier Old English texts feels intuitively perverse, and indeed much of the evidence adduced crumbles on closer examination (*neorxnawanga* is, for example, alleged to be a poeticism for 'paradise' despite the fact that the Dictionary of Old English Corpus shows it to be more frequent in Ælfric than in poetry). *Purloined Letters* several times advances a chronology for the annotations in which an initial ambitious use of English gave way in the face of extreme practical difficulties to a more confident use of Latin, but this is never argued, and is indeed readily disproved by Latin annotations like **37** and **43** which, respectively, preceded the English notes **38** and **44**. In fact, the annotations seem to be the work of a functional Latin / English bilingual, code-switching at will – witness for example **29b** where he corrects the original Old English translation in Latin. Finally, the criteria by which the script and spelling of the English annotations are identified as consciously archaistic are never justified, and in many cases can be paralleled by palaeographical and orthographical quirks in the Latin annotations.

Even if these arguments for understanding the annotator's use of English as purely emblematic were acceptable, it is most improbable that anyone, even a medieval monk, would have undertaken the annotation project, fundamentally a massive work of biblical scholarship, to achieve a political goal. As Doane and Stoneman acknowledge, about sixty manuscripts survive from twelfth-century St Augustine's. These include patristic texts, twelfth-century theology and glossed books of the bible. In scope these dwarf the four forged charters that Doane and Stoneman discuss and consequently provide a much more obvious context for the annotation project. Nor can the attribution of the whole project to Normannus be sustained. While he is named in ten of the Claudius notes as an authority, it is not 'obvious' that that he was therefore 'instrumental in the annotation project' (340), any more than the attribution of other notes to Jerome means that he was alive and well and living in twelfth-century St Augustine's. It is more likely that Normannus taught in the monastic school at St Augustine's, and that his opinions were therefore cited by the annotator, in the same way that, say, student notes have by chance recorded Lanfranc's teachings on Cicero's *Ad Herennium* or Priscian's *Institutiones*.

Though Doane and Stoneman deserve our gratitude for bringing the annotations to a wider public in an accurate and accessible edition, *Purloined Letters* is a retrograde step for the study of English in the twelfth century. Flawed premises and faulty logic have here created a troublingly conservative account of a set of annotations that should shake the paradigms by which we understand English literary history.

MARK FAULKNER
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK