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0521412919 - The Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe
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This book presents a detailed survey and analysis of the surviving corpus of biblical drama from all parts of medieval Europe. Over five hundred plays from the tenth to the sixteenth centuries are examined from the point of view of the communities who performed them and the stories they dramatised in a mixture of sermons and suffering, comedy, pathos and the realities of everyday, mainly urban, life. Remarkable in their variety and quality, fascinating in their evolution and development, these plays offer unique insights into the medieval interpretation of sacred texts.

The volume is arranged in such a way as to present a detailed overview of major aspects of medieval biblical theatre, including the theatrical community of audience and players; the major plays and cycles; and the legacy of medieval drama in the modern world. Specially prepared maps illustrate the number and distribution of towns involved in dramatic activities, and an Appendix provides information on the liturgical context of the plays, including the Church calendar, processions, and the Mass, the Office and the Creed.

The biblical drama of medieval Europe will be a valuable resource for scholars and students of medieval theatre and for enthusiasts of early drama.

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The biblical drama of medieval Europe

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Preface

The aim of the present study is to make available to the increasing number of scholars working in the field of medieval drama, and to the even larger number of people who attend performances of such plays, a detailed survey and analysis of the surviving corpus of biblical drama from all parts of medieval Christian Europe. The number of plays is very considerable, their variety and quality remarkable and the history of their development and evolution fascinating.

Inevitably in a work conceived on a European scale, the need for translation discourages discussion of the stylistic and linguistic qualities of the plays. Nor, though the book is essentially comparatist in its approach, can it avoid some national divisions, for they are an essential part of the evolution of the genre. Very little secondary literature has been cited since the overall purpose is to encourage and facilitate detailed and comparative critical investigation of the plays, not to provide it.

The origin of the book goes back to the early 1970s when interested members of the Leeds Centre for Medieval Studies met on Wednesdays for a working lunch and hammered out the principles of a catalogue and episode-guide to the medieval religious plays. The catalogue was eventually abandoned (partly because of the work being done by Lancashire, in England, and Lippman, Bergmann and Neumann in Germany) but some of the material gathered was published in *The staging of religious drama in Europe in the later Middle Ages*, edited by Peter Meredith and John Tailby, in 1983.

In 1974, the Leeds Centre organised the first international colloquium on the medieval theatre, which led (during the second colloquium in Alençon in 1977) to the formation of the Société internationale pour l'étude du théâtre médiéval (SITM). Meanwhile in 1975 the Leeds Centenary Cycle – the first modern production of the York cycle on pageant waggons – initiated a series of such productions in both Europe and North America.

Having been working for a number of years on the comparative treatment of subject-matter in Old Testament plays from different language areas, I was encouraged by the success of *Staging* and the stimulus of the cycle productions and SITM meetings to attempt a general history and analysis of biblical plays from the whole of Europe based partly on the original subject-index prepared for the now defunct catalogue. The present volume is the outcome.

The material is presented in two parts: in the first the theatre is considered from the point of view of the organisers and performers – the theatrical community. The question of who performed plays, when and why, is examined, with a brief outline of how and where the plays were performed.

In part two, the subject-matter and sources of the theatrical text are analysed following the biblical narrative from Genesis to the Book of Revelation and including as far as possible all known examples of the Old Testament themes and a selection of the more interesting and unusual variants of the prolific Christmas and Easter plays.

As the purpose of this book is to provide a comprehensive picture of European medieval biblical drama, I have tried to include references to all texts composed before 1500 (with the exception of some unpublished material). Between 1500 and 1550 the only texts omitted are those which have no medieval links at all – mainly humanist and polemical plays – whereas after 1550, plays are only included if they relate to the medieval traditions, for example the Dutch rhetoricians' plays and the Stonyhurst pageants. In doubtful cases, the text is always included. The arabic numbers following play titles refer to the pages of the edition given in the bibliographical index of plays at the end of the book.

The changes that take place in the drama during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are discussed in the conclusion, which also studies the survival and revival of the medieval dramatic traditions. An appendix describes the liturgical context in which the plays were created and performed.

The maps indicate the principal known (or surmised) locations of plays and performances. Since political boundaries changed constantly in the six hundred years covered by the survey, rivers have been preferred as a guide to the position of less well-known towns. The place names on the maps are the medieval ones and modern changes are indicated in the index. English forms are used throughout where applicable.

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The illustrations, taken from some of the many productions which have delighted audiences on both sides of the Atlantic in the last twenty years, are chosen less for their intrinsic quality than for their exemplary value in the recreation of medieval staging techniques and practices.

All drama is a communal effort and this book is indebted to an enormous number of people: to include their names in the acknowledgements is but feeble return for all they have done for me. But my greatest debt is to the original stalwart 'Wednesday-lunchers' and it gives me great pleasure to dedicate this book to those three wise men of Leeds, Peter Meredith, Richard Rastall and John Tailby, in gratitude for their advice, help and friendship over the last twenty years.

Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible without the help and advice of many friends and specialists. General assistance and information on plays in different language groups was given by Leeds colleagues, including Richard Andrews, Peter Meredith, Jane Oakshott, Richard Rastall, Anne Rees, Penny Robinson, and Irmgart and John Tailby. In addition, Alan Knight and Graham Runnalls have provided me with advance copies of French plays not yet published as well as answering many questions. Elsa Strietman and Wim Hüsken have kept me straight on the Dutch material, and the Eastern European texts have been identified and translated for me by Sonja Dekanić-Janoski (Serbo-Croat) and Irena Janicke-Śviderske (Polish). I have also had advance information or texts from Cyrilla Barr, Joyce Hill, Wim Hüsken, Alexandra Johnston, Hans-Jürgen Linke and Gerard Nijsten. Other contributions are acknowledged in the footnotes, and the bibliographies list the work of numerous scholars, masked but not concealed by the acronyms of *REED* and *RORD*, EDAM, SITM and *MeTh*.

Illustrations and permission to reproduce them have been provided by Alistair Doxat-Pratt, Helen Taylor, Eleonora Udalska and Black and White Pictures (Chester). The photos were prepared for publication by Fred Johnson of Chester and the Domino Agency, York.

I have also had much help in the preparation of the text. Peter Meredith, Richard Rastall, Elsa Strietman and Elizabeth Williams read parts of the typescript and made many useful suggestions. Barbara Douglas devoted a great deal of time and care to preparing the maps. Jenifer Fairpo spent many hours putting the bibliographies in order and Gavin Fairpo enabled me to use a computer. The editors for the Cambridge University Press, especially Victoria Cooper and Janet Banks, have been endlessly helpful and patient.

Without all this assistance there would be many more errors of

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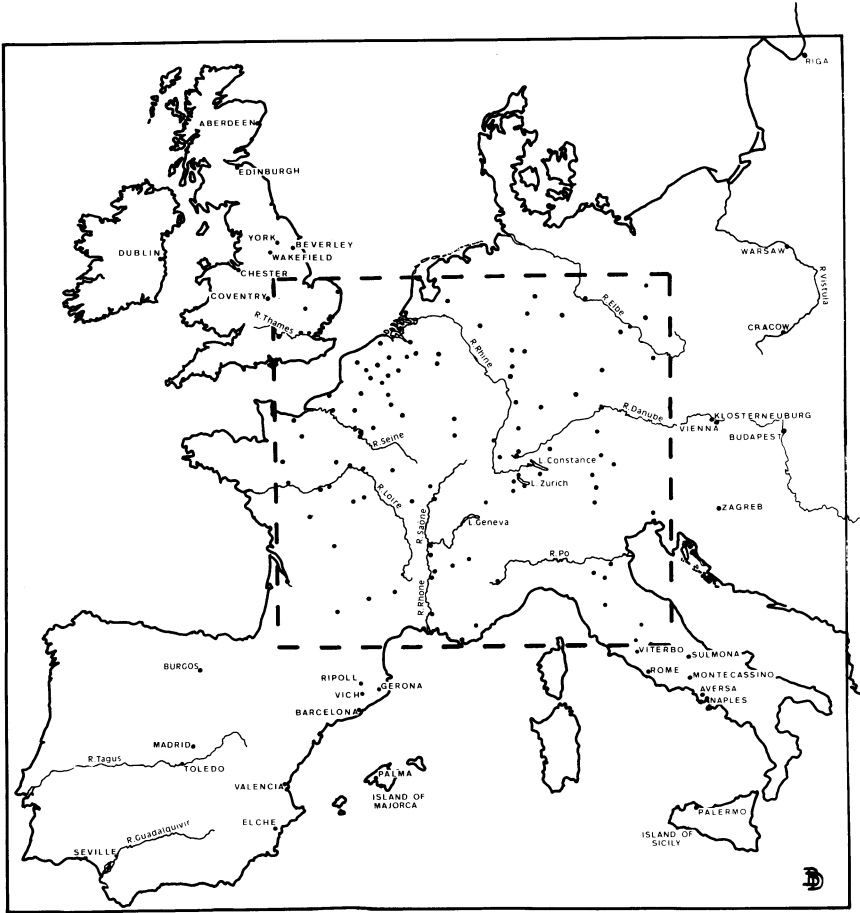
omission and commission in this book. For those that remain the fault and the responsibility are mine.

*Ce que avons de faultes commis
Et que en noz fais avons obmis..
Prions vostre benivolence
Que le nous voeulliés pardonner,
Suppleer et nous excuser,
Car le Mistere est tres pesant.*

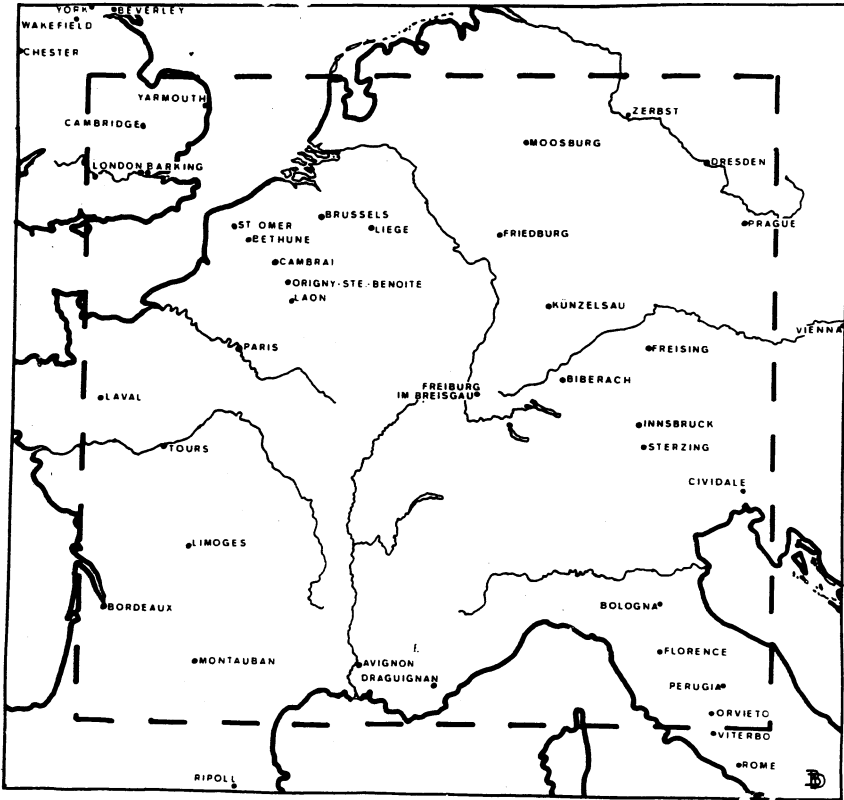
Abbreviations

- Bergmann: Bergmann, K. *Katalog der deutschsprachigen geistlichen Spiele und Marienklagen des Mittelalters*. Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1. Munich and Zurich, 1986.
- Evans: Blakemore-Evans, M. *The passion play of Lucerne: an historical and critical introduction*. New York and London, 1943.
- CFMA: Classiques français du moyen âge.
- D'Ancona, *Origini*: D'Ancona, A. *Origini del teatro italiano*. 2 vols. Rome, 1966 (repr. 1981).
- De Bartholomaeis, *Origini*: De Bartholomaeis, V. *Origini della poesia drammatica italiana*. 2nd ed. Turin, 1952.
- Donovan: Donovan, R. B. *The liturgical drama in medieval Spain*. Toronto, 1958.
- EDAM: Early Drama, Art and Music.
- EETS: Early English Text Society.
- Hummelen: Hummelen, W. M. M. *Repertorium van het rederijkersdrama, 1500 – c.1620*. Assen, 1968. (Addenda to the *Repertorium in Dutch Crossing*, 1984, 22: 105–28).
- Lancashire: Lancashire, I. *Dramatic texts and records of Britain: a chronological topography*. Toronto, 1984.
- Malone: Malone Collections, Malone Society, London.
- MeTh*: *Medieval English Theatre*.
- Mill: Mill, A. J. *Medieval plays in Scotland*. Edinburgh and London, 1927. [repr. New York, 1969].
- Mons: *Le mystère de la passion . . . joué à Mons, 1501*. (Ed. G. Cohen. Paris, 1925.)
- Neumann: Neumann, B. *Geistliches Schauspiel im Zeugnis der Zeit. Zur Aufführung mitteralterlicher Dramen im deutschen Sprachgebiet*. 2 vols. Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 84, 85. Munich and Zurich, 1987.

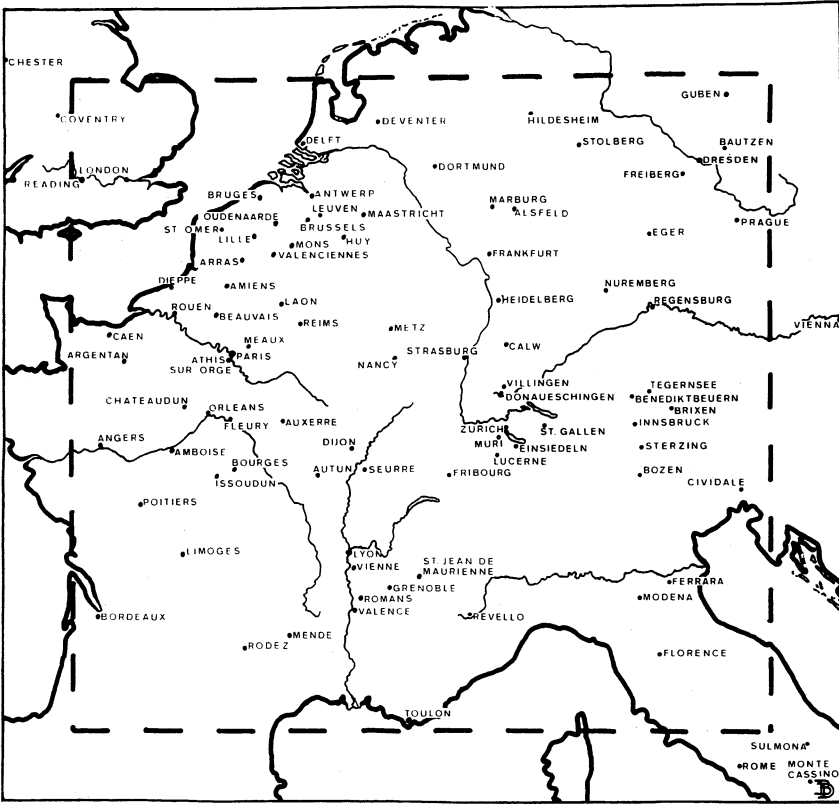
- Newbiggin: Newbiggin, N., ed. *Nuovo corpus di sacre rappresentazioni fiorentini del Quattrocento*. Bologna, 1983.
- Petit de Julleville: Petit de Julleville, L. *Histoire du théâtre en France. Les Mystères II*. 1880. [repr. Geneva, 1969].
- PMLA: *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*.
- REED: *Records of Early English Drama*.
- RORD: *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*.
- Rouanet: Rouanet, L., ed. *Coleccion de Autos, Farsas, y Coloquios del siglo XVI*. 4 vols. Barcelona and Madrid, 1901.
- Roy, *Mystère*: Roy, E. *Le Mystère de la passion en France du XIVe au XVIIe siècle*. Paris, 1905.
- SATF: Société des anciens textes français.
- Shergold: Shergold, N. D. *A history of the Spanish stage from medieval times until the end of the seventeenth century*. Oxford and London, 1967.
- SITM: Société internationale pour l'étude du théâtre médiéval.
- Staging: The staging of religious drama in Europe in the later Middle Ages: texts and documents in English translation . . . [etc.]*. Eds. Peter Meredith and John Tailby. EDAM monograph series, 4. Kalamazoo, 1983.
- Toledo: Torroja Menéndez, C., and Rivas Palá, M. *Teatro en Toledo*. Madrid, 1977.
- Woolf: Woolf, R. *The English mystery plays*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972.
- Young: Young, K. *The drama of the medieval church*. 2 vols. Oxford and London, 1933.
- ZDA: *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsches Literatur*.
- ZDPPh: *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*.



Map 1 Medieval Europe showing locations of principal play-texts and records cited in this study. (For names of towns in central area see maps 2 and 3.)



Map 2 Enlargement of central area showing locations of liturgical and feast-day plays as defined in chapter 1.



Map 3 Enlargement of central area showing locations of civic and community plays as defined in chapter 2.