

*Cultures of the Fragment: Uses of the Iberian Manuscript, 1100–1600.*

Heather Bamford.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. xii + 258 pp. \$75.

The scholarly practice of collating and editing manuscripts according to the common-error method modeled by Karl Lachmann (d. 1851)—although criticized by many for over a century now—continues to wield a heavy influence on the way we read and teach medieval literature. Even twenty-five years after John Dagenais called for a new ethics of reading among those who deal with manuscript culture, many of us—in our preparation and use of scholarly editions or our coding and digitizing of texts—continue to evaluate the idiosyncrasy and variability of medieval sources according to a single reductive measure of wholeness or fragmentation.

This learned book by Heather Bamford lays out a promising path to avoid this pitfall by challenging “the commonplace notion that fragments came about accidentally.” As she asserts, “the majority of manuscript fragments were created on purpose, as a result of the use of manuscript material for a wide variety of practical, intellectual, and spiritual purposes—from binding material to excerpting for an anthology, to talismans” (7). Bamford explores this proposal through a range of case studies, all drawn from the Iberian tradition, including epic poetry (chapter 1); the fate of manuscripts of chivalry texts upon the advent of print (chapter 2); the circulation and variation of final romance *kharja* (exit) verses within Andalusi *Muwashshahāt* (Arabic or Hebrew strophic songs) (chapter 3); the use of text fragments as apotropaic objects, such as inscribed stones, charms, and building materials (chapter 4); and the practice of compilation and reuse of sources among Moriscos (forcibly converted Muslims) in sixteenth-century Spain (chapter 5). On the basis of this eclectic assortment of examples, Bamford offers a fruitful model for approaching Iberian literature specifically, and medieval manuscript culture more generally.

The chronological span of this book, ranging from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, encompasses a number of important transformations in Iberian history as well as in the evolution of written culture more generally. This book makes a careful attempt to trace the significance of fragmentation across this broad canvas. In cases in which pieces of works play a referential function, such as in Mohanmad de Vera’s compilations of earlier Islamic writing in Morisco tradition (selections of which are included in the appendix), Bamford points to the paradox that “only a strong referent or, more importantly, a convincing image of this referent . . . can produce the dialectic that is essential to fragments” (150). In other cases, such as in the survival of fragments of chivalry novels within the bindings of early printed versions whose widespread popularity rendered those manuscripts obsolete, recovered fragments “overcome the shortcomings of being partial and inert and . . . come to serve as metonymies of their wholes” (81). In some cases, the fragment does not only stand in for a work, but also evokes a broader extratextual power or meaning, as in the case of protective amulets or devotional text

objects, such as the Jewish tefillin and mezuzah. One of the most insightful observations of the book is Bamford's comparison of the evocative power of texts in such spiritual objects with the modern use of medieval manuscripts and early books as "authentic" objects in displays and museum settings (131). For both medieval manuscript culture and for modern medievalism, appreciation of the presence of a text has never been exclusively a function of reading.

This is an ambitious book that makes a meaningful intervention in a number of ongoing scholarly conversations. While the complex individual readings in each chapter will primarily hold the attention of specialists familiar with the relevant critical bibliographies, what will be of broadest interest is the theorization of fragmentation itself as a concept that has always defined manuscript use in the past and that is still central to manuscript study today. The book could reach out a little more to related scholarship to make this point even clearer. There are, for example, multiple research projects dedicated to manuscript fragments that would offer productive interlocutors for this research, such as the University of Bergen project "From Manuscript Fragments to Book History" ([https://www.uib.no/rg/manuscript\\_fragments](https://www.uib.no/rg/manuscript_fragments)), the "Fragmentarium" project (<https://fragmentarium.ms>) at the University of Fribourg, and Mauro Perani's "Italian Genizah" project at the University of Bologna. Such connections would be especially relevant in the conclusion, which is a thoughtful and elegant meditation on the broader implication of fragmentation. Here, Bamford initiates an important discussion about the place of physical manuscripts in our present age of digitization, in which the meaning and function of texts and textual objects are—as they did upon the rise of printing—rapidly evolving in tandem with new technology. As this book shows us, in our brave new world of searching and screens, the fragment might acquire new life, not only as a metonym or token or talisman, but also as a witness of the unique value of living practice and human experience in the measured labor of writing and reading.

Ryan Szpiech, *University of Michigan*  
doi:10.1017/rqx.2022.85

*Lumières épicuriennes au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle: La Mothe Le Vayer, Molière et La Fontaine, lecteurs et continuateurs de Lucrèce.* Bruno Roche.

Libre pensée et littérature clandestine 75. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2020. 444 pp. €65.

Bruno Roche sets himself the slippery task of tracing camouflaged Lucretian thought in three authors not traditionally associated with his strain of Epicureanism. Though not the first to study the reception of Lucretius in the seventeenth century, Roche innovates in his method and corpus. Because Cartesian dualism was challenging Epicurean materialism and Lucretius's anti-religious fervor sat ill with the Catholic renewal of post-Reformation France, sympathizers would have wanted to disguise their appreciation