PRIVATE EPIGRAPHY IN LATE MEDIEVAL LONDON: METAL LETTERS ON PERSONAL POSSESSIONS

Volume I

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It does not exceed the prescribed word limit (100,000).

Abstract

Private Epigraphy in Late Medieval London: Metal Letters on Personal Possessions

Text in medieval London was engraved, stamped, moulded, and cast onto objects in the urban landscape for all to see. The particular focus of this thesis is epigraphy on a small, intimate scale, seeking out text that was affixed to the clothing, or secreted in the pockets of ordinary Londoners. These materials include familiar categories of objects such as jewellery, seal matrices, and pilgrim souvenirs, but also lesser-studied possessions such as spoons, purses, mirror cases, and whistles. Its aim is to take these uniquely communicative objects and explore what their sustained analysis may offer to an art history of medieval London, from the identities they express, to the relationships they perform, and the material playfulness they reveal.

The material discussed in this thesis is testament to the importance of the text in the city's material culture, and of the desire to access it, even among those whose education was limited. Many of the types of object discussed, in particular seal matrices and pilgrim souvenirs, have enjoyed the attention of art historians in recent years. However, inscriptions on these objects rarely, if ever, take centre stage in these studies. On individual artefacts, inscriptions have been overlooked, often seen as too simplistic, repetitive, or even illegible, to be worthy of note. By analysing large numbers of small metal objects, this dissertation will uncover new sculptural epigraphic traditions of private inscription, and reveal how letters were used in medieval London beyond the manuscript page.

The thesis argues that small private inscriptions present a previously untapped opportunity to explore uses of letters that, unlike those in manuscripts, require us to redefine definitions such as the 'literate' and 'illiterate', revising our understanding of those who can and those who cannot, those with access and those who are excluded.

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Note on Transcription, Dating, and Names

Transcriptions of inscriptions are included throughout, and record as much of the original content and format of an inscription as is possible. Where minuscule letter-forms have been used, I have rendered these in lower case, and where capital letters have been used I have recorded these in upper case type. I have also attempted to find equivalent symbols visually to represent other graphic forms, or reversed letters, as closely as possible. In cases where part of the inscription has been obscured, I use [.] to indicate a lost character, with the number of dots corresponding to the number of characters obscured, and [—] where an unknown number of characters have been lost. A forward slash / indicates a break in the text where, for example, some letters of the inscription is one part of an object and carried on on another part of the object. Where an inscription is not originally in English and has been heavily abbreviated, I have sometimes included modernised transcriptions in the original language in italics. English translations follow all transcriptions in brackets.

Translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

The small finds material discussed in this thesis is notoriously difficult to date with accuracy. I have relied on archaeological records of finds and sites, as well as published catalogues, to give broad date ranges for objects but, where an object has been published with a date that is contrary to this information, I have made a note of conflicting dating.

Forenames have been translated where necessary from Latin into English. For surnames I have used historical forms found in the source documents. I have retained historical London street names as they appear in sources, as sometimes modern equivalents do not reflect the same geographical situation as their earlier counterparts. However, where I refer to sites of archaeological excavations, modernised street names have been used in line with site records.

Introduction

Two metal letters, an ‘R’ and an ‘A’, are disembodied remnants of a tradition of epigraphy that flourished in later medieval London (figures 0.01 and 0.02).[1] Side-by-side, and not pictured to scale, these letters appear to be speaking the same language. Both are made of base metal alloys that were cast in a mould. The ‘R’ is made of curvaceous, fluid lines, offset by the overly angular projection from its right leg, while the ‘A’ is mostly formed of straight lines, emphasised by its flat top and dramatically broken cross-bar, its curved left foot tempering its severe aspect with some softness. Both of these letters are designed to be attached to something, with rivets on their reverse for this purpose. Both are fragments of a complete object, or perhaps they may even have been made without a specific home in mind, never used as part of a whole and discarded as surplus to demand. It is, however, the different contexts for which the ‘R’ and the ‘A’ were created that set them apart. The differences in their intended purposes are apparent by their relative size. With a height of 21mm, the ‘R’ is less than half the size of the more substantial ‘A’, whose height is 47mm.

The ‘R’ was likely made to be fitted on a dress accessory of some sort, such as a belt, shoe, or purse, or some other personal belonging. Its size reflects the scale of the items to which it could be fitted, and the fact that it did not need to be distinguishable from a distance. The ‘A’ is a brass letter that would most likely be intended to fit into a stone funerary monument as part of a longer inscription. The many distinctions between these objects, despite their resemblance

[1] ‘R’ mount, London, Museum of London, SWA81<3881>; Monumental ‘A’, London, Museum of London, BWB83[306]<741>. It has been suggested that brass letter-form fittings like the ‘A’ were produced in London for Purbeck funerary monuments from the mid-to-late thirteenth century and throughout the fourteenth century: Sally Badham and Malcolm Norris, *Early Incised Slabs and Brasses from London Marblers* (Oxford, 1999), 28-30. There is no reason to think that this ‘R’ could not also fit into this broad date range. The mount is included in Geoff Egan and Frances Prichard, *Dress Accessories c.1150-c.1450* (London, 1991), 202-203, but they do not suggest a date for this piece.

out of context, illustrates the variety of roles metal letters could perform in medieval England and beyond. While the 'A' was destined for a static, reverent vigil, the 'R' was designed to move with its owner, an appendage to their body, traversing the streets. The 'A' solidifies memory, while the 'R' courts opinion. To its owner, the 'R' might have represented an affiliation or a name, part of their living identity; it could be proudly worn or cast aside, but its life-cycle would have been bound to that of its owner. The 'A', by contrast, is the final word, or part of it, in a life; it was intended to speak long after the person who commissioned it had decomposed. Its ownership is largely posthumous.

This thesis will be an exploration of the category of epigraphy on the scale of the 'R' above. The metal letters discussed here will be defined by their proximity to their owners, and their resulting diminutive size. These letters offer new, often intimate insights into medieval Londoners and how they participated in a rich world of visual communication. Unlike monumental letters represented by the 'A', letters on a small scale like the 'R' have not received sustained art historical scrutiny. In placing such artefacts for the first time at the centre of close analysis, this thesis thus aims to enrich the study of medieval London by extending the examination of Londoners' visual culture from large-scale topographical surveys, looking inside their homes, even inside their pockets. This close-up view of medieval London echoes a trend in research on the urban environment that looks more keenly at its inhabitants.[2] But inscribed metal objects represent a uniquely communicative group of possessions, one-way echoes of a conversation undertaken between medieval Londoners and their objects from which I will attempt to uncover insights into how they interacted with metal letters. This thesis will therefore ask: what was the role of letters and words on smaller-scale metal objects in medieval London? How does such text demand a different approach to that written in pen and ink? And how does

[2] A good recent example of this is Katherine French, *Household Goods and Good Households in Medieval London: Consumption and Domesticity after the Plague* (Philadelphia, 2021), which will be discussed in more detail below.

the style of these letters—their manufacture, form, decoration, and typesetting—likewise affect their meaning? To answer these questions, I turn to the under-used resource of small metal finds with inscriptions incorporated into their design. These objects were common in medieval London and include a broad spectrum of personal items from purse frames and rings, to whistles and pilgrim souvenirs. Many of these objects have languished in archives, undisturbed by researchers since their excavation. Yet the potential of these small inscribed objects as a resource is significant, especially in their variety of inscriptions and functions, the way in which they use letters and words, and in how ubiquitous and, therefore, how prevalent they were in the visual culture of ordinary Londoners.

My central assertion is that these lettered metal objects compel us to look differently at the use of text in medieval London. They reveal behaviours and logics that illuminate a vast spectrum of relationships that medieval people had with text. As active objects they prompt exploration of the intersections between epigraphy, form, and function. Where meaning can be literally spelled out on some of these objects, in many cases it can only be exposed by observing the interaction between the metal letters, their surroundings, and the purpose for which they were employed. By the end of this thesis, we will have charted the multifaceted uses of metal letters in the medieval city, and discovered how their presentation, and their situation on objects used for particular purposes, reveal sophisticated traditions of private epigraphy.

Metal Letters in Medieval London

The first major contribution of this thesis is its focus on an otherwise overlooked group of objects, giving critical voice in many cases for the first time to a number of small, metal artworks. By selecting these objects based on material, scale, and the presence of metal letter-forms, I am able to bring together objects from different spheres of life, traversing boundaries

between rich and poor, work and play, religious devotion and worldly cares. As such, they offer different perspectives on life in medieval London. They represent commercial and personal choices of makers and consumers. To understand these objects, I must call on the accomplished work produced by researchers across several disciplines. This thesis therefore aims to add to the picture of medieval London created by these scholars, and enrich it by placing small finds material at the centre of study and allowing them to direct my investigations. This focus on tangible, hand-held objects puts my thesis on a more personal scale in comparison with other materially focused studies on medieval London that have come before.

Before placing my study in the context of this scholarship on medieval London, however, I will first define the material that I will be considering. All of the personal belongings discussed here were found in London. Most were uncovered during formal excavations of London's waterfront, where the waterlogged anaerobic environment preserved metal finds that in other parts of the city would have disintegrated entirely. Others were found in a less formal fashion, recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme or as chance mudlarking finds that have been accessioned into museum collections.[3] During the later Middle Ages, it was along Thames Street, where some of the highest volumes of metal artefacts have since been excavated, that imported goods were unloaded in the city's largest wharf and sold in the shops that lined London Bridge and nearby streets. In addition, land reclamation in the twelfth and fourteenth centuries also took place along the Thames, involving the process of backfilling revetments with waste material from dumps across the city. Tying finds uncovered at these sites to any specific activities which took place on or near them is therefore difficult, but it can be said with confidence that the material used to fill in these spaces would not have been transported a great

[3] John Schofield, Lyn Blackmore and Jacque Pearce, with Tony Dyson, *London's Waterfront 1100-1600: Excavations in Thames Street, London, 1974-84* (London, 2018),10. Detailed discussion of the Billingsgate site can be found in this publication. For in-depth information about the Trig Lane excavation see Gustav Milne and Chrissie Milne, *Medieval Waterfront Development at Trig Lane*, London & Middlesex Society Special Paper, No. 5 (1982).

distance, and thus these finds are a good representation of the possessions of medieval Londoners.[4] Despite sharing a common provenance, however, the objects considered in this study reflect the demographic diversity of the city's inhabitants. Like the population of the city, they are also multilingual, with inscriptions in Latin, medieval French, Middle English, Greek, and runes. They are also diverse in other ways. Some are inscribed with pseudo-script, nonsense words, or text that has been hitherto misidentified as such. Some items are materially precious, with epigraphs etched into gold, while others are more humble, base metal pieces, the letter-forms cast onto their surface transforming cheaper materials into quasi-magical, 'speaking' objects. While there are pieces delicately engraved by hand, others were made in batches through replicable means, such as casting.

In response, this thesis grounds its understanding of these diverse metal letters using work by scholars who have made London's archaeology the focus of many studies, and thereby have revealed the shape of the medieval city. While there had been some activity in exploring London's archaeology earlier in the twentieth century, it was in the 1970s when Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) was formed that significant efforts began to uncover and record London's material past.[5] London is one of the most systematically excavated cities in Europe, with scholarship on this topic providing an extensive contextual background to my thesis. The Museum of London's collections and archaeological archive house artefacts from 8,500 sites, offering an opportunity to interrogate vast assemblages of objects that witnessed life in the medieval city. Archaeologists such as John Schofield, Geoff Egan, and Brian Spencer have produced a large corpus of resources that go a long way towards reconstructing the material city,

[4] Schofield, et al., *London's Waterfront 1100-1600*, 55.
[5] John Schofield, 'The capital rediscovered: archaeology in the City of London' *Urban History*, Vol. 20, Pt. 2 (1993), 211. In 1973 the Department of Urban Archaeology (DUA) was established by the Guildhall Museum, which in 1975 became part of the Museum of London. In 1991 it combined with the Department of Greater London Archaeology (DGLA) to form the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MOLAS).

from the enormity of the city's topography to the minute detail of its household goods.[6] The fact that London excavations have yielded an important collection of small metal objects can be seen in the number of items of this description included in published catalogues, and a dedicated publication on the subject by Hazel Forsyth with Geoff Egan in 2005.[7] These catalogues expose the wealth of small finds material found in London and offer an important survey of personal possessions in the Middle Ages. My purpose is to complement this survey work further with more detailed critical analysis, proving the richness of this material as a source that demonstrates the creativity of London craftspeople and the sophistication of its consumers.

To do this, my study will bring together objects more convincingly with the worlds in which they operated, in order to understand how practice impacted design. A second strand of scholarship on medieval London therefore also provides a strong foundation for the critical work of this thesis, both in terms of material contexts and historical settings. Historians, most notably Caroline Barron, have published many works on medieval London, taking advantage of the significant documentary evidence surviving from the city.[8] Barron's research on the government of London offers a painstakingly detailed view of the workings of the city's governance and administrative culture, from the office of the mayor to parish fraternities.[9] Civic life in medieval London has also been explored more recently by David Harry in his research on the governing

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[6] John Schofield, *London 1100-1600: the Archaeology of a Capital City* (Sheffield, 2011). A meticulously researched work on the shape of London through its buildings, topography and other archaeological remains right down to the bones of medieval Londoners. Geoff Egan and Brian Spencer, among many others, have lent their expertise in the production of a number of catalogues of medieval small finds as part of the Museum of London's Medieval Finds series such as, Egan and Prichard, *Dress Accessories*; Geoff Egan, *The Medieval Household: Daily Living c.1150-c.1450* (Woodbridge, 2010); Brian Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges: Medieval Finds from Excavations in London* (Woodbridge, 2010).

[7] Hazel Forsyth with Geoff Egan, *Toys, Trifles and Trinkets: Base-Metal Miniatures from London 1200-1800* (London, 2005).

[8] For general works of London see Caroline Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Its Government and People* (Oxford, 2004) for an unsurpassed study on the late medieval city. For early to high medieval London, a period of the city's history that fewer scholars have researched, see C. N. L. Brooke with G. Kier, *London 800-1216: The Shaping of a City* (London, 1975). This work is still cited by many currently working on medieval London.

[9] Caroline Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*. On parish fraternities see also Caroline Barron, 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London' in, *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society: Essays in Honour of F. R. H. Du Boulay*, eds. C. Barron and C. Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, 1985), 13-37.

strategies and ideologies of London's political elite.[10] Pulling together a breadth of documentary sources, Harry analyses how London's government sought to maintain their authority over the city by promoting their own piety and charitable works. Historians such as Clive Burgess, Sylvia Thrupp, and Barbara Hanawalt have also investigated the history of the medieval city on a human scale, with works on its social history.[11] The subject of London's merchants in particular has recently enjoyed an enthusiastic resurgence since Thrupp's pioneering work on the subject over seventy years ago. Her research still gives an unparalleled insight into the private lives of this important group. 2016 saw the publication of both Anne Sutton's study, *The London Mercery*, as well as a collection of essays, *Medieval Merchants and Money*.[12] The prominent place of merchants in the field reflects the fact that they were a hugely important part of London's government as the status of the London citizen was dependent on their economic contribution. They were also particularly litigious and savvy users of bureaucracy, ensuring their presence in a wide variety of extant documents.[13]

Similar scholarship also provides this thesis with an international grounding. Merchants imported goods to London from a wide geographical area, and many Londoners themselves migrated from continental Europe and the rest of the UK, bringing their material culture with them. This is reflected in the objects discussed in this thesis, especially in chapters below on seal matrices and pilgrim souvenirs. While all were found in London, this is not to suggest that they were necessarily made or purchased there. A large proportion of London's inhabitants were not citizens; work has recently been done by Jessica Lutkin, Derek Pearsall, and Joseph Huffman on

[10] David Harry, *Common Profit and Charity in Late Medieval London* (Woodbridge, 2019).
[11] Clive Burgess, 'London Parishioners in Times of Change: St Andrew Hubbard, Eastcheap c. 1450-1570', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History Vol. 53, No 1* (2002), 38-63; Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London: 1300-1500* (Michigan, 1948). Barbara A. Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (New York, 1993).
[12] Anne F. Sutton, *The Mercery of London: Trades, Goods and People, 1130 – 1578*, (London, 2016); *Medieval Merchants and Money: Essays in Honour of James L. Bolton*, eds. Martin Allen and Matthew Davies (London, 2016).
[13] See, for example, Matthew Frank Stevens, 'Londoners and the court of common pleas in the fifteenth century' in, *London and Beyond: Essays in Honour of Derek Keene* Matthew, eds. Davies and James A. Galloway (London, 2012), 225-246.

the city's immigrant population.[14] These studies are important as they are some of the few works that put London in the context of its wider geographical networks, where too often studies give an insular view. Other unfranchised inhabitants are elusive in terms of written sources from the medieval city and are therefore unacceptably absence from the scholarship.[15] Through small finds material, I am able to emphasise a view of London during the Middle Ages as an international city, exploring trade and cultural links on a human level.

The historians mentioned above largely draw their material from the city's extensive collection of medieval records.[16] My approach, however, is centred around using *both* documentary and material evidence to enrich discussion of the urban material environment, in some cases combined for the first time. This builds on similar studies that, in my view, have contributed positively to our knowledge of the medieval city. Derek Keene was one of the first historians of medieval London seriously to consider archaeological evidence in tandem with more traditional historical sources in his work during the 1980s. His research has provided future scholars with reliable answers to fundamental questions about the urban environment,

[14] Jessica Lutkin, 'Settled or Fleeting? London's medieval immigrant community revisited' in, *Medieval Merchants and Money: Essays in Honour of James L. Bolton*, eds. Martin Allen and Matthew Davies (London, 2016), 144-147; Derek Pearsall, 'Strangers in Late-Fourteenth Century London' in, *The Stranger in Medieval Society*, eds. F. R. P. Akehurst and Stephanie Cain Van D'Elden (Minneapolis, 1998), 46-62; J. Huffman, *Family, Commerce and Religion in London and Cologne: Anglo-German Emigrants c.1000-c.1300* (Cambridge, 1998).

[15] Barbara A. Hanawalt, 'Reading the lives of the illiterate: London's poor', *Speculum* Vol. 80, No. 4 (2005), 1067-1086, is an exception to this trend.

[16] At times there is a sense of frustration that historians rarely acknowledge material evidence that has been uncovered. For example, it was noted by Egan in the introduction of a publication about toys found in London, that Hanawalt's firmly historical approach in her work on childhood in London, meant that key parts of this experience were missed from entirely. Sections on children at play, which might have incorporated such material culture, instead, in striking contrast with the joyful subject matter, draw from the morbid accounts of coroners' rolls. Such accounts would hardly be recording well-supervised children playing indoors with small pewter horses. See Geoff Egan, 'Trends in Dating and Production', in Forsyth with Egan, *Toys, Trifles and Trinkets*, p.59; Barbara A. Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History*, (New York, 1993), 78-79.

such as its population size.[17] More recently, Nick Holder's work on London Friaries has also demonstrated how effective this interdisciplinary approach to the study of the city can be.[18] However, both of these scholars combine written evidence with only large-scale architectural and topographical data, rather than objects. One of the most recent works on London has also put belongings like those discussed in this thesis at the centre of a study of late medieval identity: *Household Goods and Good Households*, by Katherine French, traces Londoners' possessions in wills and inventories to observe changes in patterns of ownership resulting from the Black Death.[19] Her proposition stresses the effects of things on their owners' behaviours and, as a result, on their sense of identity. The potential of personal objects to reveal such valuable insights is clear. However, while French exclusively uses documentary evidence, such as wills and inventories, to reach her conclusions about materiality, I will analyse these possessions themselves to offer a more intimate view of the role of a Londoner's belongings in their life.

Using Letters in Medieval London

Another central contribution of this thesis is to draw attention to the vast spectrum of letter use in medieval London, a spectrum that small metal objects help demonstrate was in fact much broader than scholarship on literacy has to date acknowledged. As well as the excellent work on material and historical London cited above, there has also been a wealth of scholarship

[17] D. Keene, 'A New Study of London Before the Great Fire', *Urban History Yearbook* (1984), 20; Scholars refer to his work for and authoritative voice on the fundamental questions of the urban environment such as population numbers. The figure of 80,000-100,000 Londoners in 1300 first put forward by Keene in 1984, which was much higher than earlier estimates and disputed by some at that time, has since been adopted by those currently writing on the subject. This figure was acknowledged but not asserted in Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London*, 24; and disputed in P. Nightingale, 'The growth of London in the medieval English economy' in, *Progress and Problems in Medieval England: Essays in Honour of Edward Miller*, R. Britnell & J. Hatcher (Cambridge, 1996), 89-106; but has since has been used with more certainty by probably the two leading figures in the field Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, 238; and Schofield, *London 1100-1600*, 8.
[18] Nick Holder, *The Friaries of Medieval London: From Foundation to Dissolution* (Suffolk, 2017).
[19] Katherine French, *Household Goods.*

concerning the production and consumption of text in medieval London.[20] Medieval London has provided a setting for so much research in the field of manuscript studies that its status as a textual city in the minds of scholars has solidified. It is therefore an important step to extend the discussion of the uses of letters into sections of material culture outside of book production, as well as beyond a binary debate over 'literacy' and 'illiteracy'. Over the course of this thesis, we will discover that Londoners were surrounded by smaller-scale metal letters and words, and that their use was not confined to an elite few with formal training in reading or writing.

Even within manuscript sources themselves, there are hints that there is complexity in the use of letters by medieval Londoners.

> Why stant this word heere? And why this word there?[21]

In the quote above, a commoner puzzles over some text in London clerk Thomas Hoccleve's 1414 poem, *Remonstrance Against Oldcastle*. Hoccleve denigrates the speaker as literate yet unschooled, as they read but do not understand, inquisitive and yet ignorant. This line hints at the emotional and political weight placed on letters in the fifteenth century, especially the relationship between using them and understanding them. Written at a time when the Crown and the Church alike feared the Lollard heresy, a central idea of which was that the faithful should be able to read the Bible for themselves, this line shows both the potential of the written word to fuel dissent and its power to keep people in their place. The high number of scholarly studies made of London scribes, as well as book ownership and production in the city, indicates that, in the view of many historians, issues of textuality flourished in the late medieval city.[22] But, just as Hoccleve's lay observer defies the notion that the knowledge of letters was confined to the

[20] This scholarship will be discussed in detail in Chapters One and Two.
[21] Hoccleve, 'The Remonstrance Against Oldcastle' printed in, *Selections from Hoccleve*, ed. M. C. Seymour (Oxford, 1981), 65.
[22] See below for discussions of this scholarship.

spheres of the ecclesiastical and political elites, such letters were by no means restricted to manuscripts locked away in the court or cloister, but were etched into the urban landscape for all to see. The small finds material under consideration in this thesis was made by craftspeople, a group who, unlike those in religious orders or secular clerks, did not necessarily have the opportunity to be formally educated. Likewise, while some of the inscribed personal possessions in this thesis were clearly owned by people who could read and write, other objects—for instance those which display pseudo script or nonsense text—reveal a more complicated relationship between Londoners and text. A second major contribution of this thesis is therefore found in its acknowledgment that text on small metal objects presents a unique glimpse into interactions between letter-forms and Londoners who perhaps could not read or write them, or whose reading and writing were very limited.

The very existence of these metal letters demonstrates that there were grey areas between 'literacy' and 'illiteracy' among the inhabitants of medieval London. Epigraphs on small metal objects often include letters that were misplaced or reversed, words spelled in an unusual way, and stylistic inconsistencies in the letter-forms used. Cataloguers have often commented on makers' 'illiteracy' in reference to such objects.[23] Yet this seems an unnecessarily reductive way of viewing makers and, by extension, their creations. This thesis instead considers these objects as representing a way of composing and communicating with letters-forms, no matter how unfamiliar the maker might be with reading and writing in its more traditional sense in manuscripts. To do so is to expose the binary distinction of 'literate' and 'illiterate' as unhelpful when attempting to understand these objects, and indeed the role played

[23] Egan and Prichard, *Dress Accessories c.1150-c.1450*, 255. Egan suggests that a the 'blundered *gracia*' and unusual letter forms suggest that the maker of a brooch was 'illiterate or sub-literate'; the catalogue entry for a pilgrim souvenir in the Museum of London's collection mentions idiosyncrasies in its inscription saying 'this shows the maker was illiterate'. 'Museum of London Collection', 14th April 2019, https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/37592.html; the assumption of 'illiteracy' can sometimes cause errors on the part of the cataloguer. A purse frame's inscription is mis-transcribed in the catalogue to include an error where. Purse frame 2003.50, 'Museum of London Collection', 14th April 2019, https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/725936.html.

by text in medieval London as a whole. Likewise, it complicates notions of 'reading' and 'writing', as scholarship has traditionally understood them. Is carving reverse letter-forms into stone for them to be cast in pewter 'writing'? Can viewing a worn badge with a monogram of the name 'Maria' be termed 'reading'? Rather than painting these activities with a broad brush, my approach in what follows is always to define the specifics of these interactions with visual words as an essential element of understanding them. In doing so, we can broaden our understanding of the ways such objects and their texts played a role in the quotidian lives of a large proportion of Londoners. As we will see, these objects were given as gifts, used in business and governance, and were part of personal religious devotion. The meanings of metal letters are bound up in such a broad range of activities that they can contribute significantly to our understanding of the role of small-scale text across moments in urban life.

My acknowledgement that literacy is not a binary state, and subsequent exploration of what this means in practice, has been influenced by several interesting recent studies. Literacy in medieval towns, for instance, has recently attracted a substantial amount of historical scholarship.[24] Indeed, scholars have expanded the definition of literacy to such an extent that the term is sometimes put aside in favour of more nuanced language. Rather than 'literacy', it is not uncommon to find terms such as 'use of the written word', or 'use of literacy', or even 'pragmatic knowledge of many textual forms' in work on this topic.[25] However, few scholars

[24] The Medieval Urban Literacy project, which began in 2007, has resulted in numerous publications such as, *Writing and the Administration of Medieval Towns: Medieval Urban Literacy I*, eds. Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska (Turnhout, 2014), vii.
[25] *Uses of the Written Word in Medieval Towns: Medieval Urban Literacy II*, eds. Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska (Turnhout, 2014); John Higgitt, 'Introduction' in, *Roman, Runes and Ogham: Medieval Inscriptions in the Insular World and on the Continent*, eds. John Higgitt, Katherine Forsyth and David N. Parsons (Donington, 2001), 1; Sheila Lindenbaum, 'London Texts and Literate Practice' in, *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. D. Wallace (Cambridge, 1999), 287.

interested in medieval literacy use evidence offered by inscriptions.[26] As Andreas Zajic has commented of large-scale medieval textual display, 'as far as I can see, epigraphic monuments have scarcely been discussed as sources revealing aspects of the urban or civic use of writing'.[27] This insight is certainly true of the studies of literacy in medieval London. While Sheila Lindenbaum's work on literate practice in London, and Caroline Barron's research on the reading habits of merchants, both provide useful insights, they focus on book ownership as an indication of literacy.[28] This ignores the fact that, as this thesis will argue, letters could be encountered in many situations outside of books. Making or owning an inscription of fewer than five words entails an entirely different level of engagement with, and understanding of, letters than is necessary to read a book, yet does not in turn imply a complete inability to do so. For example, as I explore further in Chapter One, inscriptions were an integral part of the visual experience of a medieval church, with letters carved into the masonry, inserted into funerary monuments, and painted on stained glass. Medieval Londoners would have frequently been exposed to these inscribed letters, especially given that the inhabitants of medieval London would have encountered a church or monastic building every tenth of a mile.[29]

If large 'epigraphic monuments' have failed to gain scholarly attention, then inscriptions on small private objects have been disregarded altogether. In analysing small metal epigraphy, I

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[26] One of this few is Andreas Zajic, 'Texts on Public Display: Strategies of Visualising Epigraphic Writing' in, *Writing and the Administration of Medieval Towns: Medieval Urban Literacy I*, eds. Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska (Turnhout, 2014), 389-426. Another is possibly Terje Spurkland, see T. Spurkland, 'Scandinavian Medieval Runic Inscriptions: An Interface Between Literacy and Orality?' in, *Roman, Runes and Ogham: Medieval Inscriptions in the Insular World and on the Continent*, eds. John Higgitt, Katherine Forsyth and David N. Parsons (Donington, 2001), 127. While Spurkland's article is not explicitly about literacy, it does consider aspects of writing and reading while commenting on linguistic aspects of runic inscriptions that are the article's focus. Spurkland is therefore one of few to look at small private objects, although these objects are very different from the ones under discussion in this thesis because they are informal notes rather than inscriptions that are incorporated into the design of an object.
[27] Andreas Zajic, 'Texts on Public Display: Strategies of Visualising Epigraphic Writing', 393.
[28] Lindenbaum, 'London Texts and Literate Practice', 248-310; Caroline Barron, 'What did Medieval Merchants Read?' in, *Medieval Merchants and Money: Essays in Honour of James L. Bolton*, eds. Martin Allen and Matthew Davies (London, 2016), 43-70.
[29] John Schofield, 'Saxon and Medieval Parish Churches in London: A Review', *Paper in Transactions of London & Middlesex Archaeological Society*, Vol 45 (1994) http://www.colat.org.uk/assets/doc/saxon-and-medieval-parish-churches.pdf , 24.

intend to add evidence from these different kinds of inscription into the discussion about how text was used in the medieval urban environment. Unlike public inscriptions created by institutions, these small finds demonstrate a choice made by individual Londoners to own, even to wear, metal letters. My aim here is not to survey the literacy skills of medieval Londoners using these objects. The levels of reading and writing skills attained by their owners and makers does not constitute a measure of sophistication that is relevant in my analysis of these texted objects. Instead, I will argue that the desire to interact with text in the creative and diverse ways demonstrated in these objects ought to be considered in our understanding of the use of letters in London alongside book ownership or educational provision.

Epigraphic Ideas

A third key contribution of this thesis is to carve out a space for small, inscribed metal objects within the existing field of epigraphic study. The portable items that are the focus of this dissertation allow for a unique exploration of the complex relationships between inscription, image, form, and function on a small scale and across several different categories of medieval object. The thesis aims to reframe these pieces as artistic works, and develop scholarly understandings of epigraphy by exploring how their different constitutive elements functioned together.

Until recently, art historians had primarily looked to inscriptions as a handy way of giving an object provenance, searching for names, locations, dates, or stylistic clues to confirm theories or dispel myths about where an object fits in the greater scheme of artistic movements, national heritage, or research potential.[30] Scholars such as Antony Eastmond and Ilene Forsyth have analysed the visual, material, and spatial aspects of inscriptions to look beyond their

[30] Elizabeth Okasha and Jennifer O'Reilly, 'An Anglo-Saxon Portable Altar: Inscription and Iconography', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 47 (1984), 32-51.

content for meaning.[31] Their work has had significant influence on the approaches of this thesis, in asserting that the presentation of text on objects is central to understanding its significance. However, their focus is once more largely on public, permanent objects. The study of inscriptions on more personal objects is more advanced in the history of Islamic art than studies of Western art, with scholars such as Sheila Blair using innovative methods to analyse this material and to draw conclusions about its makers and owners.[32] Nonetheless, work on small finds, such as those from London, is still limited.

This may be because, traditionally, material on this scale does not fit into the established terminology on which epigraphic study was built. Renowned medieval epigraphist Robert Favreau defined inscriptions in his broadly titled *Épigraphie Médiévale* as being large, public, and permanent.[33] These criteria do not apply to the objects analysed in this dissertation. All of the objects in this study are small and portable, even wearable. While they might be displayed in view of others, for example when worn as dress accessories, they cannot be considered public, either in terms of audience or ownership. As for being permanent, these objects constitute remarkable survivals because they were not created with the intention of lasting beyond the lifecycle of their owner. Another problematic but widely used definition of medieval epigraphy was put forward by Rudolf Kloos, who described it as writing executed by those outside of the spheres of scribal activity.[34] While this definition is based on more subtle conextual concerns, an improvement on Favreau, epigraphy is still fundamentally defined in a negative sense: rather than being its own thing, inscriptions are here simply 'not smart writing'. The distinction

[31] Antony Eastmond, 'Textual Icons: Viewing Inscriptions in Medieval Georgia' in, *Viewing Inscriptions in the Late Antique and Medieval World*, ed. Antony Eastmond (Cambridge, 2015), 76-98; Ilene H. Forsyth, 'Word-play in the Cloister at Moissac' in, *Romanesque Art and Thought in the Twelfth Century: Essays in Honour of Walter Cahn*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Pennsylvania, 2008), 154-178.
[32] Sheila S. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions* (Edinburgh, 1998); Blair, 'Place, Space and Style: Craftsmen's Signatures in Medieval Islamic Art' in, *Viewing Inscriptions in the Late Antique and Medieval World*, ed. Antony Eastmond (Cambridge, 2015) 230-248.
[33] Robert Favreau, *Épigraphie Médiévale* (Turnhout, 1997), 31.
[34] Rudolf Kloos, *Einführung in die Epigraphik des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit* (Darmstadt, 1992), 2.

between writing and inscription is valid and important, and will be explored in detail in this thesis, but this definition unnecessarily casts scribal activity as the benchmark of letter-making, with letters made of anything but ink being interlopers, their makers appropriating a system that was not designed for their purposes. It also creates the impression that these two types of letter-maker had no contact, and by extension, no influence on each other. Extant objects and manuscripts explored in this thesis pose a challenge to this notion. At an obvious intersection between epigraphic objects and manuscripts stand wax seals. Even within manuscripts, gilded illuminated initials could be argued to have more in common with inscription than writing in terms of style, function, and materiality.[35] Rather than lumping together all non-ink letters, this thesis will therefore be specific in its material boundaries, concentrating on small-scale metal inscribed objects. Even this encompasses diverse materials and making-methods, as well as types of object. However, in comparing objects of a similar scale, made of materials with common physical properties, this study will offer insights that are not possible when taking epigraphy as an umbrella term covering materials and contexts that are each laden with their own meaning.

In short, this thesis will draw on terminological traditions from both epigraphy and art history for its conceptual underpinning, in recognition that the metal letters under discussion fall firmly in neither camp. Such letters, as I have already begun to suggest, were experienced and owned by Londoners, some of whom may not have been able confidently to compose and comprehend them. Thus these examples of private epigraphy reveal a textuality that is personal rather than monumental, and object-based rather than exclusively textual. My qualification of these objects as what I want to call 'private epigraphy' acknowledges an oversight in the study of medieval inscriptions in defining its material. I aim to both shed epigraphic light on a new

[35] For inscriptions in books see Anna-Dorothee von den Brincken, 'Monumental Legends on Medieval Manuscript Maps: Notes on Designed Capital Letters on Maps of Large Size (Demonstrated from the Problem of Dating the Vercelli Map, Thirteenth Century)', *Imago Mundi*, Vol. 42 (1990), 9-25.

category of objects and, at the same time, bridge the terminological gap in how such objects have been studied by epigraphists and art historians, reuniting the often separate worlds of materiality and text.

The final major contribution of this thesis is its mobilisation of a mixed methodology, bringing together art historical analysis with a diverse range of critical approaches drawn from archaeology, literature, and inscription studies. This is particularly necessary when putting epigraphic material front and centre, given the inherent cross-over in these objects between matters of text and materiality. In employing this interdisciplinary approach, I will foreground small-scale metal letters as an area of serious interest for scholars from various fields and, by example, also offer a potential path forward for a better art historical understanding of the overlooked archaeological finds, beyond both London and the Middle Ages.

The study of inscriptions has attracted scholars from a variety of methodological backgrounds from philology to archaeology, and an even wider variety of research interests both geographically and in terms of material.[36] But inscriptions of the sort discussed in this thesis—with a three-dimensional, tactile nature, positioned on an object—adds to them a level of complexity which requires expertise from many different disciplines.[37] Many scholars analyse the contents of inscriptions without much interest in their material form, for example whether they have been carved in stone or cast in pewter, their scale, or their placement on an object. Similarly, philologists, runologists, and historians analyse the language used in inscriptions, but for the most part treat the content of inscriptions as 'epigraphic texts'.[38] Likewise, epigraphists such as Robert Favreau, for example, analyse inscriptions as a public expression of

[36] The collection of essays, *Roman, Runes and Ogham*, ed. Higgitt et al. illustrates the broad spectrum of methodologies, with contributions from those mentioned above as well as runologists, historians, palaeographers and those interested in the digital humanities.
[37] Ronnie Ferguson, 'Dating the Vernacular Inscription on the Wall of St Mark's Treasury in Venice: A Case Study in Medieval Epigraphic Philology', *Italian Studies*, 72:3 (2017), 225. Ferguson blames the complexity of these sources for their neglect in scholarship.
[38] Andreas Zajic, 'Texts on Public Display', 411.

contemporary literary trends.[39] I employ an interdisciplinary methodology in this thesis to do more than simply access the contents of epigraphic texts. I understand these objects as fragments of a larger whole, parts of a material culture of a city and as part of a landscape that displayed visual letters of all sizes and media, and for many different purposes with many intentions. They therefore demand an approach that employs archaeological and historical research as well as art historical analysis to situate their makers and owners within the prevailing material and systemic structures of the time and place.

Structure and Argument

This thesis is divided into five chapters that together seek to reveal a previously overlooked tradition of private epigraphy, the metal letter, and its various impacts on our understanding of art and life in medieval London. It starts by situating small, metal, inscribed objects within the experiences of making and viewing text in medieval London. The middle three chapters then explore three levels of communication in which these objects participated, progressing from personal, one-to-one communication, to expressing group identities to a community, and lastly ideas of what we might call 'mass communication'. The final chapter represents the culmination of these ideas, exploring a series of case studies that showcase the design strategies for medieval epigraphy which emerge from the preceding chapters, mobilising metal letters on active objects to interrogate afresh the agency of words on personal possessions. In sum, the thesis argues that in private epigraphy from medieval London we can observe a rich and creative use of letters, as much visual as literary. The compositional strategies used by the makers of these texts vary depending not only on subject matter, but crucially also upon both the form of the object and its purpose.

[39] Robert Favreau, 'REX, LEX, LUX, PAX: Jeux de mots et jeux de lettres dans les inscriptions Médiévales', *Biblioteque de l'Ecole de Chartes*, t. 161 (2003), 628.

The arguments of each chapter are worth framing in further detail here to prepare the reader for their unfolding structure. Chapter One begins the thesis by introducing the idea that the way in which inscribed letters are made and experienced differentiates them from other medieval processes of 'writing' and 'reading' as they were traditionally understood. I argue that, with such different creation processes, approaching metalwork text only for its content misses key aspects of these valuable artefacts. The objects discussed in this thesis involve experiencing letters without necessarily 'reading' them, and composing with letters without necessarily 'writing' them. Starting with an exploration of making letters in the medieval city, scribes and metalworkers are discussed side-by-side in order to better contextualise what it might have meant to write in the city compared with the experience of those who made three-dimensional letters. I explore how researchers to date have viewed the twin realms of scribes and metalworkers, as well as many of the assumptions they have made about these two types of makers. Through this comparison, I suggest that the social status and education of scribes and metalworkers are among the key aspects that have set them apart in terms of their relative agency in the minds of modern researchers. The second section continues this same critical focus through a more historiographical lens, exploring how historians have approached medieval literacy. It argues that inscriptions present an opportunity to explore uses of letters that, unlike those in books and manuscripts, transcend the binary of those who can and those who cannot, those with access and those who are excluded. This chapter continues by exploring the different ways in which words were encountered by Londoners in their original landscape. The varying functions of the letters encountered emphasise even further that Londoners had a far more complex relationship with these inscriptions than simply as readers. I propose here that, in the same way that letters in manuscripts had an established role in governance structures, epigraphic letters also had well-established roles in the urban environment's visual culture. The final section of this chapter addresses the problem of terminology in epigraphic study. Unlike manuscript scholarship, the study of inscriptions does not benefit from palaeographic taxonomy.

The chapter ends setting out a methodological approach that is used for the remainder of the thesis to describe the characteristics of letter-forms encountered on small metal objects.

Chapter Two is the first of a group of chapters to focus on a specific form of inscription in context, in this case how inscriptions on metal jewellery performed the role of expressing personal relationships. The key proposition of this chapter is that inscribed jewellery in medieval London had the desirable quality of invoking and reifying relationships and affiliations. The intended purpose of letters on such pieces thus differs from that of conventional 'written' texts, and should be viewed as such. The chapter begins with the suggestion that private epigraphy used text in a way that is particularly creative and, crucially, utilised the form and purpose of the object of which it formed part. By considering the variety of relationships that can be revealed through engraved inscription on small metal objects, the chapter evidences how these varied objects are a rich resource that offer a unique insight into how medieval Londoners interacted with words on metal objects, and used them to express and signify relationships. I argue that, although the names of their makers and owners are lost to the historical record, these objects are not anonymous but manifestly personal, if given the space to reveal their context. The link between gifting customs and these intimate possessions offers a particularly good opportunity to observe the private lives of Londoners. The subject of the second half of this chapter is the linguistics in the epigraphs of such jewellery and how these in particular helped them to express relationships. Here I explore the ways in which these extant inscriptions communicate using a variety of languages, obscurantism, pseudo-script, and other epigraphic idiosyncrasies. I argue that the manipulation, imitation, contraction, and adaptation of words does not point to ignorance or dismissal of text among craftspeople and consumers in medieval England, a leitmotif that will continue throughout the thesis. From the material evidence that survives it is clear that the desire to fasten words to their hearts, carry them in their pockets, and wear them around their fingers, was strong in medieval Londoners. Words were personal, and these objects in the present scholarship seem to come up against a culture of standardised written language in

which they do not belong. In order to understand them, we must accept our own illiteracy and translate by using the logics—ways of viewing and reading, of associating text with image and form—rather than by relying solely on the linguistics, of the time.

The third chapter develops my argument from the personal to the communal, taking another ubiquitous form of small, metal London object, seal matrices, and focusing on their role in projecting identity. Its central argument is that seal matrices found in London demonstrate an emphasis on group identities—especially religious, familial, occupational, and geographical—which added another layer of authority to an individual's seal. Bridging the divide between written sources and material culture, this chapter will look at surviving matrices alongside documentary evidence of seal use in medieval London. It draws particularly on the records of Plea and Memoranda Rolls of the city from the late thirteenth to the early fifteenth centuries. Mentions of seals in these documents reveal that they were taken seriously in the administration of the city, and that they were used in wider material culture beyond being attached to documents. There is particular emphasis on seal matrices belonging to private individuals, as these are well-represented in these documents and are under-used in art historical discussion of seal matrices. The medieval seal matrices found in London represent a broad social range of seal use that reflects the people who did business in the medieval city. These include people of diverse social and economic statuses, professions, and geographical origins. In putting extant seal matrices in conversation with evidence of seal use, this chapter investigates how these expressions of identity operated in practice, as well as their status and perceived significance in London's administrative culture, to analyse design choices.

Having established the place of metal letters in Londoners' personal lives and assertions of group identities within their community, Chapter Four moves to an even broader sphere, that of medieval Christian religious devotion as expressed once more through personal metal objects. This chapter uses evidence from pilgrim souvenirs found in London to understand how metal letters could be used in what we might term as mass communication. I propose that shrine-

keepers thought strategically about how inscriptions and imagery would be presented together on these small souvenirs to promote the popularity of their cult. The chapter centres around six examples of souvenirs taken as case studies: the first three of these exemplify strategies of borrowing, visual qualities from other objects imported as efficient visual references, situating metal letters in a broader context of the visual letter; the subsequent three are explored for their more novel uses of letters that interacted with imagery to display a message that was unique to the identity of a particular saint. These base metal objects, replicated from moulds, evidence sophisticated and nuanced uses of text to tell stories of hallowed lives and reflect the experiences of pilgrims who visit sacred spaces.

The last chapter of the thesis draws together the approaches and ideas of the thesis thus far into a final, creative adventure in epigraphy. The culmination of the methods and evidence of the previous four chapters, Chapter Five uses the approach to small metal objects developed from the preceding case study chapters; but in a departure from the others, it addresses objects that cannot easily be categorised. Broadly, these objects are all active household items that utilised a specifically playful approach to text, through which we can see letter-forms asserting agency through tactility as well as visual means. In these artefacts, metal letters are not part of their purpose but define the way in which they would have been experienced by their owners. The argument central to this chapter is that the craftspeople who made these objects had creative agency and that this material represents a sophisticated tradition of private epigraphy. In sum, the way in which letters and images work together on inscribed objects from medieval London reveal that makers were capable of a high degree of creativity, even in lowly, almost disposable objects. My approach here is to analyse the interplay between the words and images cast or engraved on these objects, and how these relate to the object itself and its purpose. The material includes purse frames, utensils, a mirror case, and a whistle. The makers of these objects played with, even sometimes abandoned altogether, the linear arrangement and typical orientation of letters that governs a codex or a page. These metal letters, the closing of the thesis argues, have

a visual rhetoric of their own. Despite their often staid subject matter and replicated production methods, they remain a unique expression of the ways in which their makers used letter-forms on portable, private objects.

Chapter One: Conextualising Visual Letters in Medieval London: Making, Viewing, and Terminology

As I thrast thrughe out the thronge

Amonge them all, my hode was gonn,

Nethles I let not longe,

To kyngs benche tyll I come.

By fore a juge I kneled anon

I prayd hym for Gods sake he would take hede.

Full rewfully to hym I gan make my mone

For lacke of money I may not spede,

As I thrust throughout the throng

Amongst them all, my hood was gone,

So I did not wait long

Until to Kings Bench I come

Before the judge I knelt a while;

I prayed him for God's sake to take my heed.

Full ruefully to him I began to complain;

For lack of money I may not succeed

London Lickpenny, Anon.[1]

The 1410 poem, *London Lickpenny,* follows the progress of a poor Kentish plowman around the city's various courts in search of redress for some undisclosed injustice. Starting in Westminster, he makes his way through the city to Billingsgate, begging and imploring an unsympathetic cast of indifferent judges, lawyers, and clerks as he goes. Along the way his hood is stolen and, at the end of his journey, he finds it for sale in a shop but cannot afford to buy it back. Throughout the poem are moments in which the literate structures that underpin London's legal systems compound a sense of hopeless injustice and frustration. The plowman lacks both the education to participate in this literate culture, and the money to pay one of its members to guide him. When he reaches the King's Bench, he observes the clerks: '*Benethe hym sat clerks, a great rowt; Fast they writen by one assent'* (beneath him sat the clerks in a great row, writing fast with one mind).[2] Here the clerks are presented as limbs of a bureaucratic creature sharing one mind, impenetrable to the plowman. When one shouts something that may be concerning his own case, the plowman, exasperated, *'wist not wele what he ment'* (did not know well what he meant).[3] Communication systems separate those working in London's legal structures from the plowman; his lack of money means that they are mutually incomprehensible. Later he speaks to a lawyer in Westminster Hall, '*"I wot not what thou menest," gan he say. "Ley downe sylvar, or here thow may not spede"'* ("I do not know what you mean", he began to say. "Lay down silver or you will

[1] British Library MS Harley 542 fols. 102r-104r. This poem used to be attributed to John Lydgate, an opinion that literary scholars have been disputing since the beginning of the twentieth century. See Robert Withington, 'Queen Margaret's Entry into London, 1445', *Modern Philology*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (19150), 54; John A. Yunck, 'Dan Denarius: the Almighty Penny and the Fifteenth Century Poets', *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1961), 212; C. David Benson, 'Some Poets' Tours of Medieval London: Varieties of Literary Urban Experience', *Essays in Medieval Studies: Proceedings of the Illinois Medieval Association,* Vol. 24 (2007), 16. MS 542 is not the original copy of the poem but is the earlier of two manuscripts in which the poem appears. It is a miscellany of works compiled in the last quarter of the 16th century. The later manuscript, British Library MS Harley 367, attributes the poem to John Lydgate in a contemporary note. There are numerous variations between the two versions, see James M. Dean ed., *Medieval English Political Writings* (Michigan, 1996), 183.
[2] Lydgate, *London Lickpenny*, lines17-18.
[3] Lydgate, *London Lickpenny*, line 21.

not succeed").[4] *London Lickpenny* expresses a feeling of frustration towards this 'documentary culture', to borrow a term from Sheila Lindenbaum's work, a powerlessness arising from the complexity of bureaucratic structures and suspicion that they are rife with corruption.[5]

Nevertheless, participation in public life in medieval London often depended upon understanding the visual word, which accounts in part for the expansion of literacy skills to a larger proportion of Londoners during the later Middle Ages.[6] The pervasive nature of written language in political and ecclesiastical power structures drove an increase in demand for, and attainment of, reading and writing skills. Londoners wanted more schools to be established in the city, and requirements for literacy skills became expected of a higher proportion of its populace. Ecclesiastical institutions had a monopoly on the formal teaching of reading and writing, although increasingly the city's secular community of citizens influenced the foundation of new schools to which they could send their sons.[7]

Given this elevated status of the word in medieval London, it is unsurprising that it was not confined to the media of parchment and ink. The *London Lickpenny* presents a view of interaction with words as being part of a closed-off world. But inscriptions, including those on private objects like those under discussion here, present an altogether different view of the word: letters that reached out to viewers and became part of their lives. Discussing metal letters as part of this culture is not, however, without difficulties. The term 'reading' does not quite describe a viewer's experience of metal texts; likewise, 'writing' is also a difficult term when it comes to describing how metal letters were made, given formal 'writing' in medieval London was the purview of the professional scribe, materially specific both in terms of tools and media. The resulting conundrum of 'reading' and 'writing' in relation to metal letters is the subject of this

[4] Lydgate, *London Lickpenny*, lines 47-48.
[5] Sheila Lindenbaum, 'London Texts and Literate Practice', 286. Lindenbaum acknowledges that this mistrust of literate structures sometimes boiled over into rebellion in London.
[6] M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307, 3rd Edition* (Chichester, 2013), 19.
[7] Sylvia Thrupp, *The Merchant Class*, 156-7.

chapter, divided into two parts. The first outlines the problem that faces examples of private epigraphy, as objects caught between definitions of writing and making. To help contextualise this issue, I will build a picture of what it was to make letters and write letters in medieval London, reconstructing the professional world of metalworkers in conversation with that of scribes to understand why there is such disparity between the levels of creative agency attributed by scholars to each group. I will suggest that incomplete modern ideas of literacy have been forced upon these speaking objects: running interference that has rendered them all but silent in the historical record. The second part of this chapter then delves into the place of visual letters themselves in the specific setting of medieval London's material culture. I will explore interaction between Londoners and text across different media, and how the forms of letters could affect their purpose and experience. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to create a foundation of ideas about the place of the private epigraphic objects that are the subject of the rest of this thesis. It will ground this material in a textual world of medieval London that does not interrogate metal letters through a lens of modern 'literacy', but in the context of textuality—public and private, written and made, devotional and secular—in which they originally operated.

Part 1: Writers and Letter-Makers in Medieval London

A non-fictional case heard at the mayor's court at the Guildhall in November 1376 resembles that of the plowman in *London Lickpenny*: a story of loss on a journey through the city. Through this non-fictional case, however, we can nonetheless observe a similar status for visual letters in London in actual practice, rather than only as satirical comment. The unfortunate plaintiff was one Luigi Gentyl of Genoa. On his way from Westminster into the city to have dinner, Luigi 'thrast thughe-out the thronge' on Fleet Bridge and found that his purse had been

unfastened from his belt and stolen.[8] He did not realise that his purse was gone until after dinner, when he went directly to the Guildhall where, by two o'clock in the afternoon, he had made his 'mone' before the mayor. Inside his purse had been some letters and his seal matrix, and it was the loss of the latter in particular that prompted him to notify the Guildhall as soon as he could.[9] He took care to describe his seal, which was drawn by the scribe tasked with noting down the incident, and instructed that if it were to appear on any documents after that day they should be considered void.[10]

Unlike the Kentish plowman, Luigi's possession of letters and a personal seal implies that he was comfortable enough with London's documentary culture to interact with it on a regular basis. Once he reached the Guildhall, his case was recorded in the Plea and Memoranda Rolls of the mayor's court. This court developed during the thirteenth century and had a broad remit that only excluded disputes concerning land ownership.[11] Cases often involved London's highly litigious merchant class and their commercial disputes. Records were kept selectively, so extant documented cases represent only a small fraction of what once existed. It might be that Luigi's case was preserved because of the potential for fraudulent use of his stolen seal in the future. Although the seal was lost, the drawing made by the scribe still exists as part of the record and shows that its shield had a crossed fess and pale motif (figure 1.01). This drawing

[8] *Calendar of plea and memoranda rolls preserved among the archives of the Corporation of the City of London at the Guildhall. [Vol. 2], A.D. 1364-1381*, ed. A.H. Thomas (Cambridge, 1929), 231. The record states that Luigi lost his seal on Westminster Bridge. The modern Westminster Bridge that is currently across the Thames did not exist in the fourteenth century, the only crossing of the Thames was London Bridge which connected the city to Southwark. Because the record specifies Westminster Bridge rather than Southwark Bridge or London Bridge, I have concluded that Luigi was coming from the direction of Westminster into the city and passed over a bridge on the way. This was most probably Fleet Bridge, which crosses a tributary of the Thames to the West of the city, as it is the only bridge on the way from Westminster.

[9] The record does not describe the purse, which may itself have been of value, nor does it state that it contained any money. Luigi's motive for reporting the purse missing was not to find who stole it or have it recovered, but to have his seal cancelled.

[10] *Calendar of plea and memoranda rolls, A.D. 1364-1381*, ed. Thomas, 231.

[11] Caroline Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Its Government and People* (Oxford, 2004) p.154; *Calendar of plea and memoranda rolls preserved among the archives of the Corporation of the City of London at the Guildhall. [Vol. 1], A.D. 1381-1412*, ed. A.H. Thomas (Cambridge, 1932), vii–xli.

and description together would have enabled the identification of this defunct seal on any subsequent legal documents, so that these could be voided. It would be necessary, therefore, for Luigi to acquire a new personal seal that differed sufficiently in design so as not to be confused with the stolen one. The fact that he reported his personal seal missing and had it cancelled within hours of it being stolen also implies that Luigi needed to replace it promptly, anticipating having to use it the near future.

The metal letters on Luigi's seal matrix, which consisted of his name encircling the motif, were experienced differently from the inky cursive that populated its double on the court's parchment roll.[12] Functionally, the metal letters incised in reverse on a seal matrix were intended to be imprinted onto wax seals. This process was necessary in order for these letters to be interpreted word-for-word by viewers, but their general tenor could be understood even in their reverse metal form. As discussed further in Chapter 3, words inscribed onto seals were important not just for their literal content, but in their very presence on a ubiquitous and recognisable type of object with a socially acknowledged role.[13] Thus, although the inscription on a metal seal matrix was not immediately legible, and usually consisted of simply the owner's name, they held an elevated significance conferred by practices of seal use.

The seal matrix that Luigi lost on Fleet Bridge, then, was another part of the documentary culture represented by records like the memoranda rolls.[14] Yet makers of small

[12] Luigi's seal was most likely made of metal, although other materials were available such as ivory or stone. While non-metal seals were more popular in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, by the later Middle Ages metal was the much more common material for later medieval personal seal dies. T. A. Heslop, 'Seals as Evidence for Metalworking in England in the Later Twelfth Century' in, *Art and Patronage in the English Romanesque*, eds. Sarah Macready and F. H. Thompson (Avon, 1986), 50-51.

[13] There has been lots of work recently on the semiotics of medieval seals, which will be explored in more detail in chapter 3 of this thesis. For the function and semiotics of high medieval seals see Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago: Signs of Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2011).

[14] Key works on medieval seals include, *Seals and Their Context in the Middle Ages*, ed. Phillipp R. Schofield (Oxford, 2015), a collection of essays that include contributions on diverse aspects of medieval seals from their purpose in different contexts, the meaning of their motifs, and the status of those who made them. Another collection of essays puts medieval seals into a global context see, *Making and Marking Connections across the Medieval World*, ed. Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak (Leeds, 2018). For a more local view of seals see P. D. A. Harvey and Andrew McGuinness, *A Guide to British Medieval Seals* (Dorchester, 1996).

metal inscriptions like this have been met with a markedly different reception in the historical record than the scribe who wrote down Luigi's case in the Memoranda Rolls. Consider the two quotes below, demonstrative of the different approaches scholars use in their analysis of those who wrote ink letters and those who made inscribed letters:

> The scribe could not have studied an exemplar letter by letter but must have read several words, held them in his head as sounds, and then copied what he remembered by a sort of internal dictation.
>
> - Daniel Wakelin[15]

> As craftsmen in this period tended to specialise in a particular material rather than a type of object, a wide variety of artisans were probably active in making seals.
>
> - John McEwan [16]

The first is an intimate analysis of scribal experience. In his study of the role of the scribe in book production, Daniel Wakelin describes both an external and an internal process, using the output of one to deduce the other. The manuscript at the centre of his analysis is a fifteenth-century copy of the *Brut Chronicle*, Peterhouse MS 190, in a cursive script. He comments on the practice of cursive writing among scribes of this period, but more specifically attempts to get inside the head of one of these craftspeople. As a result, the scribe is not nearly as anonymous—and by extension more tangibly creative and skilled—as the generic seal 'craftsmen' referred to in the second quote. Whereas Wakelin asserts a specific, projected conclusion—albeit one that cannot possibly ever be verified—the second quote is wholly inconclusive as to the specifics of

[15] Daniel Wakelin, 'Writing the Words' in, *The Production of Books in England 1350-1500*, eds. Alexandra Gillespie and Daniel Wakelin (Cambridge, 2011), 51.
[16] John A. McEwan, *Seals in Medieval London: A Catalogue* (Woodbridge, 2016), ix.

the makers it discusses. John McEwan does not attempt to venture any particulars about who made seal matrices, their processes of manufacture or internal thought. Wakelin's theoretical scribe is implicitly invested with an agency that suggests a formative role in a manuscript beyond making marks on parchment; McEwan's maker remains vague to the point of total anonymity.

Up to a point, the contrasts in these exemplified approaches are understandable. Wakelin and McEwan address medieval makers from the perspectives of different disciplines and within the contexts of varying types of research output. Wakelin is a literary scholar and palaeographer who researches book production and scribal processes. In his work on the scribal process behind correcting errors, he uses both the examples of individual scribes and quantitative analysis of the Huntington Library's manuscript collection in order to analyse how scribes corrected errors when copying texts. The central point that he aims to prove is that 'medieval scribes think'.[17] McEwan, on the other hand, is a historian of visual culture, who has written extensively on medieval seals.[18] The quote above is taken from his introduction to a catalogue of London seal impressions, a far more descriptive work. McEwan has also produced work on the careers of makers of metal seal matrices and their social status, but still even this work does not attempt explorations of the actual processes of seal makers, the skills they would need, or discuss a maker in conversation with their output.[19]

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[17] Daniel Wakelin, *Scribal Correction and Literary Craft: English Manuscripts 1375-1510* (Cambridge, 2014), 3.

[18] As well as the catalogue referenced above, McEwan has also written essays and articles including, John McEwan, 'The Seals of London's Governing Elite in the Thirteenth Century' in, *Thirteenth Century England XIV: Proceedings of the Aberystwyth and Lampeter Conference 2011*, eds. Janet Burton, Phillipp Schofield and Björn Weiler (Woodbridge, 2013), 43-60; John McEwan, 'The Formation of a Sealing Society: London in the Twelfth Century' in, *Medieval Coins and Seals: Constructing Identity, Signifying Power*, ed. Susan Solway (Turnhout, 2015), 319-330; John McEwan. 'Making a Mark in Medieval London: The Social and Economic Status of Seal-Makers' in, *Seals and their Context in the Middle Ages*, ed. Phillipp R. Schofield (Oxford, 2015), 77-88; John Mc Ewan, 'Does Size Matter? Seals in England and Wales, ca. 1200-1500' in, *A Companion to Seals in the Middle Ages*, ed. Laura J. Whatley (Leiden, 2019), 103-126.

[19] John McEwan. 'Making a Mark in Medieval London: The Social and Economic Status of Seal-Makers' in, *Seals and their Context in the Middle Ages*, ed. Phillipp R. Schofield (Oxford, 2015), 77-88.

The varying distinction with which scribes and metalworkers are treated is echoed in further works on these subjects by other scholars, suggesting a concrete set of assumptions about each across the medieval field. In disciplines relating to manuscript studies, researchers most often treat scribes as individuals. Some, such as Linne Mooney, Estelle Stubbs, Alexandra Gillespie, Sarah Wood, and Jane Roberts, have attempted to trace individual scribes' careers by assessing the palaeographic features of extant manuscripts.[20] M. B. Parkes, Ralph Hanna, M. T. Clanchy, and Stephen Partridge's influential works approach scribal professionals as a group, dissecting their methods but also nonetheless venturing statements about their individual lives and motivations.[21] This close analysis of 'scribal behaviour', as Partridge terms it in his work, does not have an equivalent in scholarly discourse surrounding medieval metalworking practitioners.[22] Instead, considerations of metalworkers have usually been approached by archaeologists and art historians, often with differing results. Archaeologists tend to give emphasis to understanding technical factors in their studies of metalworking. In the context of medieval London, archaeologists Justine Bayley, Derek Keene, and Ronald Homer have examined the evidence of metalworkers in London.[23] They have produced surveys of the craft's operations in the city, focusing on techniques and infrastructure rather than how an individual craftsperson might go about creating an object. Art historians who discuss metalwork, by

[20] Linne R. Mooney and Estelle Stubbs, *Scribes and the City: London Guildhall Clerks and the Dissemination of Middle English Literature, 1375-1425* (Woodbridge, 2013); Alexandra Gillespie, 'Reading Chaucer's Words to Adam, *The Chaucer Review*, Vol. 42. No. 3 (2008), 269-283; Sarah Wood, 'Two Annoted Piers Plownam Manuscripts from London and the Early Reception of the B and C Versions', *Chaucer Review*, Vol. 52, No, 3 (2017), 274-297; Jane Roberts, 'Giving Scribe B a Name and a Clutch of London Manuscripts from c. 1400' *Medium Aevum*, Vol. 80, No. 2 (2011), 447-470.
[21] M. B. Parkes, *Their Hands Before Our Eyes: A Closer Look at Scribes* (Aldershot, 2008); Ralph Hanna, *London Literature, 1300-1380* (Cambridge, 2005); Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*; Stephen Partridge, 'Designing the Page' in, *The Production of Books in England 1350-1500*, eds. Alexandra Gillespie and Daniel Wakelin (Cambridge, 2011), 79-103.
[22] Stephen Partridge, 'Designing the Page' in, *The Production of Books in England 1350-1500*, Alexandra Gillespie and Daniel Wakelin (Cambridge, 2011), 80.
[23] Justine Bayley and Derek Keene both contributed to, *Medieval Metalworking: Papers Presented at a Conference Held in London, 13-14th January, 1996*, eds. Crossley and David Wyatt (London, 1996); Ronald F. Homer, 'Tin, Lead and Pewter' in, *English Medieval Industries*, eds. John Blair and Nigel Ramsay (Guildford, 1991), 57-80.

contrast, often focus on who owned or commissioned the work, and give them creative agency over the maker of the artefact. A notable exception to this is H. S. Kingsford, whose work on seal engravers attempts to identify some makers of individual seals and even suggests the existence of a school of engravers based on visual analysis of extant seal matrices and impressions.[24] More recent works specific to metalwork from London include those by Sally Badham, John Blair, and Elizabeth New.[25] Their approaches are the exact opposite of those of the archaeologists above, as their starting points are the objects themselves rather than methods of production or individuals involved, which are mostly bypassed altogether. Both of these approaches have the effect of divorcing metalworkers from the products of their labour.

Disciplinary differences, however, do not entirely explain the varying degrees of agency attributed to these two groups of craftspeople in the secondary literature. For example, art historian Jessica Berenbeim in her work on medieval English documentary culture writes about both manuscripts and seals.[26] When talking about manuscript illumination, she considers artists and their choices. For example, take this statement about a 1380 grant to Merton College to hold a property in mortmain:

> … it seems that these figures were added by a collaborating artist, and this revision implies a choice to emphasise the corporate nature of the college as an institution.[27]

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[24] H. S. Kingsford, 'Some English Medieval Seal-Engravers', *The Archaeological Journal*, Vol. 97 (1940) 155-180. This work demonstrates that it is possible to think about metalwork in terms of individual makers, although even Kingsford conceded, 'I am very much afraid that at least half of the craftsmen with whom I have been able to deal were not seal engravers at all', 178.

[25] In art history the subjects of monumental brasses and seal matrices have prompted scholars to explore metalworking specifically in medieval London. See, Badham and Norris, *Early Incised Slabs and Brasses*; John Blair, 'English Monumental Brasses Before 1350: Types, Patterns and Workshops' in, *The Earliest English Brasses: Patronage, Style and Workshops 1270-1350*, ed. John Coales (London, 1987), 133-175; Elizabeth A. New, '(Un)conventional Images. A Case-study of Radial Motifs on Personal Seals' in, *Seals and Their Context in the Middle Ages*, ed. Phillipp R. Schofield (Oxford, 2015), 151-160; Elizabeth New 'Reconsidering the Silent Majority: Non-Heraldic Personal Seals in Medieval Britain' in, *A Companion to Seals in the Middle Ages*, ed. Laura J. Whatley (Leiden, 2019), 279-309.

[26] Jessica Berenbeim, *Art of Documentation: Documents and Visual Culture in Medieval England* (Toronto, 2015).

[27] Berenbeim, *Art of Documentation*, 22.

Her discussions of scribes copying cartularies uses equally active language. She remarks how a scribe 'adopts the features of a documentary hand', or, 'manipulates some of the letter forms'.[28] But by contrast, her chapter in the same book on the seal of Evesham Abbey makes intricate observations about the seal's design without mentioning the role of its maker at all.[29] True, she is working from the wax impressions made by the seal matrix, rather than a matrix itself. However, while she does mention similar presentational decisions to those in her sections on manuscripts, a key difference is that the person who made those choices is not merely rendered anonymous, but non-existent. The fact that this discrepancy in how scribes and metalworkers are thought about in a single, otherwise detailed and careful work produced by one researcher indicates that this is not simply the result of different methodologies, but rather entirely different historiographical modes consciously or unconsciously habituated as appropriate for each category of object and maker.

This thesis advocates an altogether different approach to these two groups of makers. To begin developing this novel perspective, in what follows I will consider information demonstrating that many of the approaches used to analyse scribes and their work can also be applied to better understand London metalworkers and their world. In order to compare these two categories of letter maker more effectively, I will present them side-by-side: first, considering the ways in which they operated, I will explore some of the professional structures and practices of scribes and metalworkers, including where in the city they worked; second, I will go on to discuss the materials, methods, and tools used by these craftspeople; and in a final section, I will focus on the education, pay and social status of both scribes and metalworkers. What this approach reveals is that the answers to research questions concerning how these makers operated are in fact often more complex when discussing metalworkers than scribes, due

[28] Berenbeim, *Art of Documentation,* 59.
[29] Berenbeim, *Art of Documentation,* 138-158.

to the fact that the term 'metalworker' can refer to a wider variety of different professions, with diverse skills and outputs. I argue that there is no greater significant body of evidence about scribal techniques, organisational structures, or training than those of metalworkers. I will conclude by suggesting that instead of creative measure, it is rather the social status and education of scribes and metalworkers that have formed the key aspect in setting the two apart in the minds of modern researchers.

Structures and Communities: Guilds, Professional Practices, and Locations

Medieval London's highly regulated economy and urban environment has left us records that provide insights into all manner of professions and crafts. A particularly illustrative example that sheds light on the work of metalworkers appears in the Assize of Nuisance, which recorded infractions of what we might think of as health and safety regulations in medieval London. The fact that metalworking industries were located within the walls of a cramped city occasionally caused tension between them and their neighbours, offering helpful evidence for their professional practices. In 1357, William Stacy, his wife Margery, and one William Crokhorn were all indicted for building a forge on Wodestret in Crepulgate in the north of the city, just within the walls. Apparently the forge was obstructing the street and was thus an inconvenience for residents and passers-by, and after inspecting the forge the court ordered it to be removed within 40 days.[30] An almost identical case was brought in January 1369, when Geoffrey Marchal also built a forge in Wodestret, this time well inside the walls, further south in the parish of St Michael Hoggenlane; he was also ordered to remove his forge.[31] In 1378, Thomas and Alice Young brought a complaint against various armorers on Watelyng Street in the parish of St Augustine, near St Paul's Gate. They claimed that the chimney of the forge was

[30] *London Assize of Nuisance 1301-1431: A Calendar: London Records Society*, eds. Helena M. Chew and William Kellaway (Kent, 1973), 117.
[31] *London Assize of Nuisance*, eds. Chew and Kellaway, 138.

lower than regulations specified, and was made of wood and timber rather than plaster and stone. The hammering of iron was noisy and caused reverberations that threatened the structure of both the forge and their house, with which it shared a party wall. In this case, however, the armorers seem to have successfully refuted these claims, arguing that members of any craft should be able to carry out their business anywhere in the city and make adaptations to their premises in order to facilitate their work.[32]

These cases are instructive for how and where in the city metalworkers went about their business, and how they defended their rights to do so. Understanding these working conditions is useful in analysing the output of metal letter makers that will be discussed in the chapters that follow, espescially with reference to off-the-peg seal matrices and to the pilgrim souvenir industry. But, as well as this, in making a comparison of metalworkers and scribes based on their working environment, I also seek to establish whether such considerations would justify why these two makers are allowed such different levels of agency when discussed by scholars.

The first aspect of metalworkers' working lives that becomes apparent from the evidence of Nuisance Assizes is the locations in which these craftspeople practiced their trade. Trade and infrastructure networks meant that London was an ideal location for metalworking industries in terms of obtaining raw materials, employing a skilled workforce, and selling finished products.[33] These cases reveal metalworking equipment was not confined to an industrial district of the city, but could be found nestled in and amongst residential and commercial buildings on the city's crowded streets. Although in the archaeological record metalworking by-products and waste can be found in sites from across the city, these were often transported from their point of origin to provide backfill for building works, meaning that the

[32] *London Assize of Nuisance*, eds. Chew and Kellaway, 160-1.
[33] Justine Bayley, 'Innovation in Later Medieval Urban Metalworking' in, *Medieval Metalworking: Papers Presented at a Conference Held in London, 13-14th January, 1996*, eds. Crossley and David Wyatt (London, 1996), 67; Derek Keene, 'Metalworking in Medieval London: An Historical Survey' in, in, *Medieval Metalworking: Papers Presented at a Conference Held in London, 13-14th January, 1996*, eds. Crossley and David Wyatt (London, 1996), 95.

presence of this type of material at a site does not directly confirm metalworking was taking place there.[34] Instead, most of what is known of the locations in which metalworkers operated is based on documentary evidence, suggesting in particular a cluster of premises around Cheapside. Indeed, Wodestret, where two of the three forges mentioned above were situated, ran directly off Cheapside to the North. Watelyng Street, the site of the contentious armorers, ran parallel to Cheapside on its south side. It has been estimated that there were some four hundred shops along Cheapside, together forming a well-established market of vendors to whom goods could be sold.[35] Cheapside was particularly renowned for its goldsmiths' shops.[36] Other crafts, particularly those producing goods for sale in the market, such as cutlers, set themselves up slightly to the north of Cheapside, within easy reach of this trading centre.[37] Geographically, the main centre of scribal activity in London was the area around St Paul's Cathedral, also directly to the east of Cheapside. Records show that members of both the Limners' and Textwriters' guilds operated in premises in Paternoster Rewe and St Paul's Churchyard.[38] Some scribes and metalworkers, therefore, would have worked next to each other. However, professional text-writing was by no means isolated to this area. There is evidence that text-writers operated in multiple locations across the city. Mooney argues, for example, that much scribal activity took place in scribes' lodgings, rather than in scriptoria or in trading premises.[39] She also states that,

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[34] Geoff Egan, 'Some Archaeological Evidence for Metalworking in London c. 1050 AD – c. 1700 AD' in, in, *Medieval Metalworking: Papers Presented at a Conference Held in London, 13-14th January, 1996*, eds. Crossley and David Wyatt (London, 1996), 83.
[35] Derek Keene, 'Shops and Shopping in Medieval London' in, *Medieval Art, Architecture, and Archaeology in London*, L. Grant (London, 1990), 29-46.
[36] Karen Newman, '"Goldsmith's Ware": Equivalence in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (2008), 103-4. The name 'Cheapside' indicates that this was a trading street in that it is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word 'ceap' which means 'barter'.
[37] As they grew, Pewterers' workshops gradually migrated to the less densely-populated east of the city so that they could expand their operations. Also, as there was a large export market in pewter from the late-fourteenth century onwards, pewterers did not need to be as close to retail premises. Derek Keene, 'Metalworking in Medieval London: an Historical Survey' in, in, *Medieval Metalworking: Papers Presented at a Conference Held in London, 13-14th January, 1996*, eds. Crossley and David Wyatt (London, 1996), 99.
[38] Margaret Connolly and Linne R. Mooney, *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England* (Wiltshire, 2008), 186.
[39] Connolly and Mooney, *Design and Distribution*, 186.

because many scribes were not London citizens, they were unable to join a guild, and would have worked outside the city walls, specifically in the suburbs between London and Westminster. She has suggested that some of the scribes operating here were also working as clerks in Westminster by day, and copied texts in their homes in their spare time.[40] Parkes agrees, concluding that commercial book copying 'should probably be regarded (like many other crafts at the time) as a cottage industry'.[41] Both professions, therefore, could be small concerns, carried out alongside residential property and indeed, in the case of scribes, within the homes of the craftspeople themselves.

However, while they could take place in similar parts of the city, it is clear that working environments for metalworkers were mostly collaborative and workshop-based, quite a different scenario from their fellow letter-makers such as scribes. The number of people who worked at these metalworking premises varied. Records of the Pewterers' Guild from 1457 regulated that pewterers' shops could vary significantly in size, ranging from a single craftsperson to a master with up to a maximum of eighteen other workers. The majority of pewterers' shops had between one and four people working there, while the largest, owned by Thomas Dounton who was also a mercer, reached the Guild's upper limit of nineteen.[42] It is true that scribes did, on occasion, work in collaborative spaces. While they might make extra money copying texts in their homes, they could carry out their work within a larger institution, such as those described in the *London Lickpenny* who worked in governmental or legal settings.[43] Ecclesiastical scribes also worked communally in regular or secular religious institutions. As well as parish priests and clerks, this

[40] Connolly and Mooney, *Design and Distribution*, 186.
[41] Parkes, *Their Hands Before Our Eyes*, 51. Parkes states that there is no evidence that scribes worked in stationers' shops, nor is there evidence that private individuals commissioning scribes provided work space for them, 49.
[42] Ronald F. Homer, 'Tin, Lead and Pewter', 71.
[43] For more on secular clerks see, Linne R. Mooney and Estelle Stubbs, *Scribes and the City: London Guildhall Clerks and the Dissemination of Middle English Literature, 1375-1425* (Woodbridge, 2013); J. L. Bolton, 'William Styfford (fl. 1437-66): Citizen and Scrivener of London and Notary Imperial' in, *Medieval Londoners: Essays to Mark the Eightieth Birthday of Caroline M. Barron*, eds. Elizabeth New and Christian Steer (London, 2019), 149-164.

included members of religious orders, and by the later Middle Ages, London was home to numerous religious institutions, from the chapter of St Paul's Cathedral to various mendicant houses.[44] The canons of St Paul's Cathedral produced chronicles and annals as well as hagiographies and historical works, such as the Life of St Erkenwald and Roger of Waltham's *Compendium Morale*, written in the twelfth century and fourteenth century respectively.[45] Scribes working for religious institutions would have also copied works and written from dictation, in the same way that secular scribes would.[46] But as we have seen above in Berenbeim's work, rather than blurring the boundaries of their work, acknowledgement of collective spaces and institutions only contributes further to the attribution of agency to these craftspeople. Scholars regularly link the well-documented aims and ambitions of such host institutions with the fruits of certain scribes' labour, adding a sense of intention behind everything from materials to design strategies. Metalworkers, on the other hand, are afforded no such agency by scholars, their creating of products communally instead framed as far less multifaceted.

The same is true when it comes to the professional structures in which scribes participated; bodies that are regularly cited by scholars to provide detailed commentary on their world. These institutions were varied and complex. While ecclesiastical scribes and government clerks operated in London from the early Middle Ages, there is only evidence of lay scribes producing texts in London from the beginning of the thirteenth century.[47] By 1373, these individuals had gathered into a Scriveners' Guild, whose members were authorised to draft

[44] Diana E. Greenway, 'Historical Writing at St Paul's' in, *St Paul's: The Cathedral Church of London 604-2004*, eds. Derek Keene, Arthur Burns, Andrew Saint (New Haven, 2004), 151; Jens Röhrkasten, 'Spiritual Life and Education in the London Friaries' in, Nick Holder, *Medieval London Friaries* (Suffolk, 2017), 263.
[45] Greenway, 'Historical Writing at St Paul's', 151.
[46] Luisa Nardini, '"God is Witness": Dictations and the Copying of Chants in Medieval Monasteries', *Musica Disciplina*, Vol. 57 (2012), 53.
[47] Parkes, *Their Hands Before Our Eyes*, 39.

legally binding documents.[48] There was also the Textwriters' and Limners' Guilds, who copied and illuminated texts, respectively.[49] Another related organisation was the Stationers' Guild, which included scribes who copied texts and also people who sold books, acting as intermediaries between a commissioner and the craft workers involved in book production, such as limners or binders.[50] Evidence of these companies has been used extensively by scholars to frame how individuals operated within their industry, both inside and outside of guilds. For example, Linne Mooney used these structures as a quantitative backbone when estimating the volume of scribal work in London. She suggested that scribes belonging to these guilds represented only a fraction of those who engaged in scribal activity, pointing out that London would have had a far larger need for books than the members of these guilds could produce.[51] Evidence supporting this claim includes the fact that, by the later Middle Ages, the city housed numerous schools and libraries, all of which we know were provisioned with books. There were libraries at St Paul's and the Guildhall, and schools at the major mendicant houses in the city as well as at St Mary le Bow, St Paul's, Holy Trinity Aldgate, and St Martin-le-Grand.[52] Mooney also proposes that many who worked as copyists also held down jobs as government scribes.[53] Malcolm Parkes suggests that, for some projects, a level of professional insight beyond faithfully copying the text may have been preferred by a given book's commissioner. Parkes points to the accounts of the Chapel of St Thomas Becket on London Bridge, which show that two of the chapel's clerks and a priest were commissioned not only to copy texts but to add

[48] Errors in the presentation of legal documents could jeopardise their legitimacy, see Bolton, 'William Styfford (fl. 1437-66): Citizen and Scrivener of London and Notary', 150.
[49] Connolly and Mooney, *Design and Distribution*, 185-186. The profession of scrivener differed to that of textwriters in that scriveners were able to draft legal binding documents.
[50] Erik Kwakkel, 'Commercial Organisation and Economic Innovation' in, *The Production of Books in England 1350-1500*, eds. Alexandra Gillespie and Daniel Wakelin (Cambridge, 2011), 175-176.
[51] Connolly and Mooney, *Design and Distribution*, 190.
[52] Jens Röhrkasten, 'Spiritual Life and Education in the London Friaries' in, Nick Holder, *Medieval London Friaries* (Suffolk, 2017), 258-271.
[53] Connolly and Mooney, *Design and Distribution*, 193-194. Presumably not all of these books were necessarily produced locally. M. B. Parkes has suggested that liturgical books were often produced locally because they reflect local variations in the liturgy. See M. B. Parkes, *Their Hands Before Our Eyes: A Closer Look at Scribes* (Aldershot, 2008), 40.

musical notation, for which a degree of specialist skill was required.[54] The evidence of organisational records and structures, combined with contextual information about medieval London, is therefore used to better understand not only the working arrangements, but also the skills needed by craftspeople.

Similar information on London's metalworkers has, to date, not been mobilized in nearly the same manner. This is unfortunate, as a better understanding of the institutions of metalworkers can shed significant light on this group. The last Nuisance Assize case mentioned above reveals how guilds for metalworking crafts could protect the rights of their members, here with reference to armorers. I have also referenced the Pewterers' Guild above with regards to working conditions, and during the later Middle Ages there were a number of guilds open to different metalworking professions, usually defined by the type of metal that was being worked or the product that they made. According to documentary evidence, goldsmiths were the oldest organized group of metalworkers in London. Their responsibilities to ensure that gold and silver were of the correct standard meant that from at least 1238 there is evidence of structured cooperation between practitioners in this field.[55] According to Caroline Barron's work on London's civic lists from 1328 to 1528, goldsmiths were joined by ironmongers and then cutlers in the first half of the fourteenth century.[56] Then, in the second half of fourteenth century, a veritable explosion in metalworking communities emerged: armourers, braziers (makers of copper pots), pewterers, spurriers (makers of spurs), founders (makers of church bells as well as other cast objects such as kitchen items), pinners (makers of metal pins), plumbers (worked with lead, especially for pipes), smiths, cardmakers (makers of iron equipment used in the wool industry), and lorimers (makers of horse furniture). In the mid-fifteenth century further developments incorporated coppersmiths, ferrours (a synonym for a smith), bladesmiths,

[54] Parkes, *Their Hands Before Our Eyes*, 45-46.
[55] Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, 202.
[56] Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, 220-221.

latteners (possibly a synonym for founders), and in 1485 even wiresellers.[57] Of these diverse companies of craftspeople, the most relevant to this thesis were the goldsmiths, pewterers, and coppersmiths, all of which helped establish their members as influential within London's government: goldsmiths, pewterers, armorers, and ironmongers all served as sheriffs of London during the later Middle Ages, while the office of mayor of London was frequently filled by goldsmiths.[58]

Such companies of metalworkers were not static establishments but were pragmatic, changing as their industries developed. Some ended up merging, such as spurriers and lorimers, pinners and wiresellers. Others expanded exponentially. The London pewter industry is a prime example of how metalworking developed during the late medieval period, experiencing large-scale growth due to high demand in continental Europe. The Guild of London Pewterers was established in 1348, which was relatively late compared to equivalents in Europe that formed during the thirteenth century.[59] During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the number of pewterers working in London grew significantly. It has been estimated that in 1310 five pewterers operated in London; this increased to thirty-three in 1400 and by the mid-fifteenth century there were approximately one hundred pewterers working in the city, reflecting a period of particularly rapid growth.[60] Demand for English pewter in continental Europe increased dramatically during the later Middle Ages. In 1307, the first recorded shipment of exported pewter was of about fifty *lbs*; by the 1400s, between fifteen and twenty tonnes of pewter was exported on average each year.[61] These industrial and economic changes reveal that the life and

[57] For the definitions of some of these terms, I have consulted Claude Blair and John Blair, 'Copper Alloys' in, *English Medieval Industries*, eds. John Blair and Nigel Ramsay (Guildford, 1991), 93; and 'Medieval Londoners', 14th July 2022, https://medievallondoners.ace.fordham.edu/occupations/.
[58] Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, 311-355.
[59] Groups of craftspeople often operated for decades before their guild was formally established. Homer, 'Tin, Lead and Pewter', 68.
[60] Homer, 'Tin, Lead and Pewter', 70.
[61] Homer, 'Tin, Lead and Pewter', 73.

work of such a metalworker at the beginning of the fourteenth century will likely have looked quite different to one working at the century's end.

In short, then, there is ample evidence for substantial metalworking and metalworking organisations in medieval London, both archaeological and documentary. Many different types of metalworkers operated within the walls of medieval London, including those who made objects of the kind discussed in this thesis. Such makers collaborated in workshops and, from the fourteenth century onwards, groups of metalworkers who shared raw materials or made the same end product formed communities who protected and regulated their trade. Yet these industry dynamics are rarely commented on with reference to metalworkers and the objects they created.[62] Throughout this discussion, I have brought in comparisons with scribes that reveal sometimes very similar professional structures, particularly in the cases of commercial scribes. Yet while such information inspires specificity and richness of observation among scholars of scribal lives, for scholars of metalworkers stark abstractions often remain.

Materials, Processes and Tools

So far, I have written of metalworkers generally, not all of whom were involved in making metal letters. In addressing matters of material, however, we can observe more keenly the differences in processes and expertise needed to make letters and write letters. Again, I will seek to strip back disparities between the treatment of the two kinds of maker, scribe and metalworker, showing that despite similar available information scholars of manuscripts are more likely to employ such information in their analysis than those of metalwork.

[62] These studies instead focus on the social and economic analysis, for example, Justin Colson, 'Commerce, Clusters, and Community: A Re-Evaluation of the Occupational Geography of London, c. 1400 - c. 1550', *Economic History Review*, Vol. 69. No. 1 (2016), 104-130; Gervase Rosser, 'Crafts, Guilds and the Negotiation of Work in the Medieval Town', *Past & Present*, No. 154 (1997), 3-31; Heather Swanson, 'The Illusion of Economic Structure: Craft Guilds in Late Medieval English Towns', *Past & Present*, No. 121 (1988), 29-48.

A very rare depiction of a metalworker rendered in metal, not made but found in London, exists in the unlikely medium of a pilgrim souvenir. This souvenir commemorates St Eloi, or Eligius, and it was brought to London from France (figure 1.02).[63] St Eloi was a goldsmith and farrier, and it is in this latter guise that he appears in lead-tin souvenirs from his shrine. He was said to have the miraculous ability to shoe particularly skittish horses by removing their legs to fit shoes on their hooves and then reattaching them.[64] The plaque-shaped badge shows a relief casting of the saint at his anvil, hammer in hand, his customer (with newly re-shod horse) offering payment in the form of a coiled wax candle.[65] There is an unusually rendered legend at the top of the badge, that may spell 'ELIGIUS', but also resembles a pattern of horseshoes. The aim of this badge's imagery is not to document the realities of metalworking. For example, the saint is depicted seated at an anvil, which seems impractical while working with hot iron, though depictions of goldsmiths do survive who are shown seated while hammering gold ingots.[66] Ironmongers are more usually depicted standing, for example in an illumination of a blacksmith in the Holkham Bible Picture Book (figure 1.03).[67] St Eloi may be depicted seated so that he could be rendered larger, and therefore more prominent, than his customer; or this could be a reflection of the ways in which the pewterer who cast this badge worked.[68]

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[63] London, Museum of London 87.14/2 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/28703.html.
[64] Brian Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges* (Woodbridge 2010), 221-222.
[65] This could also be reflective of shrine practices, as gifts of wax were common offerings donated by pilgrims at shrines.
[66] See, for example, a thirteenth-century illumination showing a goldsmith in, London, British Library, MS. Cotton Cleopatra C.xi f.42. St Eligius specifically was depicted a number of times as a goldsmith by artists, including Niklaus Manuel in his sixteenth-century piece that shows the saint seated, hammering a gold cup in his workshop with colleagues, *St Eligius in his Workshop*, Bern, Kunstmuseum Bern.
[67] London, British Library, Additional 47682 *Holkham Bible Picture Book* c. 1327-1335 (poss. London) f. 31. https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=34327. The blacksmith is depicted forging a nail as part of a depiction of Christ on the road to Calvary, presumably manufacturing the nails especially for this occasion. Material referencing this image often caption her as the 'smith's wife', which seems unnecessary as she is clearly shown actively blacksmithing.
[68] There is a fifteenth-cenutry illumination of a pewterer seated while casting a jug in the *Housebook of the Mandel Brotherhood*, Nuremberg, Stadtbibliothek.

The St Eloi badge is an unusual, perhaps unique, instance of one metalworker depicting another metalworker in their shared media. More common was their depiction by limners or scribes, a group of makers who were far more interested in self-referentially depicting their profession. Several manuscripts produced in London during the later Middle Ages include illuminations of scribes, often under the guise of a biblical or historical narrative, most commonly illuminations of the Evangelists depicted as scribes, a standard feature of medieval Gospel Books including several made in London (figure 1.04).[69] This regular depiction likewise bred a familiarity with scribal tools, in turn discussed at length by scholars across the literature. Subjects in these reflexive scribal images are usually shown seated at tilted desks quill in hand, with a knife they would have used for a number of purposes including shaping the tip of a feather quill and expunging errors.[70] Knives were also tools for marking guiding lines onto parchment, leaving space for finishing details such as illuminations and flourished initials executed later by a limner.[71] Ink horns and ink holders built into desks are also a common feature. Unlike many other medieval craftspeople, scribes did not work with raw materials. Instead their materials were prepared for them by specialists. Throughout the period, scribes

[69] All of the manuscripts mentioned below in this paragraph are held in the British Library and have been identified either as having been, or possibly having been, produced in London, according to the British Library's catalogue. A particularly detailed example can be seen in, Harley 2915 *Book of Hours, Use of Sarum* f. 10 Evangelists https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8478&CollID=8&NStart=2915. A selection of other illuminations from medieval London include: Additional 42555 Abingdon Apocalypse, f. 81 Ezekiel https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=14594 ; Additional 47682 Holkham Bible picture book c. 1327-1335 (poss. London) f. 11. St Mark and St Luke https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8743&CollID=27&NStart=47682 ; Royal 19 B XV *The Queen Mary Apocalypse* f. 3 John the Evangelist https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8744&CollID=16&NStart=190215 ; Harley 4605 *Le Livre des faits d'armes et de chivalerie*, London 1434 f. 3 Christine de Pisan https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=7301&CollID=8&NStart=4605.

[70] Clanchy's section on scribal equipment is particularly useful, see Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, pp. 117-120. In his work on scribal correcting Daniel Wakelin includes a section on the tools and techniques of expunging errors and preparing the parchment for writing-over. See Wakelin, *Scribal Correction and Literary Craft*, 103.

[71] Partridge, 'Designing the Page', 84.

wrote on parchment (made of sheep or calf skin) or, from the fourteenth century, paper, neither of which involved scribes in their making, and which in London could be procured from a stationer or haberdasher.[72] Scribes in London could also buy ready-made ink, the recipes of which would vary according to the type of parchment being used. The archaeological record for medieval London is rich in scribal tools, suggesting they too were commercially produced and bought readymade by scribes. The Museum of London holds a number of such objects including inkwells, styli, and wax tablets, all discovered in archaeological settings within the city. Styli are usually approximately 100mm long and less than 10mm thick (figure 1.05).[73] The bone or wood handles often include spherical nodules and other turned details. At the tip is usually a sharp metal pin. Some complete examples survive, but often only the bone or wood handle remains. Just under a quarter of all of the medieval wood and bone registered finds from Billingsgate were styli; in this dataset they were more prevalent than needles and almost as common as pins. This indicates that they were among the most quotidian of objects in the medieval city.[74] Set against bone and wood finds, styli stand out as being particularly carefully manufactured, their neat contours turned on a lathe. The specialist equipment needed to produce these objects indicates that scribes did not make their own styli but bought them from commercial centres of Cheapside or London Bridge, and that there was a demand for such objects to be highly worked.

By comparison, metalworkers' materials are far less frequent in both medieval depictions and modern scholarly discussion. Yet in fact we know much about the complex and

[72] Making parchment was a laborious process that started by selecting appropriate skins, washing them, soaking in lime, re-washing, drying under tension and then removing any hairs. Orietta Da Rold, 'Materials' in, Alexandra Gillespie and Daniel Wakelin eds., *The Production of Books in England 1350-1500* (Cambridge, 2011), 17.

[73] For example stylus, London, Museum of London, BWB83[110]<73>. These types of objects are almost always catalogued as parchment prickers but there is there is some ambiguity as to which, if it must only be one, is their purpose. I would prefer the term styli because it is less specific than the term parchment pricker, reflecting the fact that these objects probably had multiple purposes.

[74] Amongst the bone and wood finds from Billingsgate (BWB83), 24 per cent were parchment prickers, 12 per cent were pins, 35 per cent were needles and 29 per cent were other categories such as 'waste' from making processes. They are frequently found amongst wood and bone finds from across the city. The Museum of London's collection also includes a large number of medieval styli.

varied practices of those who made letters in metal. In terms of their raw materials, many examples survive from medieval London of precious metals, pewter, copper alloys, and lead all being decorated with letter-forms. London's trading networks meant that metalworkers could easily obtain these materials, importing them from mines elsewhere in the country. Tin was mined in Devon and Cornwall, while lead was mined in the north of England and also Devon, Flintshire, and the Mendips.[75] From 1200, it is thought that copper was mined in Yorkshire, Cumbria, and Cornwall.[76] Gold and silver were usually imported from abroad.[77] As well as producing new metal, workshops would also melt down and re-work scrap metal.[78] These raw materials all required different methods of refining and working. Goldsmiths refined their precious metals in their workshops using a technique called cupellation, where ores or alloys were heated to a high temperature and worked to extract precious metals, which could be done on a small scale with dishes used for this purpose.[79] As well as refining metals, workshops often alloyed metals. Copper was alloyed usually with either tin or zinc.[80] This alloy was used to make a variety of personal objects relevant to this thesis including seal matrices and jewellery, and could be placed with other materials to make other dress accessories such as purses. Copper alloy items like seal matrices were engraved after casting. A number of purse frames in the Museum of London have niello inlay, in which black niello was poured over lettering and other decoration engraved on the surface of the copper alloy, pooling in the indentations, and was then fired so that the matt black niello stood out the bright-coloured copper.[81] Pewterers in medieval

[75] Homer, 'Tin, Lead and Pewter', 57-8. Between c.300 and 1300 England was 'the only significant European producer' of tin, so it was very important to the English economy.
[76] Claude Blair and John Blair, 'Copper Alloys' in, *English Medieval Industries*, eds. John Blair and Nigel Ramsay (Guildford, 1991), 84.
[77] Marian Campbell, 'Gold, Silver and Precious Metals' in, *English Medieval Industries*, eds. John Blair and Nigel Ramsay (Guildford, 1991), 108. Gold was imported from mines in Eastern Europe, Karen Newman, '"Goldsmith's Ware": Equivalence in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (2008), 97-8.
[78] Blair and Blair, 'Copper Alloys', 83.
[79] Justine Bayley, 'Innovation in Later Medieval Urban Metalworking', 70.
[80] Blair and Blair, 'Copper Alloys', 82.
[81] Niello was made from copper sulphide and silver. Campbell, 'Gold, Silver and Precious Metals', p. 126. An example of this technique is a purse frame, London, Museum of London, A27396.

London made two different grades of pewter. According to the Pewterers' Ordinances of 1348, 'fine metal' was an alloy of tin and copper, while 'lay metal' referred to tin and lead.[82] Pewter is a low-melting alloy and items could easily be produced from it using moulds typically made of stone. After the pewter object was cast, a pewterer would finish it by soldering any pieces together and then finish the objects using a lathe and abrasives to polish it.[83] Lead was alloyed with copper to make cheap domestic items, such as cutlery.[84]

The relative complexity of metalwork, as opposed to scribal activity, can also be seen in the variety of methods employed to work metals. The two main methods of working metals were hammering sheet metal and casting objects from molten metal. Metal was melted in crucibles, and the remains of several such vessels from various points in the history of medieval London reveal that, as time progressed and demand for metal items increased, crucibles were made bigger so that more metal could be melted and items could be mass produced.[85] Numerous types of casting were employed in medieval London, again attested by surviving artefacts preserved in the archaeological record. The simplest mould had an open top and had molten metal poured over it. This sort of mould could be used more than once. To make hollow objects like ampullae, two-piece moulds were strapped together, the metal was poured in, and the air escaped from vents.[86] Hollow castings were also made by putting a core inside the mould. The lost-wax or waste-wax method was common during the Middle Ages and involved sculpting the object in wax then covering it with clay, leaving a pour hole and vents. The clay and wax were heated so that the clay hardened and the wax melted and poured out through the vents, leaving a hollow mould ready to have metal poured into it. This kind of mould could only be used once, since it

[82] Homer, 'Tin, Lead and Pewter', 73.
[83] Homer, 'Tin, Lead and Pewter', 66.
[84] Homer, 'Tin, Lead and Pewter', 58.
[85] Bayley, 'Innovation in Later Medieval Urban Metalworking', 67-8.
[86] These moulds were made from a fine-grained stone and the two pieces were aligned and held together with lead pegs. Justine Bayley, 'Innovation in Later Medieval Urban Metalworking', 67. An example of this in the Museum of London's collection is an ampulla mould (only one half of the mould survives), London, Museum of London, 8905(1).

had to be broken in order to reveal the metal object.[87] In London, archaeologists have also found a multi-layer stacking mould used to cast multiple items at once.[88] Goldsmiths made seal matrices for large institutions or powerful individuals and were therefore also accustomed to engraving letter-forms in reverse, which has led some to suggest that they may have been involved in making moulds for other metalworkers.[89]

We have already seen that metalworking was a collaborative process, and their equipment reflects this. The inventory of pewterer Thomas Filkes's shop in 1427 gives a sense of what equipment and tools were used. The shop seems to have mostly produced tableware. The moulds ranged in value from 'the greatest charger mould' (a 'charger' being a very large dish) which cost 52*s*. 4*d*. to 'a small saucer mould' valued at 5*s*. 4*d*. The moulds had a combined value of over £16. Other items included lathe tools chisels and tongs and twenty marking irons.[90] Because of their significant expense, pewterers sometimes had arrangements in which they shared some of this equipment. The 1441 will of John Childe bequeathed his share of a dish mould which he owned with the pewterer John Hulle, and by 1448 the Pewterers' Company had instigated a formal sharing arrangement for much of its membership.[91] Such specialist communal tools and equipment used, passed down, and sometimes even broken in the process of making a metal object therefore sharply contrasts with the ready-made and easily accessible tools employed by scribes.

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[87] Blair and Blair, 'Copper Alloys', 86-7. The lost-wax method allowed craftspeople to produce more intricate designs than the use of stone moulds and in lettering would allow them to carve the letters the correct way round rather than in reverse. Marian Campbell, 'Metalwork in England, c. 1200-1400' in, *The Age of Chivalry*, Jonathan Alexander and Paul Binski (Vicenza, 1987), 164.
[88] Bayley, 'Innovation in Later Medieval Urban, 68.
[89] T. A. Heslop, 'English Seals in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries' in, *The Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200-1400*, eds. Jonathan Alexander and Paul Binski (London, 1987), 115. An example of a silver seal matrix in the Museum of London also has an engraved gem set in its centre, which demonstrates that the maker was not only an experienced engraver but was also able to set stone in metal. Seal matrix, London, Museum of London, 84.434.
[90] Homer, 'Tin, Lead and Pewter', 71-2. The permanent moulds described in these records were made of metal rather than clay or stone, see Heather Swanson, *Medieval Artisans: An Urban Class in Late Medieval England* (Cornwall, 1989), 73.
[91] Homer, 'Tin, Lead and Pewter', 72.

Buying tools and materials ready-made implies a different relationship to the making process than making with raw materials. Consequently, scribes and metalworkers had different design decisions to consider when making letter-forms. With such diverse tools and materials, and the skills to use them, craftspeople working with metal letters used a number of different processes. An important aesthetic generalization to make is that unlike their scribal counterparts, metal letters are not fashioned in contrasting black and white or in colourful ink on a cream surface. The letter-forms of their inscriptions, especially the sort of small quotidian objects under discussion here, are instead almost always monochromatic metal on metal. All that was therefore available to the makers of these letter-forms to evoke their contents was the width and depth of the incised line, as well as the gradients and textures that could be created in hard material. Nonetheless, artefacts from London still display various styles and techniques employed by the makers of these objects to sculpt letter-forms. Metal letters could be cast in relief, incised in hollow relief, or inlaid with other metals or enamel, all of which required the same careful aesthetic decisions as writing on parchment. Relief letter-forms, for instance, are defined by their substance, whereas hollow relief letters are defined by absence; the sculptural element of lines is important in both, but the shadows created by hollow relief letters are less dynamic. Take, for example, an annular pewter brooch (figure 1.06) with the apotropaic inscription, '+Λ+G+L+Λ+ΛVEMΛRIAGRΛI' (AGLA hail Mary full of grace).[92] The letters have been incised in hollow relief, with a shallow U-shaped cross-section. The triangular serifs of these letter-forms have a blunted quality, but this has more to do with the tools and materials of the brooch, rather than the method employed in making it. The resulting shadows gives these letters a soft outline whose thickness will vary according to the angle and light levels in which it is viewed. Compare this with a fifteenth-century gold ring whose letter-forms are also incised,

[92] This piece will be explored in more detail in the next chapter. Pewter brooch, London, Museum of London, 80.73/1 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/28729.html.

the words ‘pour amor say douc’ (for love, so sweet) engraved in relief (figure 1.07).[93] This is unusual in engraved jewellery, but it appears to have been employed with the specific purpose of shaping the ring’s aesthetics, creating the illusion that the ring’s band is constructed of letters. These letter-forms are also as a result more tactile, raised on their background, whereas those of the brooch sink into the metal. These examples show how choices of material and method exerted just as great an influence on the formal qualities of metalwork objects as more traditionally discussed vectors such as overall shape and style.

Another common making method for small metal epigraphy is casting, a technique which like incising letter-forms likewise placed many potential variations in overall effect at the disposal of the maker. Pilgrim souvenirs are one of the most common vehicles for cast inscriptions. A fourteenth-century badge from the shrine of Thomas Becket in Canterbury, found in London, is a good example of this type of inscription (figure 1.08).[94] Only the inscribed frame of this fragment remains, its letters, ‘CAPUT THOME’ (the head of Thomas), sporting a sharp triangular cross-section and sculpted triangular serifs, similar to the majority of cast inscriptions of the period. Unlike the ring’s letterforms, these letters have more space between them. The graduating thickness of their lines has created delicate serifs that thin down to nothing, and bows that swell and contract in their curves. Compare this with yet another method of making inscriptions: niello inlay. An example of this technique is a fourteenth-century purse frame (figures 1.09 and 1.10).[95] Its inscription reads, ‘AVE MA G / RA P[.]ENA’ and ‘DOMINV / S TECVM’, *Ave Maria gratia plena Dominus tecum* (hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with you) on its arms and, ‘IHS’ and ‘AM’, on its central boss. The letter-forms have been incised into the copper alloy and inlaid with a black molten metal alloy so that, although the letters

[93] Gold finger ring, London, Museum of London, 80.33 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/37620.html.
[94] Becket badge frame, London, Museum of London, 8790 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/37248.html.
[95] Purse frame, London, Museum of London ID: 50.2/76 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/32431.html.

appear flush against the surface of the frame, they contrast strongly with what would have been a bright copper surface. Just like ink letters, colour defines the shapes of the letter-forms rather than texture. The inlay has only survived partially in this example, so the incised letters beneath are visible. They are quite shallow and have a U-shaped cross section, whose grainy surface would allow the inlay to adhere better to the letter-forms.

In laying out these various techniques, we can instantly see they constitute a far richer array of specialisms than those practiced by metalworkers' scribal counterparts. Both sets of makers would have had different practical and financial relationships to their respective tools and raw materials; whereas scribes could purchase many of their materials and tools pre-prepared by specialist artisans, metalworkers produced objects from materials in a raw state. And, as has been seen in the analysis of these makers' respective working environments in the previous section, their tools and materials also affected the perceived status of scribes and metalworkers. For the former, analyses of their materials intimates a certain coherence; for the latter, it suggests diversity and complexity. Materials and tools, and the skills needed to work with them, exerted significant influence in the design of metal letters, the way they look, and also the way they felt to the touch.

Training, Pay, and Social Status

As has been discussed above, the terms 'scribe' and 'metalworker' do not designate easily-defined, homogenous groups. Therefore, it is unlikely that in addressing their training, pay, and social status, a definite picture can emerge about either profession. Nonetheless, of all the factors discussed here this appears to have been the most significant in terms of these artisans' respective historiographical reception. In the sections above, it has become clear that if we view metalworkers and scribes within the context of their tasks and working environment there is little cause for the disparity of their regard. But matters of training, pay, and social status

speak particularly strongly to modern concepts of value, and it is these factors that really heighten the distinction building between these two kinds of London letter-maker.

Perhaps the most important difference between metalworkers and scribes in terms of their perception in the historical record is their relative levels of training and education. In common with trainees in many medieval trades, metalworkers learned their craft through apprenticeships. Most apprentices started at approximately fourteen years of age, and lived in the household of their master, who was bound to provide accommodation as well as food and clothing while the apprentice worked in their workshop. Apprenticeships lasted for an average of ten years.[96] The delivery of training depended upon which metalworking craft an apprentice was training in, and no doubt varied significantly from master to master. Studies of medieval apprenticeships, such as that of Stephanie Hovland, rely on stark administrative and legal records, and consequently make more observations about working conditions and disputes than the programmes of training received by apprentices. For example, Hovland makes quantitative observations about apprentices, such as her findings that over half of apprentice goldsmiths did not complete their apprenticeships.[97] Such high drop-out rates may reflect both the conditions in which apprentices worked, but also the complex skills demanded of trainees.

Regarding the metalworkers who made metal letters, the question of whether reading and writing was part of the training of these London craftspeople is key. Social historian Sylvia Thrupp has addressed this in passing during her discussions of literacy in the city more generally. From the evidence of witnesses in the consistory court in London during the reign of Edward IV (1461–1470, 1471-1483), she found that out of the 116 men whose listed occupations demonstrated that they were 'broadly representative of the city laity', forty per cent were categorised by the presiding clerk as being 'literate', which in the context of medieval

[96] Stephanie R. Hovland, 'Apprenticeship in the Records of the Goldsmiths' Company of London, 1440-1500', *Medieval Prosopography*, Vol. 22 (2001), 100.
[97] Hovland, 'Apprenticeship in the Records of the Goldsmiths', 100.

London referred specifically to the ability to read Latin.[98] Of the four pewterers among Thrupp's witnesses in London's consistory courts, three were described as literate, meaning it is likely that some of those who cast small metal objects understood the inscriptions incorporated into the objects' designs.[99] Even for craftspeople who were not engaged in making letter-forms, an understanding of text in the vernacular would have been necessary in order to conduct their business, if not intrinsic to carrying out the craft itself. However, while goldsmiths required a specified level of 'literacy' (in the medieval sense of the word) for their apprentices in the late fifteenth century, Thrupp mentions a case in which a goldsmith 'who was an expert in engraving letters could not read them'.[100] Such instances pose questions about how metalworkers worked with letters, and what level of familiarity was necessary in the manufacture of the private epigraphy discussed in this dissertation. It also draws attention to the fact that many interactions with text that occurred in medieval London do not fall within the binary categories of 'literate' and 'illiterate', an idea to which we will return in the second half of this chapter.

Returning to the contrasting framework I have been employing throughout this chapter thus far, there is much less room for ambiguity about literacy skills of medieval scribes when compared with those of metalworkers. Scribes were required to edit texts as well as copy them, and therefore easily fit into the 'literate' category in both its medieval sense and in its current understanding.[101] London was home to numerous educational institutions in which future scribes could learn to comprehend and compose text.[102] Scribes also possessed specialist knowledge to

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[98] Thrupp concludes that, 'if 40 per cent of the lay male Londoners of this period could read Latin, it is fair to guess that some 50 per cent could read English'. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, 158. Most of the objects discussed here were made fifty to two-hundred years before the sources used by Thrupp were written, making it likely that literacy rates in London during this period were lower than her estimates.

[99] Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, 156-7.

[100] Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, 158. This case was recorded in 1487 in the accounts of the wardens of the Goldmiths' Company. Walter Sherburne Prideaux, *Memorials of the Goldsmiths' Company; Being Gleanings from their Records Between the Years 1335 and 1815* (London, 1896) 68.

[101] Wakelin, *Scribal Correction and Literary Craft*, p. 3. He argues that copying texts was not just about faithful reproduction but that scribes also endeavored to do things like remove ambiguity from a text.

[102] Fitzstephen's Description of the City of London, 30-1.

be able to produce documents with the appropriate layouts and styles of handwriting. For example, scriveners specialised in creating legally binding documents, requiring some knowledge of legal conventions.[103] Training in these 'word processing' skills was an essential part of scribal training in a society in which learning to write was not necessarily achieved concurrently with learning to read. While being able to read was essential to being considered 'literate' in medieval London, it was verbal reasoning rather than writing that denoted a high level of education and intellectual achievement. The way in which orality and reading had a symbiosis in schools reflects this relationship in the wider community. When William Fitzstephen, in his *Life of Thomas Becket*, sought to portray twelfth-century London as a place in which education thrived, he did not describe scholars beavering away at their writing desks, he instead described them competing on feast days against one another verbally in competitions of rhetoric.[104]

Their ability to both read and write has certainly earned scribes a privileged place in current scholarship compared to other craftspeople, as we have already seen. But did these skills translate in medieval London to an elevated social status and financial security? This is something that, once again, has been explored in far greater depth than the remuneration of metalworkers or other craftspeople, notably by Malcolm Parkes and Michael Clanchy. A sense of how scribes were materially rewarded for their skills can be gathered at least in part from the evidence of book production costs. Copying costs, rather than materials or illumination, accounted for the majority of the expenditure in book production. Parkes found examples from fourteenth-century accounts that ranged from 61 percent to as much as 81 percent of costs being taken by the copyist. Scribes were usually paid per quire of their writing.[105] This varied according to the dimensions of the book's pages, the number of lines per page and the quality of

[103] Bolton, 'William Styfford (fl. 1437-66): Citizen and Scrivener of London and Notary Imperial', 151.
[104] Fitzstephen's Description of the City of London, 30-31.
[105] They were also sometimes paid per quire of the exemplar copied. Parkes, *Their Hands Before Our Eyes*, 49.

the handwriting.[106] During the fifteenth century, prices ranged from 4*d* per quire for a small book to 20*d* if pages had upwards of fifty lines and multiple columns.[107] The scarcity of such accounts makes it impossible to give a really accurate picture, but the fact that they consistently record scribes accounting for over half of the overall cost of producing a book is compelling. Clanchy also uses this evidence to show that scribes' materials, especially parchment, were not as expensive as often assumed by those wishing to use this as an explanation of the limited literacy levels of the Middle Ages.[108] The freelance nature of the work meant that scribes were expected to provide their own tools, while the client arranged and paid for the parchment and other processes in the book's production such as its binding.[109]

From this accumulated evidence, scholars have gone on to argue that scribes varied in social status depending on the sort of work they produced and the types of institution they worked for. Those who undertook scribal activities within monastic orders were by extension part of politically and socially influential communities. It has already been noted that there were government scribes who sometimes copied literary texts on the side and could even become authors themselves. For example, the poet Thomas Hoccleve started his career as a court clerk.[110] As has been mentioned above, commercial scribes can be considered to have been taking part in a cottage industry. For this group, scribal work was sometimes undertaken as a part time supplement to another income. The casual nature of this occupation reflects the variation in demand for books, which could easily be affected by economic factors. Therefore, for some scribes their living may have been precarious.[111] Their advanced reading and writing skills did not necessarily translate into economic security.

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[106] Parkes, *Their Hands Before Our Eyes*, 48. In paying for their work rather than their time, there was an incentive for scribes to be as efficient as possible to maximise potential earnings.
[107] Parkes, *Their Hands Before Our Eyes*, 48.
[108] Parkes, *Their Hands Before Our Eyes*, 123.
[109] Parkes, *Their Hands Before Our Eyes*, 48.
[110] J. A. Burrow, "Hoccleve [Occleve], Thomas (c. 1367–1426), poet and clerk." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sep. 2004, https://doi-org.uea.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/13415.
[111] Parkes, *Their Hands Before Our Eyes*, 43.

For metalworkers, the question of pay and social status is also one that depends on individual career paths. Once they had undergone their apprenticeship, a metalworker could become a member of their relevant craft guild. Working with precious metals, goldsmiths were the most influential metalworking guild, as we have already seen, because they also played a role in currency and moneylending.[112] In terms of the status that was afforded successful medieval metalworkers, it has already been noted that members of the Goldsmiths' company often held prominent offices in London's government. Even they, though, were less wealthy than most London merchants. The economic status of metalworkers varied even within professions. During the later Middle Ages, pewterers improved their prospects, expanding their operations into East London.[113] The earliest London pewterer was recorded in the Trailbaston Trials in 1305 and his name was John le Peutrer.[114] In a 1319 subsidy roll, John, along with other pewterers such as Geoffrey, Thomas, and William, were 'assessed at rates typical of the modest craftsman or shopkeeper'.[115] By the mid-fourteenth century, some pewterers were also operating as merchants, the most influential group in London's government and economy.[116] We can get a sense of the wealth that was attained by some in a case from the 1350s, when pewterer John de Hilton reported £30 14*s* of goods including precious metals, gems and textiles stolen.[117]

In terms of wealth, then, neither metalwokers nor scribes were uniformly poor or well off. Both had opportunities to rise within institutions or professional structures to prominent positions in London society. Equally, either profession could also be seen as a precarious cottage industry, reliant on consumer demand. Both received specialist training from early ages, and

[112] Keene, 'Metalworking in Medieval London: an Historical Survey', 96. Goldsmiths were also involved in engraving coin dies. Marian Campbell, 'Gold, Silver and Precious Metals', 150.
[113] Keene, 'Metalworking in Medieval London: an Historical Survey', 95. London pewterers got their materials from London's trading networks meant that pewterers could import lead from Derbyshire and tin from the South West and export finished products to other parts of the country and to continental Europe. London's concentration of merchants also contributed to the success of the industry.
[114] Homer, 'Tin, Lead and Pewter', 67.
[115] Homer, 'Tin, Lead and Pewter', 67.
[116]. Homer, 'Tin, Lead and Pewter', 73.
[117] Homer, 'Tin, Lead and Pewter', 73.

exercised creative agency over their work. But, after engaging with scholarship about both of these craftspeople, I propose that scribes are in many cases credited with this agency because they possessed a type of education recognisable to, and highly prized by, those writing about them. There is no reason why the environment, professional structures, and training of metalworkers' should not be acknowledged in discussions of metalwork, just as similar information has been employed in the analysis of manuscripts. As regards metalworkers and the metal texts they produced, this discussion has uncovered some complexities in terms of their relationship with the use of letters that will be discussed in the next section of this chapter, and which serve only to make these interactions more interesting in the landscape of textual London.

Part 2: Literacy, Illiteracy, and Textuality in Medieval London

The term 'illiterate' appears in several texts that catalogue various small, metal, inscribed artefacts from medieval London. In his discussion of an annular brooch with the inscription, 'AVEMARIAG/RCIAPLENA:INVAN' (hail Mary full of grace), Geoff Egan suggests that the 'blundered *gracia*' and its unusual letter forms meant that the maker of the brooch was 'illiterate or sub-literate', this despite the fact that the word as it appears on the brooch is simply contracted, albeit with an unusual 'INVAN' addition at the end.[118] Such is typically excused of a medieval scribe, even lauded for the inherent knowledge and ability necessary to subtly condense typical forms of language; but here, in a metalworker, brevity is read as indicating a lack of skill. Nor is Egan alone in this opinion. A catalogue entry for a pilgrim souvenir in the Museum of London's collection mentions idiosyncrasies in its inscription saying, 'this shows the maker was illiterate'.[119] A purse frame in the collection

[118] Egan and Prichard, *Dress Accessories*, 255.
[119] 'Museum of London', 16th February 2021, https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/37592.html.

likewise falls foul of the same assumption, despite the fact that the inscription is correctly spelled, and has simply been mis-transcribed by the cataloguer.[120] Moreover, in these catalogue entries, the term 'illiterate' is the only adjective used with reference to the makers of these objects, offering no further analysis of his or her skills or qualities. This word has the power to dissuade any attempt to understand makers, and by extension how such objects communicated with viewers.

This situation is, first and foremost, built on assumptions about literacy that are produced by considering inscribed objects outside of their context, replacing medieval understandings with modern attitudes and experiences of literate modes. Here we again see the bias towards the scribe: such statements view inscriptions as entirely fixed to the category of 'writing', and therefore apply to their understanding the same methods with which one would approach a document. Indeed, the statements from catalogues quoted above enforce a circular scholarly loop. Reductive perceptions of these objects based on their inscriptions have, in turn, construed them as less worthy of study, meaning the likelihood of finding anything of substance within their inscriptions is further reduced. In this sense, these objects are a casualty of scholarly perceptions of literacy, which have been the subject of fierce debate since the 1970s. In order to understand how the inscribed objects of this thesis may offer insight into the large field of scholarly debate around literacy and orality, what follows is first a summary of these debates, followed by an analysis of where metal inscriptions may fit within them.

A key moment in the scholarship concerning literacy and orality came with the school of thought pioneered by Walter Ong, Jack Goody, and Eric Havelock, all of whom presented writing as a 'civilising' force, without which rational thought was impaired and technological

[120] Purse frame, London, Museum of London 2003.50, https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/725936.html. This inscription has been transcribed 'AVE MARIA GRACIE' in the catalogue when the 'E' at the end of 'gracia' is in actuality an 'A' as it should be.

advances restricted.[121] These scholars focused on broad subject matter to make even more sweeping statements about the importance of the so-called 'technology of writing'. Their theories were tempered by later scholars of writing who, finding the subject heavy with ideological baggage, set about putting writing into context, considering its status within a particular culture at a particular moment, and observing its effects. Scholarly studies of literacy in London during the Middle Ages have, in turn, benefitted from this revision. Clanchy, in his still-influential work on medieval English bureaucracy, cited all of the scholars mentioned above, but maintained that his use of the phrase 'the technology of writing' was an attempt to ensure his discussion of writing remained objective, rejecting the perceived superiority of literate culture by focusing on the processes and tools involved in medieval manuscript production.[122] Since then, studies have continued to emphasise that the effects of the use of writing were dependent upon its specific cultural factors. For example, Frank Klassen has looked at medieval magic manuals, stating that these used writing in a way that was particular to their cultural context, rather than being shaped only by broader medieval practices of literacy.[123] Andy Wood, in his work on writing in early modern England, suggested that 'the distinction between orality and literacy has been overdrawn', citing the practice of using oral testimony in disputes of custom.[124] Such an idea is crucial to understanding literary culture in medieval London too, and we must recognize that just because scribes were highly literate does not mean they were separate from the predominantly oral culture in which they operated. As a

[121] Walter T. Ong. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London, 1983); Jack R. Goody. *Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge, 1977); Eric Havelock. *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, 1986). Like the statements from catalogues above, these works came from an assumption of literacy being superior to orality.
[122] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record,* especially 116-146. Clanchy devoted a chapter of this work to the technology of writing, focusing on the materials and techniques of the scribal profession.
[123] Frank Klassen, 'Unstable Texts and Modal Approaches to the Written Word in Medieval European Ritual Magic' in, *Orality and Literacy: Reflections across Disciplines*, eds. Keith Thor Carlson, Kristina Fagan, Natalia Khanenko-Friesen (Toronto, 2011), 219.
[124] Andy Wood. 'Custom and Social Organisation of Writing in Early Modern England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 9 (1999), 258-260.

consequence of this way of thinking, recent work on the subject prefers the phrase 'use of literacy' to the term 'literate'. Stressing literacy as something that may (or may not) be 'used' balances its perceived power to change thinking, and instead emphasizes that writing and reading are simply tools to facilitate different ends in different contexts.[125]

The work of these scholars recognises that literate and oral cultures can co-exist, and that the same people who participate in one arena might in the same moment participate in the other. This was persuasively argued by Brian Stock, who used wide-ranging evidence of legal procedures, heresy, liturgy, and literature, to draw conclusions about trends of literacy in medieval Europe. He contended that oral and literate traditions were practiced throughout the period, but that their roles in aspects of society, such as judicial systems, shifted in terms of their relative significance over time.[126] Stock's theories, indeed scholarship on medieval literacy in general, have focused on medieval manuscripts, rarely touching on inscribed objects.[127] But it still might provide tools to think about where inscribed objects fit in these literate and oral traditions. Particularly useful in this regard is Stock's suggestion that scholars of the Middle Ages should not think simply of 'orality' and 'literacy', but should introduce a third category:

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[125] The Medieval Urban Literacy project, which began in 2007, has resulted in numerous publications on the uses of literacy in different contexts such as, *Writing and the Administration of Medieval Towns: Medieval Urban Literacy I*, eds. Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska (Turnhout, 2014), vii.

[126] Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, 1983).

[127] Works on literacy in medieval London focus exclusively on book ownership and interaction with documents. See Lindenbaum, 'London Texts and Literate Practice', 284-310; Barron, 'What did Medieval Merchants Read?', 43-70. Andreas Zajic states in his work on uses of literacy in medieval cities that 'as far as I can see, epigraphic monuments have scarcely been discussed as sources revealing aspects of the urban or civic use of writing'. Andreas Zajic, 'Texts on Public Display: Strategies of Visualising Epigraphic Writing' in, *Writing and the Administration of Medieval Towns: Medieval Urban Literacy I*, eds. Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska (Turnhout, 2014), 393. This is not only the case for the particular context of the late medieval urban environment that Zajic researches. It is difficult to find scholars who use inscriptions to comment on literacy for any part of the medieval period, largely because scholars who interact with literacy tend to be manuscript scholars or historians whose work privileges written sources. For the early medieval period an exception would be archaeologist John Mitchell's work on inscriptions at the monastery of San Vincenzo at Volturno, which posed questions about the literacy of their ninth-century makers. John Mitchell, 'Literacy Displayed: The Use of Inscriptions at the Monastery of San Vincenzo al Volturno in the Early Ninth Century' in, *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge, 1990), 204.

'textuality'.[128] Stock's 'textual communities' relate to those who interacted with texts by placing authority in the written word, assimilating ideas from texts, but not necessarily reading or writing words themselves. For example, this would include people who listened to texts being read aloud. As such, textuality does not require or infer any level of what might be termed 'literacy' in its current accepted sense. Although there are elements of Stock's model that subscribe to the ideas of scholars such as Ong mentioned above, the basic principal that people engaged with the written word despite not possessing literacy skills themselves is helpful in exploring the interaction between inscriptions and their viewers in medieval London.[129] I propose that anyone who inscribed an object, owned an inscribed object, or even viewed an inscription, was participating in textuality. Textuality could even be applied to those who wrote and consumed pseudo-script, because this still implies authority being placed in text and a textual value to both maker and consumer, albeit using letters without definitive content.

The idea of textuality has been used by other scholars in thinking about medieval experiences of words and images. Mary Carruthers makes the point that, unlike modern ideas of reading, medieval textuality was social.[130] In her work she discusses the interaction of text depicted in the so-called Troilus Frontispiece, a manuscript image in which a wealthy and fashionable audience listens to Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Cresyde*. This idea of sociable textuality sheds a different light on the potential experience of those viewing inscriptions.

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[128] Brian Stock, 'History, Literature, and Medieval Textuality', *Yale French Studies*, No. 70, (1986), 10.
[129] Stock's more detailed definition of these textual communities is problematic in that he, like the scholars mentioned above, is interested in proving that literacy, or interaction with texts, changes 'thought and behaviour'. For example, he states that those who are part of a textual community 'must associate voluntarily; their interaction must take place around an agreed meaning of the text'. In the case of inscriptions, viewing them is not always voluntary, but can happen by chance, such as seeing a large architectural inscription when looking at a building. I would also question the notion that all who assimilate a text, be it a written document or an inscription, must agree on its meaning, beyond the literal significance of its words. Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy*, 522. See also Stock, 'Listening for the Text', 16-29; 140-158.
[130] Mary Carruthers, 'The Sociable Text of the "Troilus Frontispiece": A Different Mode of Textuality', *ELH*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (2014), 426.

Textuality therefore can highlight ways in which medieval interaction with visual letters differed from their equivalents in our modern, highly literate world.

Is Viewing an Inscription Reading? Is Making an Inscription Writing?

If, as we have seen earlier, goldsmiths were engraving letters without being able to read or write, surely the objects analysed in this thesis do not fit into earlier, more simplistic and problematic definitions of 'literacy' at work in the scholarship, which perhaps explains why they have been largely ignored by scholars who write on the subject. Unlike text that is confined to the page, text fashioned on objects was more likely to be viewed by those who could not read as well as those who could. Inscriptions were often included on objects made for purposes whose primary function was not the communication of information, ranging from knife handles to church bells. Sometimes, as in the case of letters on church bells, inscriptions were made with the maker knowing that they would rarely be seen, let alone read.[131] Examples of private epigraphy allow us to think about what it was to experience letters without necessarily reading them, and to compose with letters without writing them.

Like notions of orality and literacy, medieval practices of reading have been explored by many scholars almost exclusively in relation to books and manuscripts.[132] Even when attempting to find ways of talking about epigraphy, concepts of reading that stem from book and manuscript culture are difficult to avoid, as works on reading do not focus exclusively on inscriptions. For instance, Heather Blatt, used the term 'nonreading' to talk about architectural

[131] There has recently been interesting studies on the role of bells in medieval Christian communities, including the significance of their epigraphy in, John H. Arnold and Caroline Goodson, 'Resounding Community: The History and Meaning of Medieval Church Bells', *Viator*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (2012), 99-130; Michelle E. Garceau , '"I Call the People": Church Bells in Fourteenth-Century Catalunya', *Journal of Medieval History*, Vol. 37 (2011), 207-209.

[132] See Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (New York, 1996); Paul Henry Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford, 1997); Heather Blatt, *Participatory Reading in Late-Medieval England* (Manchester, 2018).

inscriptions, as well as books and manuscripts.[133] This term was originally coined by Leah Price in her research into books in the nineteenth century.[134] In Blatt's work on reading practices, nonreading is used to encompass all manner of interactions with a text that either go beyond reading, such as discussion or debate, or which complicates traditional reading, for example walking around a room to read an inscription painted on its walls. 'Extracodexical texts', as Blatt terms the painted epigraphs she analyses, are distinguished by their experience in space, and she argues, therefore, that it is not just the reading of them, but other forms of interaction that become crucial to understanding how such texts were viewed.[135] However, traditional 'reading' still plays a central role in Blatt's approach, her interest being *reading and* rather than understanding what it is to interact with a text without reading it.

This presents a problem in applying the term nonreading to inscriptions in pseudo-script, nonsense words, ancient or non-native languages, and those that were viewed by those with limited reading skills. Michelle Brown's thoughts on visual literacy open the experience of text to a much broader audience, as, 'reading and writing are but two independent modes of communication that are inextricably interwoven with linguistics, orality, visual narrative graphicacy and semiotics'.[136] This is especially pertinent when thinking about inscriptions, which demand interaction with their surroundings, and attract the attention of viewers whether or not they are willing or able to read them.

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[133] Despite defining itself in the negative, most of the actions are contingent on an ability to read. Heather Blatt, *Participatory Reading in Late-Medieval England* (Manchester, 2018), 196. Price also observes that the study of books privileges reading, and in her work she attempts to reverse this by analyzing books through nonreading actions, stressing their equal value in the reception of books.
[134] Leah Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton, 2012), 8-9. Originally, Price used it to describe interactions with books other than reading them, emphasising the book as a physical object rather than a text; this includes any action relating to books as possessions, such as purchasing and caring for books, or destroying books. Nonreading and reading are not mutually exclusive, in that one must often perform a nonreading action, such as holding a book, in order to read it.
[135] Blatt, *Participatory Reading in Late-Medieval England*, 196; Price, *How to Do Things with Books*, 8.
[136] Michelle P. Brown, 'Strategies of Visual Literacy in Insular and Anglo-Saxon Book Culture' in, *Transformation in Anglo-Saxon Culture: Toller Lectures on Art, Archaeology and Text*, eds. Charles Insley and Gale R. Owen-Crocker (Oxford, 2017), 71.

The answer to the question, 'is viewing an inscription *reading*?' is therefore, 'not always'. But, within the context of medieval London, was making an inscription ever *writing*? In my survey of scribal activity in medieval London, it was clear that, as Clanchy asserts, writing was an activity carried out by specialists and not something that necessarily came hand-in-hand with reading, as it does today. Within the context of London before the printing press, the sole expression of writing on parchment or paper was chirography. But the letters engraved, inscribed, or cast in metal—or indeed fashioned in other materials such as wood, stone, or textiles—were different both in form and manufacture from handwriting. Additionally, those who engraved letters often also engraved imagery, whereas illuminations were often carried out by limners rather than scribes. Metalworkers might also cast or shape a metal object, refine metals, or produce alloys. The remainder of this thesis will examine metal letters, and the objects that bear them to understand how their creators used them to communicate. As such, inscriptions present an opportunity to explore uses of visual letters that, unlike books and manuscripts, were accessible to those who did not participate in book culture.

Part 3: Letters in the Landscape

The discussion above has highlighted how important it is to root analysis of the making and reception of textual objects in the context of a particular moment and place. With this in mind, I will return to the unfortunate merchant, Luigi of Genoa, whose lost seal matrix prompted the discussion above, to build a picture of how visual letters were experienced specifically by medieval Londoners. Luigi's seal is just one example of the words on display that were part of their daily life. A reconstruction of Luigi's 0.6-mile journey from Fleet Bridge to the Guildhall to register his seal missing reveals a varied and complex landscape of visual letters in terms of material and purpose, emerging through the buildings, industries, and institutions he would have encountered (figure 1.11). While his precise journey was not recorded, work on London's

thoroughfares allows me to construct a likely, and fairly direct, route.[137] Recently, reconstruction of historical locations to comment on medieval identity and sense of self has been an effective methodology. Niall Atkinson, in his work on the urban environment in Italy during the Renaissance, emphasises how much medieval identity was bound up with the places where an individual lived. [138] In the following section, I will use Luigi's journey to situate private epigraphy within the broader landscape of language on display in medieval London.

We begin with a general observation on medieval wayfinding.[139] While all of the streets that Luigi traversed had names for administrative purposes, these names were not spelled out in the landscape through signs. There were signs on the street, but these were to indicate shops or other businesses, and were generally pictorial rather than textual. No examples of house signs have survived from medieval London but the regulation of such signs in the Liber Albus shows that they were part of the urban landscape.[140] One existing plaque from 1509, slightly after the later temporal boundary of this thesis, is in the Museum of London and was from London Bridge (figure 1.12).[141] The sign has an inscription that reads, 'Anno'dni/1509', and a mark showing a cross intersected by a star. It is the mark of city wardens who were responsible for collecting tolls and rent from the businesses that operated on London Bridge. Rather than labelling the bridge, or acting as a navigational tool, this sign imposed the presence of the city

[137] I used the 1270 to1300 map on the 'Layers of London' website, which overlays historic maps on London's current layout. 'Layers of London', 17th February 2021, https://www.layersoflondon.org/map/overlays/medieval-london-1270-1300?overlayGroups=eyJlbmFibGVkIjpbIm1lZGlldmFsLWxvbmRvbi0xMjcwLTEzMDAiXX0%3D
[138] Niall Atkinson, 'Getting Lost in the Italian Renaissance,' *I Tatti Studies in the Renaissance* 19, 1 (2016), 177-207. For an evocative description of late medieval London, as well as other locations, see Marion Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life* (Princeton, 2019).
[139] Atkinson, 'Getting Lost in the Italian Renaissance', 177-207.
[140] Ruth Evans, 'Getting There: Wayfinding in the Middle Ages' in, *Medieval Britain, Medieval Roads*, eds. Valerie Allen and Ruth Evans (Manchester 2016), 127-156; Michael Camille, 'Signs of the City: Place, Power and Public Fantasy in Medieval Paris' in, *Medieval Practices of Space*, eds. Barbara A. Hanawalt and Michal Kobailka (Minneapolis, 2000), 1-36.
[141] London Bridge boundary stone, London, Museum of London, 7210, https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/118712.html.

wardens on the landscape. Along Luigi's reconstructed journey, then, we will find inscriptions whose purposes and placing are particular to this context.

Large-scale public epigraphy in hard-wearing materials like stone and metal is what first comes to mind when we think of public letters. Imposing the presence of its subject on the landscape, the London Bridge stone reminds viewers who has authority in that particular location. Commemoration was also a common purpose of stone and metal epigraphy. Monuments displayed in public spaces were a prominent feature of medieval London's material environment, and were also produced within the city walls. After crossing Fleet Bridge, Luigi would have approached the city from the west along Fleet Street with St Paul's Cathedral directly in front of him, a landmark that was probably in his line of sight some distance before he reached the bridge. As he came inside the city walls, he would pass the church of St Martin Ludgate on his left, and the large precinct of Blackfriars on his right. Turning left onto Ave Maria Aly and then right onto Paternoster Rewe, Luigi would have passed a marblers' workshop.[142]

Purbeck marble funerary monuments had been produced in London since the middle of the thirteenth century.[143] As well as all-marble monuments, memorials also often included inlaid brass letter-forms that are thought also to have been cast in London.[144] Such pieces were situated in the architectural environment of a church, and were part of an established tradition of letters outside of the confines of books and manuscripts. A surviving Purbeck marble monument from the church of St Swithin's London Stone (figure 1.13), offers an insight into inscriptions that

[142] As has already been discussed in the section comparing scribes and metalworkers above, this was also an area of book production. Ave Maria Aly and Paternoster Rewe were named after incipits, alluding to the literary activities of those who worked there. D. Vance Smith, *The Book of the Incipit: Beginnings in the Fourteenth Century* (Minnesota, 2001), 1-2.
[143] London records include significantly more people with the epithet, 'the marbler' after 1280. Badham and Norris, *Early Incised Slabs and Brasses from the London Marblers*, 26. Blair put forward that marblers came to the city originally to work on the presbytery pavement at Westminster Abbey and that the industry grew as it gained commissions from other architectural projects as well as private funerary monuments. Blair, 'English Monumental Brasses Before 1350: Types, Patterns and Workshops', 135.
[144] Badham and Norris, *Early Incised Slabs and Brasses from the London Marblers*, 27-30.

were produced as well as viewed in medieval London.[145] It marked the heart burial of Joan, wife of Sir Fulk de St Edmunds, who was the Sheriff of London from 1289–1290. Along its sides it has the Norman-French metrical inscription, '+ LE: QWER: IONE: KEFU: / LA FEM[ME: DE:] SIRE: FU / LKE: DE: SEINT: E[DMONDS: / GIT]: ICI: PRIEZ: PUR: LALME' (the heart of Joan, who was the wife of Sir Fulk de St Edmunds, lies here; pray for her soul).[146] In the centre of the slab is an image of Joan holding her heart in her hands. Those viewing the monument would see the inscription from above, walking around the stone anti-clockwise to follow its direction. Experiencing inscriptions such as this one clearly differed from experiencing text in a manuscript, or on wax seal impressions affixed to a document. The surroundings of Joan's monument were integral to its purpose and meaning. Like most funerary inscriptions, it entreats those passing by to pray for the soul of the one it commemorates.[147] By asking its viewers to pray for Joan's soul, this monument is instigating an action other than reading, and interacts with the purpose of the building in which it is situated. It even targets a specific community of people. By the late thirteenth century, wealthy Londoners like Joan had various options of where they might be buried other than in their local church, such as in one of the friaries that had recently been established.[148] Joan lived in London, her husband was Sheriff of London, and may have decided to have her heart buried at St Swithin's because of

[145] Funerary monument, London, Museum of London, 23078, H 780 mm; W 780 mm; D 190 mm. https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/35594.html.
[146] Heart burials were not uncommon in England and France during the thirteenth century. They were briefly banned by the pope between 1299 and 1300, after which they became less popular. Immo Warntjes, 'Programmatic Double-Burial (Body and Heart) of the European High Nobility: Its Origin, Geography and Functions' in, *Death at Court*, eds. Karl-Heinz Spieß and Immo Warntjes (Wiesbaden, 2012), 197-260; Estella Weiss-Krejci, 'Heart Burial in Medieval and Early Modern Central Europe' in, *Body Parts and Bodies Whole*, eds. Katharina Rebay-Salisbury, Marie Louise Stig Sørensen, Jessica Hughes (Exeter, 2010), 122-123.
[147] Barker, *Stone Fidelity.* See also Barker, 'The Sculpted Epitaph', 237. Jessica Barker's work on funerary monuments is particularly relevant to this discussion in that her methodology centres on analysing the epigraphy with sculpted imagery and how one effects the viewers' experience of the other. See 243-246.
[148] Christian Steer, 'Burial and Commemoration in the London Friaries' in, Nick Holder, *The Friaries of Medieval London: From Foundation to Dissolution* (Woodbridge, 2017), 283.

connections she had during her life with this parish.[149] It may also be that the rest of her body was buried in a shared grave with Fulk's first wife, where Fulk himself and his third wife would later join them. In choosing this location for her heart burial, however, she also chose the prayers of the congregants at St Swithin's. In a parish church, congregants would have encountered the same inscription many times throughout their lives. The monument and its inscription, therefore, would have developed its own significance to individual viewers beyond the content of its text.

Continuing with Luigi's journey, we discover more cases of such ecclesiastical public letters. On the corner of Paternoster Rewe was the church of St Michael le Querne and, if Luigi continued on to Cheapside, he would also pass St Vedest, St Matthew Friday Street, and St Peter Westcheap. In fact, Luigi's short journey in the late fourteenth century would have been punctuated by eleven ecclesiastical buildings, in which public inscriptions were not only confined to funerary monuments, featuring on a wide range of articles of church fabric from floor tiles to vestments.[150] Such spaces offer a significant contribution to discussions of London's letters. This was acknowledged by John Schofield in his study of Saxon and medieval churches, in which he stated that 'the late medieval parish church, through its iconography of painting, carving and glass, was a highly essential educator at a time when lay literacy was rising'.[151] And while surviving examples of church furnishings specifically used in London, rather than made for export, are few, the frequency of devotional inscriptions in ecclesiastical

[149] Sir Fulke de St Edmunds was Sheriff from 1289-1290. Badham and Norris, *Early Incised Slabs and Brasses from the London Marblers*, 127.
[150] Iconoclasm and fire have destroyed the majority of London's medieval fabric. In the Museum of London there are floor tiles that include inscriptions as part of their slip decoration: 59.37/47; 6897.
[151] Schofield, 'Saxon and Medieval Parish Churches in London*',* 79. I would caveat my use of this quote by saying that, while I think that Schofield is correct in saying that churches played a role in making congregants more familiar with the visual letter, I would not use the term 'educator' in this way. Churches did have schools attached to them in the Middle Ages, but what I, and I think Schofield, is referring to here is a phenomenon that is too passive to be deemed 'education'. Education in reading and writing will be discussed further later in this chapter. Clanchy states, 'the dynamic of literacy was religious' in the Middle Ages, in that prayers and devotional texts were often the material by which people learned to read. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 13.

settings would have made some phrases and holy names particularly recognisable, even to those with limited reading skills. For example, a surviving floor tile now in the Museum of London preserves the crowned letters 'ihc', the monogram derived from the name Jesus in Greek, *Ἰησοῦς* (figure 1.14). [152] Numerous other examples of floor tiles from churches in London include such lettering in their designs.[153] On the walls of medieval churches, paintings were often captioned with text. Examples do not survive from within the city walls, but fragments of wall paintings with inscriptions do survive from St Stephen's Chapel in nearby Westminster (figure 1.15).[154] Indeed, inscriptions were not just built into the architectural features of a church: vestments and other textiles also often included embroidered text. London during the Middle Ages was a centre of production of embroidery known as *Opus Anglicanum*. An example of an embroidered panel at the British Museum (figure 1.16) depicts the Annunciation with the Archangel Gabriel holding a scroll with the words, 'AVE MARIA GRACIA' (hail Mary [full of] grace).[155] In the records for the church of St Mary at Hill, situated to the east of London Bridge, textiles belonging to the church such as vestments and altar cloths are often described as having the initials of a donor embroidered onto them, with no other details of their appearance noted.[156] Donors' initials marked out their participation in charitable works and in the shaping of their communities. They are another example of inscription being used in relation to identity, but

[152] Ceramic floor tile, London, Museum of London, 38205 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/38205.html. This floor tiles appears on the online catalogue upside-down, its worn design obviously obscured its meaning to the modern eye, but to medieval congregants the 'ihc' monogram would have been unmistakable.
[153] Floor tiles, London, Museum of London, 6897: 13th-14th-century floor tile; 59.34/47: 14th-century floor tile; 6888b; 6889: 14th-century floor tile.
[154] These particular fragments tell the story of Job. St Stephens wall paintings London, British Museum, 1814,0312.2 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1814-0312-2.
[155] Embroidered panel, London, British Museum, 1919,0305.1 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1919-0305-1.
[156] The itinerary of the parish church of St Mary At Hill includes references to altar cloths and copes with the names of the donor who paid for them embroidered onto them. 'Introduction: The pre-reformation furniture', in *The Medieval Records of A London City Church St Mary At Hill, 1420-1559*, ed. Henry Littlehales (London, 1905), 31-5.

unlike funerary monuments, which often offer few narrative details about the life of an individual, these initials clearly signpost the charitable deeds of the donor.

Public text was also used for political purposes in medieval London. Continuing onward along Cheapside, Luigi would pass St Mary Magdalene Milk Street, All Hallows Honey Lane, and St Mary Bow on this busy commercial thoroughfare. Here, he would also have discovered another side to London's public visual letters: the Cheapside Cross. The Cross was one of twelve monuments erected in the 1290s by Edward I to memorialise his queen, Eleanor of Castile. As a sculpture, the cross was adorned with statues of the Virgin, Christ, and saints, but was not itself inscribed.[157] However, as a prominent landmark in one of the busiest areas of the city, it was nonetheless regularly used to send messages to London's citizens, literally and figuratively. For example, as well as being a landmark of performative displays of justice, such as executions, in 1326 an open letter from Queen Isabella to the people of London asking for their support against the Despensers was fixed to Cheapside Cross in full view of London's inhabitants.[158] The public display of written letters in this manner would not just have been about reading: such an exhibition was also hoped to prompt of discussion, persuasion, and decision-making into which unlettered Londoners would have been drawn. Public text was also used by London's government in punitive contexts. For example, John Stow in his Survey of London, recalls an incident from his youth in which he witnessed the punishment of an adulterous priest.[159] The priest was paraded through the city's markets on three different days, with a paper hat on his head displaying words detailing his crime. The sight of him, adorned with his offence reified in visual language, created a memorable spectacle intended to brand his

[157] Vanessa Harding, 'Cheapside: Commerce and Commemoration', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (2008), 80.
[158] *Anonimalle Chronicle 1307 to 1334: From Brotherton Collection MS 29*, eds. W. R. Childs and J. Taylor (Cambridge, 2013), 125. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139839136. This letter is also mentioned in *Calendar of plea and memoranda rolls preserved among the archives of the Corporation of the City of London at the Guildhall. [Vol. 1], A.D. 1323-1364*, ed. A.H. Thomas (Cambridge, 1926), 41-2.
[159] John Stow, 'Cornehill warde', in *A Survey of London Written in the Year 1598*, ed. William John Thoms (Oxford, 1876), 72. John Stow was an Early Modern Londoner and antiquarian who wrote a detailed survey of the city.

misdeed onto his reputation.[160] It is notable that in these cases, words on display are made of traditional writing materials of ink and parchment. Communicating political machinations or crimes, they are not required, nor desired, to be permanent in the manner of a tomb slab or embroidered garment.

Turning off Cheapside, Luigi would quickly have arrived at the Guildhall to make his plea. His journey through the medieval city would have been only brief, but I have used it here to draw attention to the variety of displayed letters that a single individual would have encountered even in a short journey, as well as the wide range of worlds—devotional, political, aesthetic—to which each might have afforded access. The varying functions of the text encountered here suggest that Londoners had a far more complex relationship with these inscriptions than simply as readers.

Part 4: Viewing Private Epigraphy: Establishing Terminology

Should Luigi have been anxious to replace his lost seal with a new one, he might have returned to Cheapside on his way home. A major commercial hub in the city, this thoroughfare was famous for the wares of its goldsmiths.[161] With a high concentration of goldsmiths and other metalworkers, this area would have been full of craftspeople specialising in seal-making.[162] The presence of this market space reminds us of yet another venue for text, this time of a more private rather than public nature: the very stuff of this thesis. London's extensive commercial networks meant that small-scale, lettered objects were regularly passing in and out of the city in

[160] Sonja Drimmer notes a similar case, juxtaposing it with an incident in the fifteenth century in which the heads of dead dogs were displayed in London with scrolls in their mouths, a visual representation of speech, literally putting words in their mouths. A living bearer of such words potentially still has the power to refute them. Sonja Drimmer, 'The Severed Head as Public Sculpture in Late Medieval England', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2020), 293-321.
[161] Karen Newman, '"Goldsmith's Ware": Equivalence in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (2008), 104.
[162] McEwan, 'Making a Mark in Medieval London', 79.

vast numbers. This private epigraphy was not tied to a single location in the same manner as immovable stone monuments, yet its physical surroundings—whether worn on the body or attached to clothing, used in a commercial or legal setting or in the home—are essential factors in how people interacted with them. Following on from this discourse on visual letters in the London landscape, the small-scale visual dynamics of letter-forms carved into, or cast as part of, objects is also integral to their reception by viewers. Unlike the letters-forms created by scribes, those of metalworkers have not been systematically classified, and this final contextual section will serve to establish some of the terms I will used to describe metal letters in the remainder of this thesis.

We have seen above that scribes and other craftspeople of the book trade, worked in close proximity to the makers of inscribed letters, but can palaeography convey the characteristics of the styles employed by metal epigraphists? If we were once more to look at the fruits of the scribe's and metalworker's labour side-by-side, what visual references, influences, and distinctions would become apparent? The diverse materials and techniques used to sculpt metal letters has already been stressed above with reference to metalworking and its effects on the surface and relief of metal letters. As a result, there is also significant variety in the silhouettes of letter-forms used in small, metal inscriptions. Compared with handwritten letter-forms in manuscripts, little attention has been paid to the letter-forms inscribed on objects.[163] Satisfactory terminology to categorise inscribed forms has not been developed as thoroughly as it has been in the study of handwriting.[164] The standard way of classifying medieval inscribed

[163] That being said, there have been attempts at palaeographic analysis of large-scale early medieval inscriptions, usually in stone. See Nicolete Gray, 'The Palaeography of Latin Inscriptions in the Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Centuries in Italy', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, Vol. 16 (1948), 38-162; Carlo Tedeschi, 'Early Christian Inscriptions in Britain' in, *Roman, Runes and Ogham: Medieval Inscriptions in the Insular World and on the Continent*, eds. John Higgitt, Katherine Forsyth and Davin N. Parsons (Donington, 2001), 16-25.

[164] The most relevant work to this section would be H. S. Kingsford, 'VIII.—The Epigraphy of Medieval English Seals', *Archaeologia* 79 (1929), 149–178. Doi:10.1017/S026134090000881X. A more recent work on epigraphic letter-forms is, Vincent Debiais, Robert Favreau, Cécile Treffort, 'L'évolution de l'écriture épigraphique en France au Moyen Âge et ses enjeux historiques' in, *Bibliothèque de l'école des Chartes*, tome 165, livraison 1. (2007), 101-137.

letter-forms is to unthinkingly impose palaeographical terminology onto them, naming them either Roman, Lombardic, or Black Letter. Yet early inscriptions can often include both Roman and Lombardic forms, with Black Letter inscriptions also entering the mix from the latter half of the fourteenth century onwards. These are broad categories that encompass a variety of different styles within them. And individually, too, each of these terms has problems when taken from the written page—or, more specifically, the printed page—and applied to three-dimensional inscriptions. I am not the first to point out that inscription studies lack adequate terminology. In 1929, H. S. Kingsford, in his study of letter-forms on British seals, called the use of the term Lombardic 'unsatisfactory', but proffered no strategy to replace this terminology.[165] Anna-Dorothee von den Brincken, in her work on manuscript initials, adopted a solution that Kingsford had also rejected on the grounds that it perpetuated similar problems. This was simply to classify letters as being either majuscule (meaning that they adhere to a two-line system) or minuscule (which use a four-line system because of their ascenders and descenders).[166] Von den Brinken specifically justifies her thinking by stripping these terms back to these mechanical definitions. This exposition, in my view, almost makes her solution workable. However I think there is still room for improvement.

Whereas both authors shy away from sharing terminology with palaeographers, I suggest that it might be more fruitful instead to embrace the fluidity between manuscript and metal letters, mobilising terminology to help us comment on the visual influences flowing from the written to the inscribed and, crucially, from the inscribed to the written. Such reluctance to use terminology of the written word disregards the fact that all Roman letters are themselves based on a style originally designed to be inscribed in three dimensions, Roman square capitals

[165] Kingsford, 'VIII.—The Epigraphy of Medieval English Seals, 151.
[166] Anna-Dorothee von den Brincken, 'Monumental Legends on Medieval Manuscript Maps: Notes on Designed Capital Letters on Maps of Large Size (Demonstrated from the Problem of Dating the Vercelli Map, Thirteenth Century)', *Imago Mundi*, Vol. 42 (1990), 18. Kingsford, sixty years earlier, had rejected this on the reasonable grounds that terms majuscule and minuscule also have other meanings in the field of palaeography.

of the sort common on public Classical monuments.[167] Limners, the craftspeople who made flourished and illuminated letter-forms in medieval book production, often sought to employ a sense of texture or figuration to make initials at the beginning of words or section of text appear monumental. Therefore, in the terminology that I will use in discussing metal letters, I will acknowledge the connection between letter-making across media. My proposition, used throughout this thesis, will be to term what would usually be called *Lombardic*, or *majuscule*, letter-forms as *capitals*. This term does not carry with it stylistic or material assumptions, allowing me to then describe the aspect of any letter-form unimpeded; it also satisfies the criteria of describing letter-forms based on a two-line system in a similarly unencumbered manner. Likewise, rather than using the term *Black Letter,* or *minuscule*, in this thesis I will refer to letters that adhere to a four-line system as *textura*. This term, which is firmly established in palaeographic terminology referring to medieval book hands, recognises the origins of these letter-forms in manuscript culture, and by extension that they represent the use of a different grade of text to my earlier *capitals*. Again, this allows us to engage with these letter-forms unimpeded by too much critical baggage, focusing on their content and context.

Finally, a note about the broad date ranges I have given for the examples examined below. This is difficult to do with a high degree of accuracy, and my intention is not to provide a grounding in the chronology of these letter-forms as they appeared in London.[168] In what follows, I will use examples of metal letters taken from seal matrices found in London and will explore the letter-form styles employed by metalworkers, and their shift in grades of text and monumentality. The intention is to outline an epigraphic crib-sheet for the thesis to come,

[167] Nicolete Gray, *Lettering as Drawing: Contour and Silhouette* (Oxford, 1970), 5.
[168] Kingsford concluded in his study of seals that it was not possible to establish reliably a date for a seal based on its legend. In his study he was careful to use only seals that could be dated confidently through other means, such as the date they appeared on a document or the active dates of the person who owned it. Kingsford, 'VIII.—The Epigraphy of Medieval English Seals', 164.

lending a shared vocabulary that will allow us in later chapters to enter deeper critical modes as regards the motivations and meanings of objects.

The late twelfth-century seal matrix of a member of the influential Préaux family exemplifies the form of inscribed metal letters from the earliest part of the period discussed in this thesis (figure 1.17).[169] The inscription reads, in Latin and French, '+SIGILLVM : INGELRAM : DEPREAUS' (the seal of Ingelram De Preaux). Clearly the maker of this seal matrix did not have recourse to vivid colour or extensive space to expand into the margins of the seal with imagery or other flourishes. The letter-forms thus take on the aesthetic heavy lifting to a significant degree, boldy contrasting straight lines and curves. The thickness of the lines is fairly consistent throughout their length, with those that make up the letters seeming relatively slim and with a rounded, U-shaped cross-section, creating soft shadows. This is contrasted with the pointy triangular serifs that terminate these lines. In the case of one of the 'R's, its right foot extends with a thin line that wanders below the baseline and to the right beneath the 'E'. The other 'R' keeps within its boundaries, showing how two examples of the same letter can even have slightly different forms. In terms of silhouette, the final 'A' is particularly characteristic of inscribed capitals of this earlier period. It is symmetrical, crowned by a top bar that extends over the whole letter and girded in the middle with a broken bar. Contrast this aesthetic with another inscription made up of capitals from Boxgrove Priory (figure 1.18).[170] This thirteenth-century seal matrix is of a complex design in two pieces, with motifs and inscriptions on both sides. One of the inscriptions reads, 'SIGILL : ECCL'E : SCE : MARIE : SCIQ : BLASII : DE : BOXGRAVA' (seal of the church of St Mary and St Blaise of Boxgrove). Here, the lines of

[169] Copper alloy seal, London, Museum of London, 45.41/1 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/779938.html. The de Préaux family were Anglo-Norman nobility who operated during the reigns of the Angevins. Tony K. Moore, 'The Loss of Normandy and the Invention of "Terre Normannorum," 1204', *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 125, No. 516 (2010) 1084; other members of the family are mentioned in minor roles in Daniel Power, *The Norman Frontier in the Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 2004).

[170] Copper alloy seal matrix, London British Museum, 1852,0405.1 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1852-0405-1 . Boxgrove Priory is in Sussex but this seal matrix was found in Bethnal Green.

these letter-forms are much thicker than those of the Ingelram seal, but also have a rounded U-shaped cross-section. The curved lines of letter-forms like the 'C', 'E', and 'S' swell dramatically towards the centre of the curve, giving them more in common with their manuscript counterparts than those of the Ingelram seal matrix.[171] The 'A' is much straighter than the Ingelram examples and is asymmetrical, with one of its upright lines being thicker than the other. The lines end in restrained triangular serifs. The thickness of the lines has allowed the maker to include some decorative detail. For example, there is a very delicate outline surrounding the letter-forms, which is particularly apparent on the 'I' and 'L' forms.

The seal of the Port of London (figure 1.19), made slightly later between the late-thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, has an inscription in capitals that reads, '*S' DNI EDWARDI REG'ANGL' IN PORTV LONDONIARV' (seal of Edward King of England in the Port of London).[172] Clearly, by this point in the period stylistic conventions were beginning to shift. Firstly, these letter-forms are far narrower than the previous two examples. Swelling in the curved lines is still evident, but less extreme than in the Boxgrove Priory seal matrix. The 'A' forms are very similar in composition to the Boxgrove Priory example, as are most of the other letter-forms. But clear distinction can be made with this alphabet in terms of its highly sculpted quality. Where the Ingelram and Boxgrove examples have rounded cross-sections, the port seal's letters are flat, their edges falling away almost straight down towards the surface of the seal. I would term this type of cross-section as a trapezoid section. The letters appear more angular as a result, compared to the soft curvaceous letters in the previous examples. The resulting shadows are dampened, for more consistent lines that stand out prominently from their background.

[171] This style of letterform has been referred to in other works as swelled Lombardic.
[172] Silver seal matrix, London, British Museum,1850,0942.2 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1850-0924-2.

Another example of an inscription in capitals, shows yet another contrasting textural approach. This is the seal of an individual, probably a merchant (figure 1.20), and reads, 'S'IAVTONERII : DE : PODIO' (seal of Pautoneri of Le Puy).[173] The cross-section of the letter-forms is triangular, creating sharp shadows converging at the centre of each letter-form. The lines end in neat, triangular serifs. The letter-forms as a result seem more delicate than the previous examples, but also less distinct. Letter-forms engraved with sharp, triangular cross-sections are most often seen in base metal seals belonging to private individuals. The careful sculpting of the previous two institutional seals is indicative of the cost and skill with which they were made. There are also some differences in the silhouette styles, for example the use of straight Roman 'N' and 'E' forms, rather than the rounded styles seen in the previous seal matrices. Straight letters are also more common in base metal merchant seals, their construction being simpler than the curved forms.

From the fourteenth century and into the fifteenth, yet more stylistic conventions in metal letters emerged. Recourse once again to manuscripts made in London, such as a page from a psalter now in the British Library, offer a neat demonstration of several of their fashionable features (figure 1.21). [174] Limners employed figural imagery, pattern, colour, and gilding to create texture and movement that set opening initials apart from the main text, creating a distinct category of display letters that differed in style to the main lettering of a page. It was also the basic silhouettes of these letters that set them apart: they are curvaceous, their flourishes extending their forms to spill over borders and flow into the spaces left by the text. These grander initials coexisted with simpler textura letters on the book page throughout thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries: rounded flourished initials headed up sections or sentences,

[173]Copper alloy seal matrix, London, Museum of London, C2312 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/35721.html. This seal is listed in the catalogue tentatively as fourteenth century, however, it is unclear when this seal matrix was made and it could be placed in the thirteenth century.

[174] London, British Library, *14th century psalter*, Harley MS. 6563, 13th century psalter, London, British Library, Additional MS. 28681, London, British Library; *15th century psalter*, Additional MS. 42131.

while the main body of the text employed textura, made up of straight lines that terminated in angular serifs. This twofold format was fluid between manuscript and metalwork cultures. Textura letters began to be used in hard epigraphy in the mid-fourteenth century, especially in large-scale inscriptions such as funerary monuments, where this shift was consistently applied, and inconsistently in small-scale inscriptions, such as those on seal matrices and pilgrim souvenirs.[175] The development in the fourteenth century of informal cursive scripts meant that gradually textura gained a monumentality previously reserved for initials.[176] This shift suggests that it is vital to think of capitals and textura not as two different styles, but two different grades of letter-form appropriate for different purposes. By the beginning of the fifteenth century, textura was largely reserved in book production for religious and literary texts, and I propose that the adoption of textura in inscriptions was a way of visually signalling the owner or commissioner's familiarity with the subtleties of this manuscript culture. Fifteenth-century textura, then, could be closely linked to status. For instance, within extant seal matrices from medieval London I have not found any base-metal, anonymous seal matrices with textura legends, only seal matrices of high-status individuals and institutions. I suggest that this is because institutions and high-status individuals held a different relationship to manuscript culture than those who encounter documents less frequently, seeking to display this through the use of textura inscriptions. Ultimately, this reveals strong links between the politics of metal letters and book letters, consistent across materials.

For those fifteenth-century seals that do observe the use of textura letter-forms, closer analysis reveals yet more subtleties in the functioning of their script. A fifteenth-century merchant's seal matrix belonging to one Clais van Ende (figure 1.22) has a legend written in textura letter-forms reading, 's•clais•van•ende••' (seal of Clais van Ende).[177] The letter-forms

[175] Kingsford, 'VIII.—The Epigraphy of Medieval English Seals', 164.
[176] Saenger, *Space Between Words*, 257-258.
[177] Copper alloy seal matrix, London, British Museum, 1856,0702.2206 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1856-0701-2206.

themselves have a trapezoid cross-section, giving them flat faces similar to the Port of London example. The letters differ in silhouette from earlier initials most obviously in their use of combinations of straight lines to create even curved letters, like the ‘s’ here. The lines have also evolved diamond serifs, what in contemporary books would be called textura quadrata forms. And their spatial disposition has likewise evolved. The letters have been given a much wider channel than in previous examples, taking up a larger proportion of the seal’s design relative to the motif. In this inscription, then, we might detect a sense of transition between the traditional two-line forms and the four-line textura letters. The maker has tried to make the letters the same height, so the ‘a’ seems enlarged while ascenders are stunted. The ‘d’ breaks ranks, punctuating the top border. As a result, there is no sense that the letters flow together as there has been in the previous examples of capital inscriptions which often feature letters biting into each other. The words are spaced apart jarringly by enlarged dots. Where inscriptions in capitals visually create a border around the motif, the letter-forms in this example are more like satellites that float around the motif relatively informally. But, once more, we must acknowledge that the van Ende seal matrix is just one of a broader sample of sometimes quite different presentations of textura. Compare the van Ende seal, in which the letter-forms are spaced generously in the same way as capitals, with other examples where textura is far more tightly packed. In these cases, textura inscriptions can read almost like bar codes, so that it is not always easy to distinguish where one letter ends and the next begins. This is the case in a seal matrix from the friary at Hounslow (figure 1.23).[178] The ratio of motif to legend is reversed relative to the van Ende seal, with the letter-forms crammed into two narrow channels at either side of the motif, rather that encircling it. It reads, ‘s’: fraternitatis dom' de hundʃlove’. The ascenders and descenders have been allowed to extend through the borders, rather than being stunted as in the previous example. In terms of individual silhouettes of the letters, the most extreme departure from initials is the use

[178] Copper alloy seal matrix, London, British Museum,1936,1010.1 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1936-1010-1.

of the long ‘S’ in ‘hundʃlove’. The letter-forms have a soft U-shaped cross section, making them appear bulbous, and the attempt at quadrata style indistinct; yet in their style they feel quite radically different to the contemporaneous letters of Clais van Ende.

In conclusion, then, rather than viewing capital or textura letters as simplistic and fixed categories, this thesis argues for seeing metal letters as mobilising different grades of letter-forms within these two terms. It is vital to acknowledge that within both there are many stylistic variations. This in turns gives us access to ideas of stylistic development over time in this material, allowing the characteristics of individual letter-forms to be analysed from a neutral baseline. An approach similar to that of the palaeographic field is difficult to impose on this particular corpus. Metal letters of private epigraphy catered to owners from a variety of backgrounds, and makers with varying material expertise. Two seal matrices from the same year could have letter-forms of vastly different styles, especially if one represented, say, a wealthy institution and the other was used by a private individual of limited means.

. . .

Small metal epigraphy is part of a culture of visual letters in medieval London, the contexts for which in terms of making, reading, and scholarly terminology I have outlined above. We have established a sense of the makers of metal letters, their processes, the ways in which medieval Londoners might have encountered such letters, and a range of modern descriptors that are better reflective of their development and significance. Accessing scholarship about other London letter-makers has validated an approach whereby metalworkers can be credited with creative agency over their work. Yet it should not go unnoticed that for all this talk of the detail of metalworkers and their lives, the chapter above has barely named any London metalworking masters, the majority of whom remain unknown. The next chapter will confront the various

problems raised by the issue of anonymity in relation to metalworkers and their work. For to know these craftspeople, we must allow their work to reveal their creative processes. In this chapter, the making and viewing of letters in medieval London has provided a backdrop; now, these texted personal possessions can take centre stage, with objects speaking for themselves, their makers, and their owners.

Chapter Two: ‘Fasten this Word to your Heart’. Expressing Personal Relationships in Private Epigraphy

It is rare to find the name of an owner or maker to be inscribed on a small metal personal possession from medieval London, and even when they do appear the result is rarely clear. Take, a pewter spoon that was found in Swan Lane, on the north bank of the river just upstream from London Bridge.[1] A little cast acorn terminates its handle, at the other end of which a shallow, tear-shaped bowl is marked with a scratched shape (figure 2.01).[2] This engraving is a line with two pointed bows forming the letter ’B’, conceivably indicating the initial of the utensil’s owner’s name. The rounded bows of a more conventional ‘B’ form have been simplified to facilitate easy, quick scoring to mark the surface of the metal. Pewter is relatively soft, so specialist tools would not have been needed; a copper or iron pin would be capable of achieving this result. In terms of its content, this scratched ‘B’ reveals very little about the owner. Identification of this individual is, of course, too incomplete to attempt to trace them in records and build up a picture of their life using documentary sources. Despite carrying a representation of a name, this spoon’s owner remains unnamed and unnameable.

The perception of anonymity, both in the sense of being unnamed and in the semantically linked sense of being unremarkable, clings to small metal epigraphy. Curiosity in these objects is stunted by this, and deterred further because the way in which they communicate

[1] The Portable Antiquities Scheme lists 12 metal spoons found in London https://finds.org.uk/database/search/results/q/spoon/broadperiod/MEDIEVAL/objectType/SPOON/county/Greater+London+Authority# ; spoons also feature in the museum and archaeological collections of the Museum of London, see Egan, *The Medieval Household*, 248-251.
[2] Pewter Spoon, London, Museum of London SWA81[1971]<2109>.

is difficult to interpret without an understanding of the people who made and owned them, and the particular situation of their usage. Private epigraphy often uses language in a way that is personal to, and intimately understood by, its makers and owners, and at the same time unfamiliar to even those modern viewers with an understanding of manuscript culture and medieval languages. This genre of text challenges the sense of knowing that we take for granted in our hyper-literate world. Its freedom in expressing graphic forms in the context of personal possessions can lead to particularly frustrating encounters across centuries and traditions. But these metal letters also present an opportunity to observe epigraphy at its most personal.

In this chapter I will argue that these enormously varied objects are in fact a rich resource that offer a unique insight into how medieval Londoners interacted with metal letters on their possessions, in particular how they used them to express and signify personal relationships. The first half of this chapter will explore the variety of personal interactions that can be revealed by looking at private epigraphy. It will focus especially on the evidence of extant pieces of jewellery marked with text. After surveying the 'what' of expressing personal relationships in private epigraphy, this chapter will turn to the 'how'. The second half of this chapter will attempt to demystify further the meaning expressed on personal possessions by itemising the linguistic techniques employed in these inscriptions. The diversity on display does not stop at the use of different languages and alphabets, but also pushes the conventions of letters that we often see exclusively as a tool for clarifying and conveying meaning within a standardised system. I will argue that the manipulation, imitation, contraction, and adaptation of words does not point to an attitude of apathy towards the use of letters, but quite the opposite. Metal letters were cherished in medieval London. The desire to fasten words to their hearts, carry them in their pockets, and wear them around their fingers, was strong for Londoners with and without the skill of creating or understanding visual letters. Finally, I will end the chapter by putting into practice the methodological stance established in its first two parts, in particular by challenging various interpretations of metal letters in modern museum catalogue entries

recording items of medieval jewellery. This analysis will illustrate my contention that communication in private epigraphy is carried out on the terms of its participants, and that because of this such objects today come up against a culture of standardised written language in which they do not belong. In order to understand them, we must interpret their meanings informed by the textuality, rather than by relying solely on the linguistics, of the time.

Naming and Knowing: A Historiographical Problem

The anonymity of the makers and owners of inscribed metal objects like this spoon poses a historiographical barrier in the way their capacities for communication have been interpreted. The aim of this chapter is, after setting out how this historiographical problem has affected the reception of medieval private epigraphy, to present a solution. The problem is twofold. Firstly, names are bound up with the idea of status and agency, meaning that artefacts whose makers and owners are anonymous are often comparatively overlooked. In the case of the objects discussed here, this is amplified when we consider the historiographical treatment of ink letters in contrast to that of metal letters. In the last chapter, I posited that metal letters, in contrast with manuscript texts, can seem disconnected from their makers due to a disparity in the levels of creative agency attributed to metalworkers in comparison with scribes. In the field of manuscript studies, the desire to reunite the hands that marked a page with their owners has been so strong that there has been a flurry of works attempting to find the names of scribes who produced particular manuscripts. The identities and careers of scribes have been traced doggedly by palaeographers and scholars of London's literary scene in particular. For example, numerous works have concentrated on one figure, Adam Pynkhurst, purportedly Chaucer's personal scribe. Records such as the Scriveners' Common Paper have given scholars names, including Adam

Pynkhurst's, to put to handwriting.[3] How conclusive the results of this identification are is a subject of debate. Indeed, some of the evidence that supplements palaeographic attribution is highly questionable; Lawrence Warner, for instance, has challenged the use of a poem about Chaucer written at the back of a collection of his works that mentions a scribe called Adam as evidence supporting the Pynkhurst identification.[4] Nonetheless, the level of enthusiasm in manuscript studies for linking individual scribes to manuscripts is indicative of the perceived value placed on such information, despite the potentially negligible impact on scholars' approaches to the manuscripts concerned. Sonja Drimmer has interrogated the methods, as well as the usefulness, of scribal attribution, likening and contrasting it to connoisseurship in the art historical field.[5] Specifically commenting on the context of book production in medieval London, Drimmer sets out evidence of documents that record manuscript commissions, and finds that often commissioners were 'indifferent' to the identities of scribes, illuminators, or binders.[6] The naming of scribes by scholars today is therefore principally a historiographical preoccupation, endowing these craftspeople with a sense of personal artistic achievement that was not seemingly valued by their contemporaries. It is true that contemporary acclaim should not be the only marker of how historical agents are seen by scholars today, but the perception of

[3] This association was asserted by Linne Mooney, a specialist in London scribes in the later Middle Ages. See, Linne R. Mooney, 'Chaucer's Scribe', *Speculum*, Vol. 81, No. 1 (2006), 97-138. Her research identified Adam Pynkhurst as the scribe responsible for the Hengwrt and Ellesmere Canterbury Tales manuscripts. This has been reappraised and disputed by Lawrence Warner in, Lawrence Warner, *Chaucer's Scribes: London Textual Production, 1384-1432* (Cambridge, 2018).

[4] The poem, *Chauciers words. A Geffrey vn to Adam his own scryveyne*, was inscribed at the end of John Shirley's collection of the works of Chaucer and Lydate for Warner's analysis of this source see, Lawrence Warner, *Chaucer's Scribes*, 13-29. There is other evidence, including palaeographical considerations, that has been used to challenge the notion that Adam Pynkhurst was the scribe of the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts. It is neatly summarized by Josephine Koster, who refers to an irrational 'infatuation' with Adam Pynkhurst in the field, see Josephine Koster, 'Masters and Commanders: Considering the Concept of Edited Text' in, *Textual Cultures*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2015), 23-24.

[5] Sonja Drimmer, 'Connoisseurship, Art History, and the Palaeographical Impasse in Middle English Studies', *Speculum*, Vol. 97 No. 2 (2022), 415-468. Drimmer makes the point that, while the language and methods might be similar in attributing a painting to a painter and a manuscript to a scribe, what is at stake in these identifications is an essential part of art historical analysis, but of limited application in the field of manuscript or literary studies, as ultimately the scribe is replicating or recording the work of an identified (at least in terms of context) author, 424-425.

[6] Sonja Drimmer, 'Connoisseurship, Art History, and the Palaeographical Impasse', 428.

scribes during the Middle Ages was not in fact that far from the perception of other craftspeople employed to perform a particular task, metalworkers included. Indeed, the records of St Margaret's Westminster cited by Drimmer mention work carried out by scribes, binders, and a goldsmith in the same accounts, and not one of these craftspeople is named explicitly.[7]

Despite their similar contemporary status, it is difficult to imagine a similar hunt being undertaken to find the name of a maker behind an inscribed metal object. This brings me to the second problem that has arisen from the perceived anonymity of metal letters: that the mystery of their makers and ownership carries over to their attempts to communicate. For metalwork objects, anonymity prompts a sense that they are ultimately unknowable things, and that their use of words is similarly accepted as impenetrable, and thus of limited value. But if we follow Drimmer and remind ourselves that naming is not knowing, it is still possible to argue that even though we may never be able to identify a specific person who made or owned a small metal object, these objects still reveal much about the personal lives of the people who interacted with them. The objects that will be discussed here supply social, economic, and even emotional context to words that were crafted and bought, given and received, displayed and concealed, by medieval Londoners.

By way of challenging this idea of anonymity and unknowability of metal inscribed objects, I want to return to the 'B' spoon that opened this chapter. A closer analysis of this inscription can yield surprisingly personal conclusions about its owner and their life, if combined with contextual information, even if it does not reveal their specific identity. The 'B' incongruously takes up a large proportion of the bowl, subtlety or neatness not being of primary concern to the person who inscribed it. The spoon's 'B' ties it to its owner in a way that the spoon's maker had not anticipated. To its maker the spoon was complete and has since been modified with an inscription in a way that was not necessarily intended. The 'B', in its awkward

[7] Sonja Drimmer, 'Connoisseurship, Art History, and the Palaeographical Impasse', 434.

position on the spoon's bowl, contrasts with the design of the neat acorn knop, and upstages this symbol of longevity with a signifier limited in its meaning to the span of its owner's possession of the object. Its owner treated this spoon not so much as property but as territory, so that the initial could not be joined by that of another or supplanted by a larger character. Since pewter spoons with acorn knops surviving from this period have been found plentifully by archaeologists, it is not surprising that the owner of this particular example would want to demarcate their utensil.[8] It was common for people to carry their own spoons around with them during the later Middle Ages in England. Occasionally, spoons were passed around a table at which the company all knew one another.[9] In London, one might carry a spoon around because meals were often eaten outside of the home.[10] So rather than necessarily being a domestic implement that indicates home comforts, this spoon might speak to the precariousness of some of the lives lived out in the medieval city. Thinking back to some of the livelihoods of the craftspeople described in the first chapter of this thesis, many of whom lived in hired lodgings and took what temporary work they could find, this spoon may well have been a companion to such a life. This object is tied to its urban setting not just in the sense of where it was found, but by the behaviour it evidences in its scrappy engraved 'B'.

Crucially, the spoon reveals the nature of the interaction its owner experienced with the people around them. The spoon's inscription speaks to its owner being in the presence of

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[8] More examples of acorn spoons from medieval London can be seen in Egan, *The Medieval Household,* 250-251. Roberta Gilchrist suggests that an acorn knop on a spoon might be popular because of its connotations of longevity and possible association of protecting its user from illnesses like dysentery. Roberta Gilchrist, *Medieval Lives: Archaeology and the Life Course*, 125. The prevalence of acorn decoration is also mentioned in C. J. Jackson, 'The Spoon and its History: its Form, Material, and Development, More Particularly in England', *Archaeologia*, 53 (1892), 121-122.
Stina Fallberg Sundmark, 'Dining with Christ and His Saints: Tableware in Relation to Late Medieval Devotional Culture in Sweden', *Konsthistorisk tidskrift / Journal of Art History,* 86:3 (2017), 226.

[9] Stephanie Viereck Gibbs discusses attitudes towards practices of spoon use in later medieval England, with shared use of a spoon embodying the unifying traits of communal eating in literature. Stephanie A. Viereck Gibbs, 'A Cruel Spoon in Context: Cutlery and Conviviality in Late Medieval Literature', *Études Anglaises*, 66-3 (2013), 291.

[10] Poorer Londoners often ate at cookshops, because their lodgings did not have cooking facilities. Martha Carlin, '"What say you to a piece of beef and mustard?": The Evolution of Public Dining in Medieval and Tudor London', *Huntington Library Quarterly,* Vol. 71, No. 1 (2008), 200-204.

strangers, or at least people with whom they were not in the habit of sharing utensils.[11] This object demonstrates the way in which inscriptions communicate, and in its analysis I have set out an approach I want to term 'situational communication'. If even this hurriedly scrawled 'B' can make statements about its owner, including their urban setting and social network, then the potential of more substantive inscriptions to add to our understanding of material culture during the later Middle Ages is significant, especially the part played by inscribed objects in interactions between people.

Situational Communication in Inscribed Metal Jewellery

Private epigraphy offers insights into a way of communicating that I would term situational or subjective. Using these terms to qualify the communication expressed in small private epigraphy is useful because they refer to two factors that are essential to consider when attempting to shed light on the meaning of metal letters. The first is the physical situation of metal letters. Metal letters must be on something, a part of an object with a physical form, and often accompanied by additional imagery. Metal letters interact with these visual surroundings in ways that alter or complement their meanings. The second factor is the contextual situation of metal letters. This is the broader cultural world of these objects and letters that is created by the purpose a particular object served, and how this function was perceived by participants, onlookers, and society as a whole. The character of this situational or subjective communication is complex and therefore capable of conveying rich and varied sentiments and ideas. This chapter will go on to explore this by thinking through a particular category of metal letter: those inscribed on objects worn as dress accessories. These objects are useful because they at once focus our attention and still represent a wide variety of personal sentiments that inscribed objects

[11] Viereck Gibbs, 'A Cruel Spoon in Context', 291.

could carry. By selecting these objects, and linking their metal letters to personal feelings and relationships, I aim to promote them as objects that reveal much about those who made and owned them.

A particular mode of communication characterises this particular brand of small, metal lettered objects. I have stated above how idiosyncrasies in the way in which metal letters communicate has contributed to a dismissive reception among scholars. Drawing attention to the agility of subjective communication, its ability to express and define a variety of relationships, and indeed layer multiple meanings within a single texted artefact, exposes the opportunities that have been missed as a result. The remainder of this chapter will discuss inscribed jewellery, as these pieces offer perhaps the most intimate insights into how Londoners used and cherished the subjective medium of inscribed letters. Specifically, this section will survey the different types of text found on such objects from medieval London, which could often refer to individual personal alliances or relationships, as well as being spiritual or moral in character. To illustrate the range of sentiments that these inscriptions can convey, I will begin by focusing on inscriptions on jewellery and accessories that overtly signal relationships between people, and then move on to objects with religious inscriptions to explore the relationships that medieval Londoners nurtured with the divine.

Items of jewellery represent the most commonly inscribed extant metal personal possessions from late medieval London. From precious gold and silver adornments to inexpensive, base-metal trinkets, jewellery was commonly worn in the Middle Ages by both men and women of a wide variety of social backgrounds. As well as having a decorative purpose, items like brooches had the practical application in medieval dress of connecting two pieces of fabric.[12] Brooches and finger rings are the most common types of jewellery found from

[12] Gilchrist, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course*, 70. This was especially the case before lacing became common in the fourteenth century and buttons were introduced in the 1330s. David A. Hinton, *Gold and Gilt, Pots and Pins: Possessions and People in Medieval Britain* (Oxford, 2005), 228.

the medieval period. Analysing the finds recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme, 4,768 medieval brooches and 2,424 finger rings have been found across the United Kingdom. Of these, just over one in twenty-five brooches and one in seven finger rings are inscribed.[13] However, in London, inscribed examples make up a more substantial portion of the medieval jewellery found, with over a quarter of brooches and a fifth of rings being engraved with some form of epigraph, perhaps suggesting that inscribed pieces were particularly popular among medieval Londoners.[14] Moreover, within the inscribed jewellery found in medieval London there is an enormous breadth of expression. Christoph Witt has written about the appearance of inscribed jewellery in medieval literature and, in doing so, emphasises the importance of gift-giving in medieval jewellery traditions.[15] Witt looked at literary references to objects with personal inscriptions and those pertaining to religious devotion, including those whose inscriptions were not so much communicating love or friendship as political affiliation and fealty.[16] He argues that inscriptions represent an:

[13] 'Portable Antiquities Scheme', 28th September 2020, https://finds.org.uk/database/search/results/q/brooch/broadperiod/MEDIEVAL accessed 38/09/2020. The method for finding these results was to first type 'brooch' into the search and filter by the 'medieval' category, yielding 4768 results. Then I typed, 'inscription' into the search bar and filtered by, 'medieval' and then, 'brooch' to get 203 results. 'Portable Antiquities Scheme, 28th September 2020, https://finds.org.uk/database/search/results/q/ring/objectType/FINGER+RING/broadperiod/MEDIEVAL I used a similar method for finger rings yielding a total of 2424 rings, 334 of which were inscribed. So 4.3 per cent of brooches and 13.7 per cent of finger rings are inscribed.

[14] 'Portable Antiquities Scheme', 28th September 2020, https://finds.org.uk/database/search/results/q/brooch/county/Greater+London+Authority/broadperiod/MEDIEVAL/objectType/BROOCH/page/2 accessed 28/09/2020. Six out of twenty-three brooches were inscribed: 26.1 per cent. 'Portable Antiquities Scheme', 28th September 2020, https://finds.org.uk/database/search/results/q/finger+ring/objectType/FINGER+RING/broadperiod/MEDIEVAL/county/Greater+London+Authority/page/2 6 out of 29 rings had an inscription (20.7 per cent).

[15] Christoph Witt, 'More Than Bling: Inscribed Jewellery Between Social Distinction, Amatory Gift-Giving, and Spiritual Practice' in, *Writing Beyond Pen and Parchment: Inscribed Objects in Medieval European Literature*, eds. Luger Lieb, Christine Neufeld, Ricarda Wagner (Berlin, 2019), 291-314, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110645446.

[16] Witt, 'More Than Bling: Inscribed Jewellery Between Social Distinction, Amatory Gift-Giving, and Spiritual Practice', 297-298.

> identification between a person and an object, which turns it into a powerful form of articulating personal connection. Inscriptions, then, do not represent the identity of an object's owner, but a relationship to its giver.[17]

To follow Witt, inscribed jewellery pieces in medieval London might be explored for their potential insight into Londoners and their possessions, as well as the personal relationships they expressed.

Love and friendship often seem to have inspired an exchange of inscribed objects. Jewellery, especially rings and brooches, are the most likely surviving medieval objects to carry a loving epigraph. While this practice has existed across various chronological periods and cultures before and after the European Middle Ages, it is important to resist being lulled into a false sense of familiarity when analysing the contents of these inscriptions. All of the objects here are rooted in a particular time and place, and their contextual waters must not be muddied with sentiments from other moments. Gifts of jewellery were more than precious or attractive trinkets, as demonstrated in a gold *fede* ring (figure 2.02) found in Clerkenwell, just to the north-west of the Priory of St John of Jerusalem, and now part of the British Museum collection, which speaks to its owner in French:
'IO:SVI.ICI.EN/LIV:DEAMI/ODCEST:PRE/SENT:AVVS', *je suis ici en lieu d'ami, qui est ici present a vous* (I am here in lieu of a friend, who is here present with you).[18] The tiny, crisp letter-forms neatly encircle the ring's narrow band in two rows, suggesting a highly skilled engraver at work. The friendly spirit of its inscription is further attested by the meeting of two golden hands on one side of the ring, the preciousness of their bond mirrored with a gem set into the band's opposite side. According to its inscription, not only does the ring belong to its wearer,

[17] Witt, 'More Than Bling: Inscribed Jewellery Between Social Distinction, Amatory Gift-Giving, and Spiritual Practice', 298.
[18] *Fede* Ring, London, British Museum 1857,0928.1 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1857-0928-1.

but its giver is also theirs. This is by no means a unique inscription in terms of its content or context on a gold ring.[19] The epigraph gives the ring its own voice; its message is not directly from the giver of the ring but is mediated by this golden trinket. The object's voice, unlike that of its giver, lasts forever and can be reinforced every time it is viewed. The ring's inscription reveals an intimate, cherished relationship between its owner and the person who gave them the ring. It communicates not only a specific desire to remember an absent friend, but also implies a role that objects could play in mediating a person's presence.[20] In invoking the absent party, the wearing of this type of epigraph creates a physical connection between skin and metal, bringing together both participants in the relationship even when they are not in the same place.

Extant inscribed jewellery of this type not only sheds light on how medieval relationships were expressed or commemorated, but also on broader traditions of gift-giving. Other tokens of friendship do not explicitly invoke love, or necessarily mediate the presence of a loved one, but rather allude to the spirit of friendship in which they were given. A gold enamelled annular brooch in the British Museum (figure 2.03) has a medieval French inscription in textura letters, 'sans nul mael pencer' (without any ill thought).[21] This fourteenth-century

[19] This point will be expanded below with reference to other items of jewellery. For now, the frequency with which this phrase is used on dress accessories can be illustrated through extant examples from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries from elsewhere in the British Isles: annular brooch, London, British Museum AF.2684, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_AF-2684; brooch, London, British Museum AF.2683, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_AF-2683 (has a combination French Latin inscription); ring, London, British Museum OA.1113, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_OA-1113; brooch, London, Victoria & Albert Museum M.49-1975, https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O15219/ring-brooch-unknown/; ring, London, Victoria & Albert Museum M.178-1962, https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O121948/ring-unknown/; ring (very similar to the *fede* ring discussed here), Portable Antiquities Scheme YORYM-AA837B, https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/889635; brooch, Portable Antiquities Scheme LVPL-9EAF41, https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/843482; brooch, Portable Antiquities Scheme PAS-1382E2, https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/774897; ring Portable Antiquities Scheme LIN-A1E7B8, https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/560816; brooch, Portable Antiquities Scheme LIN-B28186, https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/465115; brooch Portable Antiquities Scheme WILT-CFEC24, https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/460375.

[20] This active role of an object is reflected in significance given to other artefacts that existed concurrently such as seals, which had a similar role in embodying the legal identity of their owner, see Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago: Signs of Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2011), 109-110.

[21] Brooch, London, British Museum 1929,1111.3 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1929-1111-3 .

brooch was found in the Old Jewry in the City of London.[22] Similar to the *fede* ring's epigraph, its inscription is not unique and can be found on other pieces of contemporary material culture.[23] This brooch was possibly a New Year's gift as *Sans Mal Penser* is the name of a song that was often sung at medieval New Year celebrations.[24] Gift giving traditions to mark the New Year were bound up with ideas about personal relationships.[25] The exchange of gifts between social equals demanded different customs to those between two unequal parties, with the politics of counter-gifts reflecting, and in many ways designed to uphold, the social structure. On the reverse of the brooch, the capital letter-form 'E' is repeated. This might refer to the name of the brooch's donor.[26] But, given that this might specifically be a New Year gift, the repeated 'E' may also stand for *étrenne*, the medieval French name for the first day of the year. Situated on the reverse of the brooch, these letters act as a reminder to the recipient of the gift that *étrenne*, and its obligations, comes round year after year.

Some gifts also carry a loving message that ties in with protective properties thought to be inherent in certain types of jewellery. A gold, square brooch with eight red garnets may have been a similarly intentioned gift. Its inscription in capitals is partially obscured by damage, but is largely legible as: '+I/O. A/IE/NC/LO/S[.]/RA/NI' (figure 2.04).[27] I would suggest that the

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[22] This is a street in the north of the city off Cheapside, so named because it was part of a large area of Jewish settlement in medieval London that encompassed nine parishes. Joe Hillaby, 'London: The 13th-Century Jewry Revisited', *Jewish Historical Studies*, Vol. 32 (1990-1992), 90-91.

[23] Fourteenth-century shoe London, British Museum 1856,0701.1675 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1856-0701-1675. Other examples do not include the word thought but are simply SANS NUL MAL, such as gold ring Portable Antiquities Scheme NARC-067DD8 https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/710325; gold brooch Portable Antiquities Scheme LEIC-5CDB65 https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/270521.

[24] Yolanda Plumley, 'French Lyrics and Songs for the New Year, Ca. 1380–1420' in, *The Cambridge History of Fifteenth-Century Music*, eds. Anna Maria Busse Berger and Jesse Rodin (Cambridge, 2015), 382, doi:10.1017/CHO9781139057813.028. This theme of ill or evil thought is also used in the famous motto of the knights of the garter, 'Honi soit qui mal y pense' (shame be to them who think ill of it). Leo Carruthers, 'The Duke of Clarence and the Earls of March: Garter Knights and "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight"', *Medieval Ævum*, Vol, 70, No. 1 (2001), 66-69.

[25] For an exploration of New Year's gifting traditions in late medieval France see, Brigitte Buettner, 'Past Presents: New Year's Gifts at the Valois Courts, ca. 1400', *The Art Bulletin* 83, No. 4 (2001), 598–625.

[26] Witt, 'More Than Bling: Inscribed Jewellery Between Social Distinction, Amatory Gift-Giving, and Spiritual Practice', 298.

[27] Ring Brooch, London, Museum of London 89.36 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/31234.html.

letter after the 'S' that has been obscured is an 'E', so the inscription may read *j'ai encloser a ni*; the exact meaning is not immediately apparent but, like the *fede* ring, this inscription would therefore be read in the voice of the object: if we interpret it as reading 'I have enclosed...', this would be a fitting play on the brooch's square shape, worn over the wearer's heart and thus enclosing it.[28] The garnets enforce this idea, their conical settings placed like guard towers spaced along a wall, with the brooch's beaded decoration similarly reminiscent of crenellations linking them. Red stones in medieval lapidaries were in fact commonly attributed protective properties.[29] A lapidary possibly written in London from the latter half of the fifteenth century says of rubies:

> *the gentil rubie fine & clene is lorde of stones… & he þat is discomforted þat in gode beleue beholdeth þis stone, hit shal comforte & make hym to foryete his contrariousete… Hit fedeth þe man & comforteth þe hert & þe body, & wynneth to a man lordeshippe above othre stones.*
>
> The gentle ruby fine and clean is lord of all stones… and he that is discomforted that believes in God beholds this stone, it shall comfort him and make him forget his troubles… It feeds the man and comforts the heart and the body and gains a man lordship above all other stones.[30]

The stones themselves, then, had communicative qualities in addition to their physical appearance and material preciousness. The effect of the inscription in combination with the red gems is a sense of guarding or protecting, perhaps even possessing, the wearer's heart. We find

[28] 'I have enclosed in a cell' may be a possible translation, but no extant examples exists with this wording so it is difficult to confirm. It may be that the latter portion of the inscription is heavily contracted.
[29] Jessica Cooke, 'The Lady's "Blushing" Ring in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', *The Review of English Studies*, Vo. 49, No. 143 (1998), 4-8.
[30] *The Boke of Stones*, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Douce 291, quoted in Cooke, 'The Lady's "Blushing" Ring in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', 6 (my translation).

such a sentiment replicated in several inscribed objects from the period, for instance one ring engraved on the outside with images of St Catherine, St John the Baptist, and a depiction of the Virgin and Child (figure 2.05), which has the medieval French inscription 'mon cor avez' (have my heart).[31]

Whether the inscription in this particular ring is meant romantically or as a statement of more religious devotion is unclear.[32] Religious imagery and holy names were popular choices for adorning medieval jewellery, indeed the majority of extant pieces from medieval London with inscriptions are overtly religious in nature, revealing relationships not just between people but also between medieval Londoners and the divine. The fact that religious jewellery is so prevalent in what remains a fragmentary assemblage of material culture is testament to the faith that the city's inhabitants had in the power of the sacred. Holy names dominate the corpus, with inscriptions including names for God—such as *Iesus Nazarenus* (Jesus of Nazareth), or the monograms *IHS* and *IHC*—the Virgin Mary, the Magi, and the term *AGLA*, which is a shortened form of the Hebrew, *ata gibor le-olam Adonai* (Thou art mighty forever, O Lord).[33] Such words were thought themselves to have the power to heal, ward away misfortune, or protect from harm.[34] Many scholars have focused on the potency of the visual language of devotion in the Middle Ages, so much so that their apotropaic function has become the accepted role of religious epigraphs on personal items. Historians, such as Don Skemer, have studied the links between textual amulets and magic, and Peter Murray Jones has explored apotropaic words

[31] Ring, London, Museum of London 80.229 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/30597.html .
[32] The implied use of the plural form of the second person here (vous) might signify that the inscription is indeed referring to the two figures engraved on its surface. However it may also be a singular formal form of the second person, perhaps the giver of the ring.
[33] Ring, London, British Museum 1932,0209.1 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1932-0209-1; Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (Pennsylvania, 2006), 112.
[34] Equally, words possessed potentially malignant powers, see Lisa M. Bitel, 'Tools and Scripts for Cursing in Medieval Ireland', *Memoires of the America Academy in Rome*, Vol. 51/52 (2006/2007), 5-27.

within the context of medieval medicine.[35] Lea Olsan, has studied the linguistic structure of healing charms.[36] Margaret Healy has even explored psychological reasons as to why people invested the visual word with power.[37] As a result of such influential scholarship, archaeologists, including Roberta Gilchrist and Geoff Egan, have also asserted the apotropaic function of inscribed personal items such as brooches, rings, purse frames, and cutlery.[38] Some of these names were believed to have specific protective power, such as the names of the Magi which were thought to guard against epilepsy.[39] A copper ring in the Museum of London (figure 2.06) is engraved with 'IASPAR + MELCHIOR + BALTH' (Jaspar, Melchior, Balthazar) and may have been worn for this purpose.[40] Additionally, given what has been observed above about the significance of names on jewellery in the gifting tradition, this ring creates a bond between these holy figures and the owner. It communicates their names as an affiliation between them and the wearer: much as the *fede* ring stands in lieu of a friend, this brooch projects the presence of holy beings and in this way channels their power.

Devotional inscriptions were not limited to holy names. Prayers or brief psalm quotations can also be found on jewellery from medieval London. *Ave Maria* was the most popular, appearing on a variety of objects such as a brooch (figure 2.07), which begins with the *AGLA* formula, and continues into *Ave Maria Gratia Plena* (hail Mary full of grace), '+A+G+L+A+A<EMARIAGRAI'.[41] This prayer is also emblazoned on a purse frame (figure

[35] Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets;* Peter Murray Jones, 'Amulets: Prescriptions and Surviving Objects in Late Medieval England', in *Beyond Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges: Essays in Honour of Brian Spencer*, ed. Sarah Blick (London, 2007), 92-107.
[36] Lea Olsan, 'Latin Charms of Medieval England: Verbal Healing in a Christian Oral Tradition', *Oral Tradition*, 7/1 (1992), 116-142.
[37] Margaret Healy, 'Wearing Powerful Words and Objects: Healing Prosthetics', *Textual Practice*, 30:7 (2016), 1233-1251.
[38] Gilchrist, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course*, 227; Egan and Prichard, *Dress Accessories*, 255.
[39] Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets*, 155.
[40] Ring, London, Museum of London 86.18/1 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/30575.html.
[41] Brooch, London, Museum of London 80.73/1 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/28729.html.

2.08), which perhaps makes a statement not only about religious devotion, but also shows a desire to protect possessions or wealth, as well as the wellbeing of the wearer.[42] Another purse frame that addresses the Virgin is the rhyming prayer (figure 2.09), 'MATER DEI MEMENTO MEI' (mother of God, remember me).[43] The presentation of these prayers on durable, wearable objects makes their communication substantive and continuous, unlike a spoken prayer which eventually comes to an end.

Another form of religious inscription can be seen in a brooch (figure 2.10) with a fine textura inscription quoting psalm 6:1, 'domine. ne. / in furore tu[o]' (Lord not in your anger) the first line of the psalm, *Domine ne in furore tuo arguas me* (Lord, do not rebuke me in thine anger).[44] The Portable Antiquities Scheme lists two other examples (figures 2.11 and 2.12) found in England with exactly the same textura inscription, though not made by the same maker.[45] This is a relatively humble piece of jewellery. The engraved words have an unadorned purity, compared with examples including imagery or gem settings; such embellishment, after all, complements text but also has the capacity to distract from it. Nor does this piece have any material preciousness, as it is rendered in base metal and has a simple annular form. The simplicity of its form and the content of the inscription casts its wearer as a supplicant, entreating help from the divine. The brooch not only indicates faith in the efficacy of prayer, but

[42] Purse frame, London, Museum of London 2003.50 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/725936.html. The cult of the Virgin Mary was extremely popular in London from the twelfth century into the later medieval period. Sixteen per cent of London churches were dedicated to her She was also a popular choice as a patron saint of London fraternities, with almost a quarter being dedicated to her. Caroline Barron, '"The Whole Company of Heaven": The Saints of Medieval London' in, *European Religious Cultures: Essays Offered to Christopher Brooke on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Miri Rubin (London, 2020), 130; 133.
[43] Purse frame, London, Museum of London A27396 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/32423.html. This object will be explored in more detail in Chapter Five of this dissertation.
[44] Brooch, Portable Antiquities Scheme LON-D6A623 https://finds.org.uk/database/images/image/id/314163/recordtype/artefacts.
[45] Brooches, Portable Antiquities Scheme SF-52ADB1 and SF6179 https://finds.org.uk/database/search/results/q/lord+do+not+rebuke+me+in+thine+anger

also reveals perceptions about the attitude which should be adopted by those who hope for divine assistance.

Not all inscriptions on personal items have the gravity of a declaration of love or faith. Medieval consumers also enjoyed wearing more playful inscriptions. An extravagant gold ring with an emerald solitaire in the British Museum (figure 2.13), warns in medieval French, '+qui plus despent qua il nafiert / sans colp ferir a mort se fiert' (he who spends more than belongs to him kills himself without striking a blow).[46] This proverb about fiscal responsibility must surely be intended as irony, given that it is engraved on such an ornate piece of jewellery, the most materially precious find from medieval London discussed in this thesis. Its letter-forms are executed in a textura script that constituted the height of fashion in epigraphic design when this piece was crafted in the late fourteenth century, and are joined by intricately engraved leafy decoration. But while the attention to detail in every other aspect of its design makes it inconceivable that its situational irony was inadvertent, what remains less certain is who the intended audience of this joke might be. Given the diminutive size of the letter forms and their position on the ring's arms, it might be that this is more of an in-joke between the giver and recipient of the ring, rather than designed to be one shared between the wearer and a casual viewer, who after all would have to be extremely close to the wearer to read the inscription. Edmond Reiss asserted that irony pervaded medieval writing, even going so far as to state that 'irony may be the most meaningful term for describing the nature of medieval literature'.[47] Irony necessitates a degree of shared cultural knowledge on the parts of its writer or creator, and the

[46] Ring, London, British Museum 1899,0520.2 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1899-0520-2 this is the British Museum's translation.

[47] Edmond Reiss, 'Medieval Irony', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (1981), 209-226. His assertion was based around the idea that certainties (such as faith in God) was so solidified in medieval society that authors were free to point out irony because it would not threaten these established structures (218). Also that irony was used freely by writers playing with long-established and well known stories (224). More recently a work on sarcasm and irony in medieval literature has drawn attention to how widespread was this subtle for of rhetoric across Europe, *Words that Tear the Flesh: Essays of Sarcasm in Medieval and Early Modern Literature and Cultures*, eds. Stephen Alan Baragona and Elizabeth Louise Rambo (Berlin, 2018) doi: https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110563252.

audience. This ring is able succinctly to put across its ironic message because all of this information is available to viewers who look closely enough. The meaning of this object dawns on the viewer just as they read the final few words of its moralistic inscription, having no doubt already covetously feasted their eyes on its gaudy surroundings.

Drawing together these different forms of metal jewellery letter, we can now recognise with renewed clarity that people in medieval London used epigraphy on small metal objects to communicate complex sentiments, affiliations, and beliefs. Their setting on objects that were used in everyday life, and which were imbued with great emotional significance by being passed between people as gifts, mean that these inscriptions cannot be seen as communicating in a vacuum, but rather as taking part in a conversation. This was a conversation that included the object itself, whose form could enhance or play with the message of its visual letters. The object's communication is thus situational, reflecting its setting upon dynamic, wearable objects.

Epigraphic Communication: Linguistics and Relationships

> *& soche a worde is þis worde GOD or þis worde LOUE. Cheese þee wheþer þou wilt, or anoþer as þe list: whiche þat þee likeþ best of o silable. & fasten þis worde to þin herte, so þat it neuer go þens for þing þat befalleþ*
>
> And such a word is GOD or LOVE. Choose whichever of these two you wish, or another that pleases you: whichever word you like best of one syllable. And fasten this word to your heart, so that it is never separated from it, no matter what happens.[48]

[48] From Chapter 7 of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, quoted and translated in Jordan Kirk, 'The Hideous Noise of Prayer: The Cloud of Unknowing on the Syllable-Word', *Exemplaria,* Vol. 28, No. 2 (2016), 99.

An unorthodox usage of a word can threaten the comfortable sensation of knowing its meaning. The anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, a spiritual treatise written in around 1380, encouraged readers to do exactly this by setting out a method of prayer in which a person would repeat a single syllable word of their choice until it lost its meaning and became nonsense.[49] The word had to be in their mother tongue, and could not be a nonsense or made-up word, because the aim was to go through an uneasy progression from knowing to unknowing. This particular aspect of the *Cloud* text has fascinated scholars, but there is also a sense of distaste betrayed in their work. The choice of titles for scholarly articles on the *Cloud*, 'The Hideous Noise of Prayer' or 'Using and Abusing Language', reflects dismay at the idea of toppling a word from its intellectual pedestal, pushing it down from the brain to become a function of the mouth, vocal chords, and lungs.[50] But while one can abuse with language, one cannot abuse language itself. The *Cloud* does use violent imagery such as '*wrastling wiþ þat blynd nought'* (wrestling with that blind nothing), but it also involves fastening a word to your heart: a gesture that implies a privileged, even affectionate, place for words and their promises of meaning. And what is more, the word must be one uniquely chosen by the person using it. Words are personal, whether knowable or unknowable, which brings us to the subject of how metal letters were used to express personal relationships.

Just as people wear their jewellery in different ways, so too does medieval jewellery, indeed all medieval metalwork, have its own way of wearing inscriptions. This next section of

[49] Jordan Kirk, 'The Hideous Noise of Prayer: The Cloud of Unknowing on the Syllable-Word', *Exemplaria,* Vol. 28, No. 2 (2016), 109.

[50] Jordan Kirk, 'The Hideous Noise of Prayer: The Cloud of Unknowing on the Syllable-Word'. 'The hideous noise of prayer' is at least a quote from the text itself, but 'Using and Abusing Language' is an accusation that I would argue is not justified, as it is not explained or even mentioned again in the main text of Cheryl Taylor's article. See Cheryl Taylor, 'Paradox Upon Paradox: Using and Abusing Language in the Cloud of Unknowing and Related Texts', *Parergon,* Vol. 22, No. 2 (2005), 31-51. Other scholars focus in and reflect a language of violence. For example, 'these prayer words are armaments to be used with all the force of weapons of war', Daniel McCann, 'Words of Fire and Fruit: The Psychology of Prayer Words in the *Cloud of Unknowing*', *Medium Ævum,* Vo. LXXXIV, No. 2 (2015), 222. Given that this practice is essentially one of contemplation and meditation, albeit sometimes (though not exclusively) framed in aggressive language, to focus on violent imagery is to sacrifice some of the text's nuance.

the chapter argues that idiosyncrasies in presenting inscriptions reveal much about the intention and function of metal letters fashioned on objects. To date, inscriptions on small metal objects are most often labelled by scholars as being rudimentary or erroneous. But here I instead argue that a number of elements in fact mark these objects out as being examples of sophisticated linguistic creativity: multilingualism, obscurantism, nonsense, and pseudo-script. Contrary to the view of much contemporary scholarship, idiosyncrasies in composing letters are not symptomatic of word abuse in medieval England of the type that some have associated with the *Cloud* text. Rather, the examples discussed below suggest the contrary to be true. Far from fumbling, error-prone missives, these four aspects reveal the metal letter in medieval London as preserving evidence of much more refined strategies for personal communication.

Multilingualism

The first discernible linguistic technique that speaks in favour of metal letters' status as intelligent and sophisticated objects is to be found in the multi-lingual nature of London's inscribed personal, worn metalwork. Inscriptions reveal a dynamic range of languages that were used in medieval London. Usually, personal jewellery is inscribed in either medieval French or Latin, as with certain London documentary sources we occasionally find single objects with inscriptions that incorporate words or inflections from both languages, revealing an influence of one on another.[51] An example of an inscription that incorporated both French and Latin is a gold brooch (figure 2.14), possibly made in London, with the inscription, 'IO SUI ICI EN LIU DAMI : AMO :',beginning with the familiar medieval French, 'I am here in the place of a friend', and

[51] The relationship between Latin, English and French in trilingual England led to complex dynamics between all three languages, especially their statuses as written or oral shifted over time within the period. For more see Christopher Cannon, 'Vernacular Latin', *Speculum*, Vol. 90, No. 3 (2015), 641-653; Richard Ingham, 'The Maintenance of French in Later Medieval England', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, Vol. 115, No. 4 (2014), 425-448.

finishing with the Latin for 'I love'.[52] The inscription on this piece of jewellery has been placed on the reverse, its face richly set with rubies and sapphires. The Latin portion is separated from the rest using colons to indicate that it stands apart from the rest of the engraved letters. Another possible candidate for a mash up of languages is an annular brooch with the inscription, 'LOSCVLA:FIORVM:IE' (figure 2.15).[53] This brooch is in the British Museum's collection, but has been mis-transcribed in the catalogue with a transcription reading 'LOSCVLA:FLORVM:IE'. *Florvm* might be a more tempting option, meaning 'of flowers' in Latin, but the 'L' is unmistakably an 'I', and the presence of other 'L's in the inscription confirms this. I would put forward that 'FIORUM' is likely two words, *fi* and *orum*. The first word in the transcription is the one that indicates that this majority Latin inscription has a French influence. The first 'L', which renders the Latin 'OSCVLA', meaning 'kisses', effectively meaningless if taken as Latin, might simply be a French definite article, creating a bi-lingual, 'the kisses'.

English is not well represented in extant inscribed objects from medieval London. One example is a brooch in the Victoria and Albert Museum (figure 2.16) which reads, 'IHESUS NAZARENUS REX' (Jesus of Nazareth King) on one side and, 'R•O•B•E•R•TI LOVEYAG : LOVES ME' (Robert I love you: loves me) on the other.[54] While not many inscriptions in vernacular languages have survived on objects from medieval London, an early medieval copper ring found on the northern bank of the Thames, upstream from London Bridge, has an Anglo-Saxon runic inscription, 't fuþniine', which could be referring to the first part of the runic

[52] Annular Brooch, London, British Museum AF.2683 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_AF-2683.
[53] Brooch, London, British Museum 1987,0604.1 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1987-0604-1.
[54] Annular Brooch, London, Victoria & Albert Museum M.41-1975 http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O13408/ring-brooch-unknown/.

alphabet (figure 2.17).[55] Other languages that were not commonly spoken in London can also be seen to have influenced inscriptions on objects from the medieval city. The Greek *IHC* or *IHS* monogram for Christ was a common inscription in medieval London.[56] It comes from the Greek *ΙΗΣΟΥΣ*. A fourteenth-century sword pommel in the Museum of London has a legend in unusual dotted letter-forms (figure 2.18) that might be influenced by this Greek name and reads, '+IHESV MERCI' (Jesus have mercy).[57] The rest of the inscription is in Latin and French. The inscription appears twice on the object, once on either side of the pommel, and one is slightly different in that it misses the 'I' from 'MERCI'. Religious inscriptions in the context of medieval weaponry are not unusual.[58] Protective or medical charms written in manuscripts in late medieval England often include holy names written in obscure languages. For example, a fifteenth-century manuscript now in the Bodleian contains a list of holy names written in Latin, Greek and Hebrew.[59] Rosanne Hebing has suggested that the reason for this linguistic variety was that an element of mystery increased the efficacy of the charm.[60] Rather than being evidence of exposure to spoken Greek in medieval London, this inscription reveals a desire to incorporate a language into a holy name that was seen throughout devotional material culture. This example not only illustrates the multilingual nature of medieval London's visual culture,

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[55] Ring, London, Museum of London TEX88[0]<1330> https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/145990.html. Both the Old English and the Scandinavian runic alphabets will be discussed in more detail below. NB: I have been unable to access this object in person but would be keen to do so as I have some questions about this transcription that are not fully cleared up by the photographs.

[56] Examples of IHC / IHS monograms on metal objects from London include: late-medieval purse frames, London, Museum of London A23302 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/32416.html; A17930 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/32410.html; A27396 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/32423.html; 50.2/76 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/32431.html.

[57] Inscribed Sword Pommel, London, Museum of London 2018.11 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/966017.html.

[58] Michael R. Ott, 'Text-Bearing Warriors: Inscriptions on Weapons' in, *Writing Beyond Pen and Parchment: Inscribed Objects in Medieval European Literature*, eds. Luger Lieb, Christine Neufeld, Ricarda Wagner (Berlin, 2019), 277, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110645446

[59] Book of Hours, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Bodley 850 fol. 94.

[60] Rosanne Hebing, '"Allmyghti God this Lettyr Sent": English Heavenly Letter Charms in Late Medieval Books and Rolls', *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 114, No. 4 (2017), 744.

but also that different languages were used for different purposes. The sword pommel inscription's 'IHESV' is written in two holy languages, Greek and Latin. The beseeching 'MERCI' follows in French, signalling a different register, more mundane than that reserved for holy names.

Obscurantism

In addition to linguistic diversity, we might consider certain more unusual linguistic techniques that makers brought to wearable metal letters to enhance their communicative capacities. As noted above, the christogram appears on numerous objects from medieval London. This device is a common form of obscurantism, whereby words are written in a particular way that requires an extra layer of knowledge from their readers to be comprehended.[61] There are other examples that can be observed in inscribed objects from medieval London. The inscription, 'IEƧVƧNASARENVƧ' (Jesus of Nazareth), runs all the way around the surface of a silver annular brooch (figure 2.19).[62] Obscuring a word requires more concentration or attention to interpret its meaning. In this case, the maker has reversed the 'S's and 'Z' in the name *Iesvs Nazarenvs*. It makes what would have been quite familiar visual words less instantly recognisable; inviting a closer look, it both reflects and asserts the mystery of its

[61] Stephen Houston, 'Writing that Isn't', *L'Homme,* Nos. 227/228 (2018) p. 31. For more on the tradition of cryptography and wordplay in medieval manuscript culture see, Benjamin A. Saltzman 'Vt hkskdkxt: Early Medieval Cryptography, Scribal Errors, and Scribal Agency', *Speculum,* Vol. 93 (2018), 975-1009; George S. Tate, 'Chiasmus as Metaphor: The "Figura Crucis" tradition and "The Dream of the Rood"', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (1978), 114-125; Henry Maguire, 'Magic and Money in the Early Middle Ages', *Speculum*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (1997), 1034-1054. This tradition also features strongly in inscribed letter traditions, see Forsythe, Ilene H. 'Word-play in the Cloister at Moissac' in, *Romanesque Art and Thought in the Twelfth Century: Essays in Honour of Walter Cahn*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton, 2008), 154-178; Favreau, 'REX, LEX, LUX, PAX: Jeux de mots et jeux de lettres dans les inscriptions Médiévales', 625-635.

[62] Silver Brooch, London, Museum of London BWB[714]<306>. For a useful summary of popular ownership and use of jewellery in medieval England, see Kathleen E. Kennedy, 'English Iconographic Rings and Medieval Populuxe Jewelry' in, *Devotional Interaction in Medieval England and its Afterlives*, eds. Elisa A. Foster, Julia Perratore and Steven Rozenski (Boston, 2018), 80-99.

subject. Crucially, the quality of the inscription engraved on this brooch negates the idea that these letters were reversed accidentally. Examples of reversed letters can be seen across art and architecture during the early and high Middle Ages.[63] For example, other jewellery pieces from medieval England have been found with reversed letters. In the British Museum there is a similar example to the silver brooch discussed here, a silver ring (figure 2.20) with the inscription 'IEƧVSNAZ' (Jesus of Nazareth).[64] Similarly to the brooch, the fact that other letter-forms in the inscription, in this case notably the second 'S', are not reversed, suggests that this was a deliberate stylistic choice in the depiction of this holy name. Reversed letters were not only used for holy names. A fifteenth-century reliquary pendant (figure 2.21) found in Devizes has the French inscription, 'A MOИ + dERREYИE' (at my last), accompanied by engraved images of a saintly bishop and John the Baptist.[65] The reversed 'N's in this inscription may be an example of mirrored letter-forms being associated with inviting contemplation, especially as the content of the inscription is looking ahead to the last moment of its wearer. This was, in fact, an international tendency. An example of an obscurantist inscription that includes reversed letters, including 'S's and other letter-play for a similar purpose, can be seen on the column capitals at Moissac Abbey, France. While earlier scholars have often seen these features as errors, Ilene Forsyth has convincingly argued that this was an example intended to occupy the minds of its viewers and aid contemplation.[66] It is unlikely that monks at Moissac would have tolerated textual errors in their built environment, and it is equally unlikely that an engraver as skilled as the one who made this brooch would make careless errors, or that its patron or vendor

[63] Ilene Forsyth refers to a Romanesque 'penchant' for reversing letters. Forsyth, 'Word-play in the Cloister at Moissac', 174. Don Skemer presents mirror writing as being demonic in his study of medieval textual amulets, but I do not think this is the case here. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets*, 121.
[64] Amulet Ring, London, British Museum 1961,1202.465
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1961-1202-465
[65] Reliquary Pendant, London, British Museum AF.2765
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_AF-2765
[66] Forsyth, 'Word-play in the Cloister at Moissac', 154-178. Forsyth is not alone in her endeavours to reassess supposed errors in medieval work, see Marcia Kupfer, *Art and Optics in the Hereford Map* (New Haven, 2016); and Benjamin A. Saltzman, 'Vt hkskdkxt: Early Medieval Cryptography, Textual Errors and Scribal Agency', *Speculum*, 93/4 (October, 2018), 1008.

would have been content with them were they not deliberate. The letter-forms compare favourably with high-quality silver seal matrices from thirteenth century, broadly contemporary with this brooch. Similarly, Marcia Kupfer has argued that an instance of reversal in the fourteenth-century Hereford Map was not an error, but rather a choice based on medieval use of mirror, or *speculum*, metaphors in theological texts. The map does not use mirror writing, but rather reverses the positions of the inscribed labels for *Europa* and *Affrica*.[67] In this way, among other things, the map draws the viewer's attention to the fact that they are observing an image of the world in which they might observe the divine reflected back.[68] It also prompts self-reflection as a means to understand and address one's own moral imperfections. Such visual reversals remind viewers that in a mirror, all is not what it seems and images can be deceptive.

Many other objects from medieval London with religious inscriptions also contained related mirrored elements. In the British Museum is an intaglio set into a gold ring with '+AGLA' written anti-clockwise around it, the opposite direction to the way inscriptions are conventionally oriented (figure 2.22).[69] Another intaglio ring in the British Museum also has an anti-clockwise inscription, but this is because it was used as a seal matrix, so as well as reading anti-clockwise its letters are all reversed (figure 2.23).[70] The *AGLA* ring cannot have been used for this purpose, as the letters 'G' and 'L' are not written in reverse, and therefore an impression of this ring would show these letters the wrong way around. Although this inscription does not use mirrored letter-forms, it is still conceivably playing on the speculum idea, just as the inscription in the Hereford map does.

A brooch mentioned earlier in this chapter also has elements of obscurantism. The brooch (figure 2.07), with the inscription '+Λ+G+L+Λ+Λ<EMΛRIAGRΛI' (AGLA Hail Mary

[67] Kupfer, *Art and Optics in the Hereford Map*, 71.
[68] Kupfer, *Art and Optics in the Hereford Map*, 75.
[69] Ring, London, British Museum 1932,0209.1 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1932-0209-1; Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets*, 112. In the centre is a classical intaglio of Jupiter. It was found at St Martin's le-Grand and dates from the thirteenth century.
[70] Ring, London, British Museum AF.555 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_AF-555.

full of Grace) features a 'V' resting on its side to become '<'. The inscription, in the sense that it combines prayers and holy names, is formed in a similar way to a textual amulet.[71] Furthermore, the way in which the words are placed all the way around the brooch, creates a sense of repetition that was often part of the performative element of charms. Repetition was a common element of prayer, just as we have seen in the ideas of the methods expounded in the *Cloud of Unknowing*. Kupfer points out that echoes were seen as a form of aural reflection, and therefore can take the idea of speculum into senses other than sight.[72] The repetition of holy formulae, or the *Cloud*'s little word, could allow someone to transcend their narrow introspection, to see the world from the perspective of the divine.

So how does this form of presentation affect the way that letters such as those in our opening silver brooch's 'IЄƧVƧNASARENVƧ' inscription were experienced? The subject matter of this inscription is extremely common in medieval dress accessories.[73] The power of this inscription lies in its invocation of the name of Christ and in mediating his presence. We have already seen in this chapter how jewellery can stand in for a person. The way in which such figures were invoked was also of significance. Peter Murray Jones points out that sometimes to increase their efficacy amulets were written in Greek to obscure their contents from all but those with the knowledge to understand them.[74] Cynthia Hahn, discussing early medieval manuscripts of religious texts, sets out a variety of strategies that were used by scribes

[71] Prayers such as the Ave Maria and Pater Noster were often incorporated into medieval amulets. Skemer. *Binding Words: Textual Amulets,* 90; 111.
[72] Kupfer, *Art and Optics in the Hereford Map*, 92.
[73] Gilchrist, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life* Course, 274. Gilchrist surveyed objects from the Portable Antiquities Scheme database in 2010 and found that, out of 302 medieval objects with inscriptions, 106 had 'AVE MARIA', 'IHC', 'IHS' and 'INRI' or 'IESUS NAZARENUS' had a combined total of 181, and only 12 objects had other religious inscriptions.
[74] He also mentions and account by fourteenth-century surgeon John of Arderne of a woman who wore a ring with a charm inscribed on it, but failed to keep it a secret and rendered its power ineffective, implying that secrecy was part of the power of these words. Peter Murray Jones. 'Amulets: Prescriptions and Surviving Objects in Late Medieval England', in Sarah Blick (ed.) *Beyond Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges: Essays in Honour of Brian Spencer* (London, 2007), 76-78.

and limners to preserve the mysteries of *nomina sacra*.[75] These included using archaic lettering, incomplete or abbreviated forms, holy languages, and visual novelty. The silver annular brooch invokes a presence that is not earthly but heavenly, and in presenting its simple inscription in this way, gives its referent a place that transcends terrestrial matters. Thinking back to the concept of unknowing mentioned above, to obscure the name of Christ is to elevate it beyond the knowledge even of literate mortals.

Understanding the use of obscurantism in private epigraphy from medieval London allows for the recognition that unusual ways of writing visual letters can enhance their meaning rather than signal errors, as is often assumed. Drawing on examples and ideas from elsewhere in the medieval world, such as ideas of *speculum*, can aid in interpreting the presentation of inscriptions from London as being designed to spark contemplation, just as in the beginning of the section unknowing a word could lead to spiritual epiphany. Thinking about situational communication as outlined in the beginning of this chapter can aid us in recognising the use of such techniques, their subject matter and surroundings being additional signals that a piece is part of an obscurantist tradition of epigraphy.

Nonsense and Pseudo-script

Another textual technique employed in private epigraphy was nonsense: some objects have inscriptions that are impenetrable because they deliberately depict nonsense words. It is important to acknowledge that these are objects with genuinely nonsense inscriptions, not least because some inscriptions that will be discussed later have mistakenly been labelled as nonsense. But in observing some characteristics of a nonsense inscription, not a label to be

[75] Cynthia Hahn, 'Letter and Spirit: The Power of the Letter, the Enlivenment of the Word in Medieval Art' in, *Visible Writings: Cultures, Forms, Readings*, eds. Marjia Dalbello and Mary Shaw (New Brunswick, 2011), 56-57.

applied lightly, we can suggest how this specific genre of epigraphy functioned, and note the ways in which it was reserved for specific types of objects and purposes. Unlike pseudo-scripts, which will be discussed below, nonsense words are made of recognisable Latin characters. In the *Cloud of Unknowing*, it specifically states that the word used to achieve unknowing through repetition should not be a nonsense word.[76] This suggests that nonsense words were used by people during the Middle Ages in other contexts. A ring in the British Museum has nonsense written all the way round its circumference in two rows. The inscription reads: '+GVGVECEVGVBEAVAVALDERA/+VRVANIALRRA+PhAECARAO' (figure 2.24).[77] Found in St Katherine's Docks, London, it is made of gold and dates to the fourteenth century. The inscription is on the outside of the ring, while inside are markings that have not yet been interpreted.[78] Some of these are letter forms from other writing systems, such as a Greek sigma. Another is a form of dotted cross. Medieval textual amulets sometimes include similar series of graphic forms and symbols. This piece is of high quality and, like the silver brooch above, its inscription cannot be judged as a mere mistake. The capitals are engraved with great skill and precision, even with some stylish flourishes indicating that the maker was accustomed to engraving metal letters. The use of metal letters in this way has been little studied, whereas charms written on small pieces of parchment, or as part of manuscripts, have recently been the subject of detailed research. Evidence of written charms reveal a practice whereby nonsense words were often interspersed with prayers, almost as filler language, hinting at the oral tradition behind charms.[79] But, unlike its pen and ink counterparts, nonsense text on jewellery in its design is a visual rather than an oral phenomenon. In this example of a nonsense inscription on a

[76] Kirk, 'The Hideous Noise of Prayer: The Cloud of Unknowing on the Syllable-Word', 105.
[77] Ring, London, British Museum AF.1005 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_AF-1005.
[78] For example, the mid-thirteenth century Canterbury Amulet, Canterbury Cathedral Library, Additional MS 23. A twelfth-century manuscript includes a page of exotic letter-forms alongside cryptograms, *Computus* Manuscript, Oxford, St John's College, MS. 17, fol. 5v.
[79] Lea Olsan, 'Latin Charms of Medieval England: Verbal Healing in a Christian Oral Tradition', *Oral Tradition*, 7/1 (1992), 121.

gold ring, it would be extremely difficult to try and sound out the words. These nonsense words do not closely resemble those analysed by Lea Olsan in her study of Latin charms, all of which are based on patterns that would produce word-like sounds.[80] Perhaps this is because these nonsense words were born visually within a graphic system, rather than orally. Instead, the logic of the words inscribed on this ring is in visual repetition of certain letter forms, such as the letter 'V' which occurs at regular intervals, and the repeating 'GV' and 'AV' compounds. Instead of hiding some secret meaning, this is purely visual, and it interprets logic applied to religious inscriptions and oral charms in its own fashion. The ideas of reflection, echoes, the use of crosses to separate and create more seams of repetition, are performed by this object. This is complex, thought-out nonsense that plays to the fundamental aspect of engraved wearable letters: that they are individual and idiosyncratic. Their significance is lost with their owner, and is too specific to be communicated beyond their original context.

A fourth and final technique through which the communicative capacities of personal objects might be played with through visual words was their use of pseudo-script.[81] A copper brooch found in Billingsgate (figure 2.25) has pretensions to fine jewellery in the form of two coloured-glass 'gems' set in such a way that they protrude markedly out of the surface of the brooch, defiant in their masquerade as emeralds.[82] Fading into the background are equally fraudulent marks scratched informally onto the surface of the metal, appearing to say, 'WVI/IVW/VO IVW'. I have interpreted a vague but fairly uniform squiggle as a 'W' in my transcription, but an alternative theory might be that this 'W' form is in fact mimicking cursive writing, rather than being a letter-form itself. The way in which it trails off into the gem setting

[80] Olsan transcribes and analyses numerous examples. Olsan, 'Latin Charms of Medieval England: Verbal Healing in a Christian Oral Tradition', 124-129.
[81] Scholarship on medieval Latin pseudo-script is sparse, there is more of pseudo-Arabic for this period, for example, Walker, 'Pseudo-Arabic "inscriptions" and the Pilgrim's Path at Hosios Loukas', 99-123. Nonsense words have, however, received some attention. Olsan, 'Latin Charms of Medieval England: Verbal Healing in a Christian Oral Tradition', 116-142.
[82] Brooch, London, Museum of London BIG82[2591]<2317>.

might support this notion. The forms are undoubtedly crude, and have been equally crudely etched to a standard that does not approach the work of professional engravers in medieval London. However, while its content is beyond anyone's understanding, perhaps other than its maker, this does not mean that it is not communicating *something*. The letters are not without logic. Three quarters of the brooch follow a repetitive pattern, of the same forms repeated and positioned to mirror each other. The order in which I have written the transcription above does not reflect this. A clearer way would be to start at the top, or bottom, of this circular brooch and render it, 'IVW/WVI/IVW/VO'. Key to understanding such a brooch is to consider not only what it is imitating, but also how it is imitating it. An example at the Victoria and Albert Museum could conceivably be similar to the object that inspired the copper pseudo-script example (figure 2.26).[83] It is a silver-gilt annular brooch with similar settings of coloured glass. Its inscription reads, 'IOSV/ICI/ATI/VCI', *je suis ici a toi, voici* (here I am yours, behold me). As has already been mentioned in discussing the *fede* ring, the sentiment of signifying an absent person is repeated across many examples of jewellery inscriptions. This tradition is so prevalent in the material record that it should not necessarily be imagined that the maker of the pseudo-script brooch was insensitive to the meaning and traditions of these epigraphs. While the engraving is shallow and scrappy, the maker has taken some care in the placing of their pseudo-letters. The letters of the inscription on the Victoria and Albert Museum brooch are divided as equally as possible across the surface of the brooch, in groups of three, and one group of four, a spacing convention that has been replicated on the pseudo-script brooch. The not-quite-repetition of pseudo-letters in the Museum of London brooch may indicate an effort to make this limited form-vocabulary appear more convincing as actual words. But the maker could not resist including a symmetrical pattern in which 'W' meets 'W' and 'I' meets 'I', improving on the random pattern that letters arranged into words have on the Victoria and Albert Museum brooch.

[83] Ring Brooch, London, Victoria & Albert Museum M.28-1929
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O13400/ring-brooch-unknown/

The jarring 'VO' quadrant of the pseudo-script brooch cuts the sweetness of the symmetrical script, taking the pains to add a difficult rounded 'O' form to these otherwise almost runic forms, to emphasise the Latin origins of these pseudo-letters. This brooch, therefore, presents us with layer upon layer of imitation, even if this imitation is not as informal and spontaneous on closer inspection as it first appears.

The Latin writing system is not the only one that can be found influencing pseudo-script in medieval London. A copper brooch found in Billingsgate has markings that resemble runes, without being decipherable as such. It is a bifaceted annular brooch with sloping sides on which are incised rune-like markings (figure 2.27).[84] It has been catalogued as dating from the fourteenth century. The engraving is shallow, making for indistinct, grainy, lines. The sloping edges further distort the markings to the eye when the brooch is viewed face-on, as it would have been when worn. These pseudo-runes were made long after runes were used in Britain, but they were still contemporary in southern Scandinavia and would be into the Early Modern period.[85] This presents a problem with regards to how this object can be interpreted. For medieval Londoners, pseudo-runes would signify an external pseudo-script; that is, one based on a writing system that is not locally dominant. To Scandinavians, this would represent internal pseudo-script and, since London was home to a trade network that attracted foreign immigrants and visitors, another possibility is that the brooch originated in Scandinavia.[86] If the inscription on this brooch is an external pseudo-script, this has quite different connotations to if it was in a Latin-type script, or if it was produced in Scandinavia. The level of exoticism implied in external pseudo-script contrasts with internal pseudo script, which aims to blend in, or perhaps

[84] Copper Brooch, London, Museum of London, BIG82[5363]<2812>.
[85] Robert W. Rix. 'Runes And Roman: Germanic Literacy and The Significance Of Runic Writing', *Textual Cultures*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2011), 114.
[86] Although it did not represent a large proportion of foreign immigration into London, there is evidence that there was some immigration from Scandinavia, see Lutkin, 'Settled of Fleeting? London's Medieval Immigrant Community Revisited', 146.

be a functional writing system to the person making and viewing it. External pseudo-script aims to mimic something exotic, rather than masquerade as something familiar.[87]

Late-medieval Londoners might have come across runic inscriptions from artefacts that were made in the vicinity of the city hundreds of years before. A ring with a runic inscription found in London has already been mentioned above (figure 2.17).[88] In the British Museum there is a sheath fitting with an Old English runic inscription that was found near Westminster Bridge (figure 2.28).[89] A seax, a type of small sword, in the British Museum also has an Old English runic inscription and was also found in the Thames (figure 2.29).[90] These examples use the Old English runic system known as the *fuþorc*, named after the first letters of its alphabet.[91] There have also been examples of the continental runic system called the *fuþark* found in London.[92] A tombstone with a Scandinavian runic inscription was found just outside St Paul's Cathedral, and is now in the Museum of London (figure 2.30).[93] This is evidence of a Scandinavian presence in medieval London that was settled enough to choose to be buried there. It also means that it is just as likely that on the pseudo-runic brooch, a Londoner was imitating an external writing system, as the case to be that the object was imported from Scandinavia. Moreover, while runes, especially Old English runes from previous centuries, may have been viewed as being mysterious, they were not overwhelmingly used in magic or the occult, but were simply another

[87] External pseudo-script during the Middle Ages was often influenced by Greek, Hebrew, Arabic. See Alexander Nagel, 'Twenty-Five Notes on Pseudo-Script in Italian Art', *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 59-60 (2011), 228-248; Rosamond E. Mack and Mohamed Zakariya, 'The Pseudo-Arabic on Andrea del Verrocchio's David', *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 30, No. 60 (2009), 157-172.
[88] Ring, London, Museum of London TEX88[0]<1330>. https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/145990.html.
[89] Sheath Fitting, London, British Museum 1869,0610.1 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1869-0610-1.
[90] Seax, London, British Museum 1857,0623.1 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1857-0623-1.
[91] Victoria Symons, *Runes and Roman Letters in Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts* (Berlin, 2016) doi: https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110492774 , 6.
[92] The English 'fuþorc' system developed from the 'fuþark'. Symons, *Runes and Roman Letters in Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, 6.
[93] Tombstone, London, Museum of London 4075 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/35563.html.

writing system used in the same way as the Latin alphabet.[94] In fact, far from indicating a connection with a pagan past, most examples of runic writing in England are from after the conversion in the seventh century. The *fuþorc* was actually developed further for several centuries by monastic communities, who included its forms in manuscripts alongside Roman letters-forms.[95] If this object was made in London, the intention behind its pseudo-script might have been to give the object an illusion of antiquity, rather than a mystical quality.

In sum, by categorising the linguistic strategies of inscription-makers here—multilingualism, obscurantism, nonsense, and pseudo-script—I have drawn attention to the intention behind the various idiosyncrasies encountered in this corpus. There is a sense of right and wrong, correct and incorrect, at play when a modern literate viewer sees text. An urge to correct or solve anything that deviates from the rules. But this ignores intention. In accepting that in the world of private epigraphy during the Middle Ages, nonsense, pseudo-script, and mixing of languages were all done intentionally, we can access the subjective communication of inscribed objects, and deduce, rather than read, their meaning.

Conclusion - A Catalogue of Errors: Understanding Epigraphic Idiosyncrasies

As mentioned above, assumptions that the inscriptions on small metal finds are often erroneous has resulted in objects being misinterpreted by scholars. To end this chapter, I will take a few examples of museum catalogue entries identifying 'mistakes' in epigraphs, or

[94] In their survey of runic Christian amulets, Mindy Mcleod and Bernard Mees found that they differed little in their content and traditions from those rendered in Latin Christendom, Mindy Mcleod and Bernard Mees, *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects* (Woodbridge, 2006), 210. Rix. 'Runes And Roman: Germanic Literacy and The Significance Of Runic Writing', 114; Witt. 'More Than Bling: Inscribed Jewellery', 294.

[95] The *fuþorc* was expanded during this period to include 32 letters. Victoria Symons, *Runes and Roman Letters in Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, 8-10. Symons's book offers an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of Old English runes appearing in early medieval manuscripts. Monks also used runes in word games and cryptography, see Maureen Halsall, 'Runes and the Mortal Condition in Old English Poetry', *The Journal of English and German Philology*, Vol. 88, No. 4 (1989), 478.

dismissing words inscribed onto objects as ‘indecipherable’. In some cases I have found that errors in interpretation have arisen where letter-forms have been mis-transcribed (or missed altogether). Problems in these examples have arisen simply because these objects have not been given time by scholars and curators. In other instances, though, I have found that an approach whereby one considers objects within the context of a corpus of similar artefacts can uncover clues as to their meaning, if not providing a definitive translation.

This section is a journey through a number of objects in order to find a plausible interpretation for a silver-gilt annular brooch, at the top of which are the sculptural forms of two hands meeting at the palms (figure 2.31).[96] It was recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme as having been found in London and dates to around the fourteenth century. Its inscription reads, ‘VIN/NVN’, which in isolation appears to be pseudo-script.[97] However, when put in conversation with similar objects, and the pseudo-script brooches above, it is my contention that this conclusion is unlikely. The first useful comparative piece is in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Apart from being made from gold and having bifaceted arms, it is similar to the Portable Antiquities Scheme example. Its inscription reads, ‘LIV/IV:/VL/VL’ (figure 2.32).[98] Another found in Wiltshire has the inscription 'VIL/VIV/ILI/VLI' (figure 2.33).[99] Like the Victoria and Albert Museum example, it is also made of gold and has some additional decoration in the form of beading on its inner-most edge, perhaps reminiscent of buttons or decorative features that might be found on sleeves, thus enhancing the illusion that these hands are attached to arms. As the decoration is the same on both sides of the brooch, the hands appear

[96] Brooch, Portable Antiquities Scheme LON-2AD03A https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/803392.
[97] The Portable Antiquities Scheme have transcribed one of the ‘N’s as an ‘A’ but I think that this has occurred because the hinge of the brooch’s pin is obscuring part of the letter-form.
[98] Brooch, London, Victoria & Albert Museum M.48-1975 http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O16613/brooch-unknown/
[99] Brooch, Lincoln, The Collection: Art and Archaeology in Lincolnshire, ID: LCNCC : 2015.38.

to be attached to the arms of the same person, rather than signifying a meeting between two people.

While these inscriptions are not identical, they have a strikingly narrow reservoir of letter-forms. Unlike the copper pseudo-script brooch discussed above, their letter-forms are detailed, uniform, and professionally engraved. In museum catalogues, vernacular inscriptions are occasionally misinterpreted, sometimes because a cataloguer might come at an inscription expecting it to be in Latin. For example, an annular brooch in the British Museum has been listed as having a Latin inscription, when it is actually in Middle French (figure 2.34). In Latin, its inscription, '+IVSVI : ICI/ENLIV : DAMI', does not make sense, but rendered in modern French it would read, *je suis ici en lieu d'ami* (I am here in place of a friend).[100] This inscription, which also appears on the *fede* ring discussed above, is common enough to feature on another brooch in the British Museum's collection, whose inscription is also not translated.[101] In the case of this second example, translation was further obscured because it had been transcribed incorrectly as, '+IOSVI:ICI SNLIVDM:MI', rather than '+IOSVI:ICI ENLIV:DMMI'.

The perception of these objects as being unimportant in the history of material culture is reflected in the way that heritage organizations are happy to assess their inscriptions as being 'unfathomable'.[102] I would argue that this is not the case, and even if their meaning is unclear to us, they were certainly once understandable to those who made and owned them. Theirs is a tradition of using letter-forms in a way that modern viewers, even if they have knowledge of the appropriate vocabulary, are not fully literate. Unlike modern processed words, visual letters in the context of private epigraphy tend to contract words or include idiosyncratic spellings.

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[100] Annular Brooch, London, British Museum OA.1113 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_OA-1113

[101] Brooch, London, British Museum AF.2684 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_AF-2684

[102] This term was used to describe similar inscriptions in relation to the Lincoln example discussed above. Antony Lee, 'Some New Archaeological Acquisitions', *The Collection: Art and Archaeology in Lincolnshire*, 4th March 2015, https://www.thecollectionmuseum.com/blog/view/some-new-archaeological-acquisitions.

With this in mind, returning to the brooches with hands, the first thing to decide is the basic question of what language this inscription is using to communicate. The prevalence of ‘V’s and ‘I’s in the inscriptions on the brooches point to their inscriptions being in Middle French rather than Latin; for instance, in various examples explored in this chapter, words such as ‘IV’ (*je*), ‘SVI’ (*suis*), ‘LIV’ (*lieu*), ‘ICI’ (*ici*) appear commonly on brooches with vernacular inscriptions. My proposition in the case of the palm brooches, is that the inscriptions, ‘LIV/IV:/VL/VL’ and 'VIL/VIV/ILI/VLI', are playful compositions based on these words. These inscriptions convey the same idea of an absent person embodied by the object. As it is on an object with a similar design, ‘VIN/NVN’ might have a similar sentiment and logic to these other examples.

The design of the brooch might also provide clues as to the meaning of the inscription. Hands have been frequently depicted on jewellery since antiquity. The clasped hands are similar to those found on *fede* rings, like the one discussed at the beginning of this chapter, which were popular throughout the medieval period. However, as has been noted above with regards to the Wiltshire example, the hands depicted on these brooches are not clasped, but pressed together in a gesture that is evocative of prayer, and often seen in commemorative monuments during the later Middle Ages.[103] This gesture is a solitary one, rather than one symbolising a union between two people. While there is no indication that the inscription is devotional, the idea of commemoration might complement an inscription that invoked an absent person.

Therefore, considered against the other items discussed in this chapter, the intention behind this brooch and its inscription are not ‘unfathomable’. Within the tradition of private epigraphy, the piece can be taken as a mitigation of absence. Its inscription is likely a contraction of a phrase or name, obscuring the content from viewers looking in from the outside of a particular relationship.

[103] Badham, ‘Kneeling in Prayer’, 58-72.

. . .

When words are fastened to people, their meaning cannot be understood in isolation from those people and their intentions. Just because the names of their makers and owners are lost does not make these anonymous objects. Far from it. In fact, inscribed objects offer an insight into the most personal, intimate thoughts of an individual's life. The breadth of quality of these object, as well as the wide-ranging content of their inscriptions, means that those interested in the lives of medieval Londoners cannot afford to ignore these artefacts. In this chapter, we have seen how people used words to express their relationships with others, and with the world around them. Their interpretation is both complicated and enriched by the unwieldy use of language that characterises small metal inscription, and distances them, in more than a material sense, from what we traditionally think of as writing. Words could be used combined with tradition, such as obscurantism to mystify a holy name, or innovation, such as combining one language with another. As a result, words intended for a particular individual can appear appropriately cryptic to onlookers. In exploring these personal words, I have established various strategies employed by metal letter-makers to convey big ideas in small spaces. Inscriptions mobilise their form, their setting on an object, and interact with visual culture around them. These strategies that I have termed situational or subjective communication were not unique to jewellery, and will be explored in the coming chapters with reference to objects that communicated no just to an individual, but to communities, local and international.

Chapter Three: *Crede Michi.* Seals and Identity in Medieval London

Historians most often encounter seals in their wax form, affixed to documents. As a result, the overwhelming majority of scholarship on the subject casts seals, and by extension metal seal matrices of the type regularly found in archaeological settings in London, as paraphernalia of the written word.[1] Yet the delicate wax seals dangling from parchment tags at the end of medieval documents do not constitute an entirely representative residue of all seal use during the Middle Ages. Behaviours of seal use show them to have had significance far beyond being an addendum to manuscript culture. The following chapter will trace evidence of seals being used in a variety of material contexts across medieval London, stuck to objects made of wood, leather, textiles, and metal. As participants in medieval practices of agreement and dispute, belief and scepticism, seals were personal things in a manner not dissimilar to the jewellery discussed in the previous chapter, symbolising of their owners during both quotidian and life-changing moments. But the use of metal letters on seal matrices contrasts strongly with that which we observed in the previous chapter. Where the use of text on jewellery was at times highly individualised, I argue here that seal epigraphy was designed to blend in as part of a bigger system. Where the last chapter saw one-to-one communication, the objects in this chapter were intended to communicate to a wider community. In examining seal inscriptions, this chapter will see another use of private epigraphy, and ground it in its practical application within the governance structures of medieval London.

[1] In terms of terminology for this chapter, the word 'seal' will refer to these wax seal impressions, and 'seal matrix' or 'matrices' will be used to refer to the metal seal dies that create these impressions. When I talk about 'sealing practices' or the 'use of seals', this applies to the use of both of these objects unless otherwise stated.

The creator of a seal impression, the seal matrix, likewise has a rich material history, endlessly adaptable yet instantly recognisable. This tool was employed by medieval Londoners in many tasks, and the intentions behind seal use are consequently multifaceted. They authenticated and identified, but they could also conceal. Moreover, their use was inconsistent and changed over time. It is clear from contemporary records that seals were taken seriously by London's government, but they were not a flawless part of a perfect system, and institutions had to remain vigilant due to their occasional, potentially troublesome, mis-use. In contrast to studies that focus on seal impressions attached to charters and other manuscripts, the starting point for my argument in this chapter will be extant metal seal matrices found in late medieval London. The most important effects of this conceptual and material shift are twofold. Firstly, it means that the material interrogated here constitutes the broadest possible variety in terms of seal owners, as not all seal owners would necessarily be attaching their seals to archived documents. While there is undoubtedly value in studies that have explored London seal use archivally, focusing on archival seal impressions on manuscripts owned by known Londoners, the criteria for inclusion in this study instead present an opportunity to consider seal owners who were not part of a political elite, and therefore impressed their seals in contexts other than on manuscripts, such as tally sticks. It also opens up the discussion of London seals to people who, like a significant proportion of the city's populace, were not permanent inhabitants of London.[2] Secondly, by uncoupling seals and sealing from their normal material context of document culture, I am able to consider how seals were used in medieval London in different contexts, and for a variety of purposes. An approach anchored in sealing practices reflects the dynamics of

[2] One such study that scrupulously selects the seals only of Londoner citizens is Elizabeth A. New, 'Seals and Status in Medieval English Towns: A Case-Study of London, Newcastle and Durham' in, *Good Impressions: Image and Authority in Medieval Seals*, eds. Noël Adams, John Cherry and James Robinson (Oxford, 2008), 38.

seal design as, by and large, responding to socially governed rules rather than laws.[3] Seals were not required to include any specific information about their owners, nor convey any particular message in their motif. As a result, a reevaluation of this particular category of London objects, prompted by previously overlooked examples from archaeological contexts, helps to reveal seal design as a dynamic process that could be adapted according to practical use, another group of multifaceted metal letters at work within the medieval city. In seal matrices, we can see what aspects of their identity individuals mobilised to represent themselves in their community. The second part of this chapter will concentrate on how metal text and image worked together in these objects, having been carefully selected to create a sign of a person, a sign constructed to put forward a version of identity that would operate most effectively in the systems by which the medieval city was governed.

London Seal Epigraphy: Anonymity, Absence, and Authority

Consider seven late-medieval London seals, all of which share the same incised legend. All seven are small, between 16mm and 19.3mm, roughly the sizes of a five pence piece and a one penny piece, and made of base metal alloys, indicating that they belonged to individuals

[3] This is discussed in detail in Jörg Peltzer, who essentially points out that in England there was no equivalent of sumptuary laws for seals. Jörg Peltzer, 'Making an Impression: Seals as Signifiers of Individual and Collective Rank in the Upper Aristocracy in England and the Empire in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries' in, *Seals in their Context in the Middle Ages*, ed. Phillipp R. Schofield (Havertown, 2015), 70-71. On a smaller geographical scale, and with reference to seal motifs shared by social groups, see Elizabeth A. New, '(U)ncoventional Images. A Case-Study of Radial Motifs on Personal Seals' in the same volume, 156. There are exceptions, such as the Edmonton Hundred, London, British Museum, 1899,0203/1, and other contemporary Hundred seals also in the British Museum, 1856,0627.141, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1856-0627-141 and 1852,0522.8, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1852-0522-8. These seals were created in response to the Statue of Cambridge, 1388. A. P. Baggs, Diane K. Bolton, Eileen P. Scarff, and G. C. Tyack, 'Edmonton Hundred', in , *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 5, Hendon, Kingsbury, Great Stanmore, Little Stanmore, Edmonton Enfield, Monken Hadley, South Mimms, Tottenham*, eds. T. F. T. Baker and R. B. Pugh (London, 1976), 128-129, *British History Online*.

living, working, or passing through London who were not particularly wealthy, but whose business or personal affairs required them to press their seal matrix into wax to create an impression that would signify their identity (figure 3.01).[4] It is likely that most of these seals were made to be sold off-the-peg, rather than commissioned by their owners. Six of the matrices are round and one is a pointed oval shape. Each has the Latin epigraph, 'CREDE MICHI' *crede mihi* (believe me), formed of capitals encircling their motifs.[5]

In terms of overall aspect, they are of a similar style and composition. Two seals sport bust-in-profile motifs and have conical handles, so that as a whole object they resemble a chess piece, while the other five are flat like a thick penny, with small loops on the back. The space taken up by the legend relative to that of the motif are likewise similar in each example. The motifs have been etched within a limited area in the centre of the seal matrix, except in the case of one seal bearing a stag, whose antlers pierce the legend's field. The inscriptions on these seven examples are all made up of capitals with angular flick serifs.[6] The 'C' and 'E' forms are closed, and they all use straight 'M's rather than curved forms made of two abutting arches, or an arch attached to an oval, possibly because these modified Roman 'M's are easier to incise than rounded ones. The letter-forms created by four of these matrices—those bearing the

[4] Copper alloy seal 10 listed in, Brian Spencer, 'Medieval Seal-Dies Recently Found at London', *Antiquaries Journal*, 64.2 (1984); Copper alloy seal matrix, London, British Museum 1865,1220.89, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1865-1220-89; Copper alloy seal matrix, London, Museum of London 84.125; Copper alloy seal matrix, London, Museum of London 84.184/2; Bronze gilt seal matrix, London, British Museum 1891,0520.2, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1891-0520-2; Copper alloy seal matrix, Portable Antiquities Scheme ID: LON-A3DF27, https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/586954; Copper alloy seal matrix, London, British Museum 1856,0701.2211, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1856-0701-2211.

[5] I have translated this as 'believe me' here, but the use of the dative *mihi* implies that this seal is imploring its viewers to give their belief to it. This inscription, and variations on the theme, was common across medieval Britain. See P. D. A. Harvey and Andrew McGuiness, *A Guide to British Medieval Seals* (Dorchester, 1996), 114.

[6] If I were dating these examples using the style of the letter-forms alone, this would place all of them between c. 1300 and 1340. Kingsford, 'VIII.—The Epigraphy of Medieval English Seals', 149–78. However, it should be remembered that Kingsford's examples are all Royal or institutional seals, meaning that their letter-forms are more likely to reflect the fashions of the time. Such a study does not exist of these small, anonymous, base-metal seals, which could conceivably lag behind these high-status seal matrices in terms of style.

pelican, stag, radial motif, and a vesica-shaped seal—have sharp triangular cross sections, making the lines of the letter-forms pointed, and therefore thinner when stamped than they appear on the incised matrix. This gives the letters a scratchy aspect, indicating that their maker was not so concerned with the structure of the lines that make up the legend; contemporary examples of institutional seal matrices, or those made from more precious metals, tend to be incised with blunt triangular or trapezoid cross-sections, the flat faces of the letters more closely resembling written scripts, and producing a channel that creates shadow to make the letters easier to read in monochromatic media such as wax.[7] Two further of the seals bearing bust-in-profile matrices, as well as one bearing a merchant's mark, are of this latter type, signaling that they were made by someone more practiced at carving letter-forms on a very small scale: these seals indicate a slightly higher quality of manufacture, despite being made of the same base metal alloy.

As testified in these seven examples, medieval owners of seals were not always identified in their inscriptions. Although the most common inscription known on late medieval seals describes a name, 'SIGILLVM [name of seal owner in the genitive]', matrices with anonymous legends also make up a significant portion of extant seals from medieval London, with inscriptions linking to their motifs or simple generic mottos. 'CREDE MICHI' is the most common of these epigraphs.[8] Unnamed seal matrices bring up the same historiographical problem as discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis regarding anonymity and status. Yet while these seven seals are technically anonymous, it is important to understand that this does not

[7] This has been discussed in mere detail above at the end of Chapter 1. A good example of these blunt triangular cross sections is silver intaglio seal matrix, London, British Museum 1875,0201.12. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1875-0201-12; and of a trapezoid cross-section see, copper alloy seal matrix, London, British Museum 1850,0924.2 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1850-0924-2.

[8] This is based on metal seal matrices found in London that are in the collections of the Museum of London, The British Museum, and the Portable Antiquities Scheme. On a national level, this was also a common inscription, with the inscription 'CREDE MICHI' being listed on 19 seals in the appendix on 'Legends in Personal Seals' in, Harvey and McGuiness, *A Guide to British Medieval Seals*, 114.

preclude them from being used as signs of identification and authentication, nor does it disqualify them from being expressions of personal identity.

We see this, for instance, when considering the context of seal use in medieval London, where it is clear that identification through seals was bound up with action and memory, rather than being solely reliant on the contents of an inscription. During earlier periods of seal use in England, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it was usual for sealers to possess their own personal seals indicating their identities, but by the fourteenth century, when these seven seals were likely made, individuals no longer needed to own their own seal, but were able to borrow that of another.[9] While the legend and motif of a seal were important in projecting qualities that an individual might want to be associated with, the act of imprinting seals on wax was more than just a means of identification. As Brigitte Bedos-Rezak has extensively argued, in the transformative act of imprinting an image into wax, a seal was not merely a representation of a person, but an embodiment of their presence.[10] Moreover, imprinting was not the only physical act that signaled contracts or promises made between different parties. Gestures often also accompanied promises in order to create memories in the minds of participants and witnesses. These included joining hands as part of a marriage contract, placing your hand in another's in pledging fealty, slapping hands to signal that a deal has been 'struck' in a market place.[11] Making promises based on trust was not expressed in static words on a page—a page whose writing was made by a scribe, and therefore physically removed from the participants—but was manifested physically. Therefore, while their legends are anonymous, the 'CREDE MICHI' seals should not be considered to have functioned 'anonymously' at their time of use, since they

[9] Harvey and McGuiness, *A Guide to British Medieval Seals*, 87.
[10] Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago: Signs of Identity in the Middle Ages* (Brill, 2010), 3-6.
[11] For this and more on corporeal language in medieval England, see Ian Forrest, *Trustworthy Men: How Inequality and Faith Made the Medieval Church* (Princeton, 2018), 45-50. Jessica Barker makes some interesting comments on demonstrative (as opposed to expressive) gestures such as this in Barker, *Stone Fidelity: Marriage and Emotion in Medieval Tomb Sculpture*, especially 224-226.

symbolise the identity of the person who imprinted them. Anonymity has developed like rust over time, because the memory of the occasion on which they were used has deteriorated.

There are, however, further critical avenues we can take to revive a sense of memory in these extant London seal matrices, in particular new evidence to be found in the city's administrative culture. This evidence is not direct: while the names of seal owners are given in these records, it is rare that they describe the visual aspects of legends and motifs that they used on their seal matrices. However, taken together, I will mobilise these practices to build a fuller picture of these overlooked examples, in particular why the inscription shared by these seven seal matrices was such a popular choice.

Presence

In the first instance, contextual evidence can show how wax seal impressions could reify not just their owner's identity, but their presence. Consider a case in which a London seal impression was used to express an intention to uphold a promise in that most common of business arrangements: borrowing money. John Prentys did just this when he attached his seal to a wooden tally stick for the mercer John de Hardyngham upon taking out a loan from him.[12] Wooden tally sticks were commonly used throughout the medieval period and well beyond it in the case of the Exchequer, both as receipts and to record debts by the government and private individuals alike. Tally sticks worked in a similar way to chirographs or indentures.[13] When Prentys had borrowed from Hardyngham, notches would have been carved into a piece of hazel

[12] *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls Preserved Among the Archives of the Corporation of London at the Guildhall, A. D. 1364-1381*, ed. A. H. Thomas (Cambridge, 1929), 16.
[13] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 125-126. Another use of a sealed tally stick this time acting as a receipt for debts paid to a lender appears in 1298. In this transaction the lender pre-sealed the tally stick which was, marked with moneys received later by his servant, causing confusion. *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls Preserved Among the Archives of the Corporation of London at the Guildhall, A. D. 1298-1307*, ed. A. H. Thomas (Cambridge, 1924), 27-28.

or willow corresponding to the amount of money that Prentys borrowed; this piece of wood was then split in half lengthwise, so that both halves had precisely the same number of notches, with each party retaining their interlocking halves.[14] Hardyngham would have kept the larger piece that retained a stump from the other half, known as the 'stock', while Prentys would have kept the other half, known as the 'foil'. The width of the notches indicated how much money was being recorded, often with a particularly bodily bent: gaps were customarily based on the width of a person's thumb and their little finger, with the whole tally stick being approximately as long as a person's hand span.

As objects made of degradable materials, surviving tally sticks are unusual.[15] For those that do survive, the names of the parties involved were written in ink directly onto the wood, as can be observed in surviving tally sticks from fifteenth-century London, on which the details of the transaction were recorded on the side adjacent to the notches (figure 3.02). While not considered compulsory to attach seals to tally sticks, doing so provided an added a layer of authentication for both lender and borrower, particularly in the unstable world of private transactions which regularly ended up in court. In the case of John Prentys, the borrower may have used his own seal bearing his name, but as has been noted above this was not essential by the fourteenth century; an anonymous seal, like any of the 'CREDE MICHI' examples, would have achieved the same effect, especially as his name was doubtless recorded on the stick in ink as well. Unlike wax seal impressions attached to documents, which would normally suspend from the foot of the document on a strip of parchment or string, on tally sticks the practice was

[14] W. T. Baxter, 'Early Accounting: The Tally and the Checkerboard', *The Accounting Historians Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (1989), 47-62.

[15] The National Archives have some medieval examples that survived deliberate destruction by fire at the Exchequer to make space for other records, London, The National Archives E 402/2 https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C7140530. The Museum of London has a tally stick dated to the thirteenth century which shows how amounts were signified by notches along the stick. Tally stick, London, Museum of London MLK76[3061]<327> https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/372215.html. The Science Museum also has a collection of 16 tally sticks from London dating to the mid-fifteenth century. Tally Sticks, medieval. *1952-431Science Museum Group Collection Online*, https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co60506/tally-sticks-medieval-exchequer-tallies.

to press the wax impression directly onto the wood.[16] When John de Hardyngham subsequently sued John Prentys for the unpaid debt in January 1365, his attorney, Henry de Bray, brought with him this relic of their deal. John Prentys was sent to prison for not paying John de Hardyngham on the strength of a stick with a wax imprint of his seal stuck to it.

In this case, it is easy to see how a seal could be viewed as an embodiment of an identity. In imprinting a tally stick with his seal, John Prentys was giving John de Hardyngham something of himself—his word, his freedom—as surety for a loan. In return, Hardyngham had placed faith in Prentys and in a number of uncertain future circumstances on which repayment would depend. In this case, the carving and splitting of a tally stick was also a way of reifying the agreement between these participants. The tally is standing in for absence, as the seal does. The significance of the tally stick changes over the course of the deal, and means something different to each of the participants. To Hardyngham, the tally stick itself stands in for money that is temporarily absent from his coffers. To Prentys, it is a manifestation in the present of something that will happen in the future. Hardyngham's stock represents his right, Prentys's foil represents his obligation.

The inequality at the heart of the transaction is also reflected in the degrees of presence and absence of the participants. John de Hardyngham was a mercer, meaning that he was a merchant who traded in silk, linen, and fustian.[17] During the fourteenth century, mercers were one of the city's most influential groups, being well-represented among the twenty-four aldermen who, with the mayor, governed the city.[18] As the lender, he was the senior partner in this transactional relationship between himself and John Prentys. But his status also afforded him such credence from the court that he could enjoy the luxury of physical absence from these

[16] Harvey and McGuiness, *A Guide to British Medieval Seals*, 19.
[17] Sutton, *The Mercery of Medieval London: Trades, Goods and People*, 2. The word mercery refers to these types of goods, the people who sold them, and also a place in West Cheap where these products were sold.
[18] Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community in Late Medieval London*, 23.

proceedings.[19] His relative anonymity to John Prentys highlights an economy of faith, in which a person's wealth corresponded to their social power. As has been noted in this case with regards to tally sticks, seal impressions were not alone in medieval material culture in embodying something absent. They represent a desire, a necessity, to stand in for something and to make a transient thing endure. They are a conduit of absent agency and its quality.

Authority

Seen in the context of the Hardyngham-Prentys case, in which the party with wealth and power was given more credence by default because of his social position, the 'CREDE MICHI' epigraph was not only apt for sealing agreements, but also an expression of aspirational privilege. Indeed, another example from London's archival documents suggests that these metal letters were bound up in notions of trust, status, and authority.

Although these words are composed in the voice of the matrix itself, by the logic of the impression coming to embody the seal's owner in the act of sealing, the plea comes from them. Privilege in London was, more than elsewhere in the country, bound up in wealth rather than ancestry. One way of securing privilege and influence was by becoming an official in the city's government. Seals of city officials played an important role in authenticating goods for consumers. A particularly useful instance for illustrating this occurred in 1364, recorded in a set of the city's Plea and Memoranda Rolls, when the Commonalty of London indicted William and

[19] There has been some debate that the term 'attorney' in this context may actually indicate the use of negotiable credit instruments and that Henry de Bray may have bought the debt from Hardyngham. A later case has been attributed as the first instance of negotiable credit instruments used in medieval England but by the logic of this argument this could be an earlier example. However, I see no compelling reason why Henry de Bray could not be acting on behalf of Hardyngham, as merchants often delegated business to associates in their employ. For more on this debate see, Tony Moore, 'According to the Law of Merchants and the Custom of the City of London: Burton v. Davy (1437) and the Negotiability of Credit Instruments in Medieval England' in, *Medieval Merchants and Money: Essays in Honour of James L. Bolton*, eds. Martin Allen and Matthew Davies (London, 2016), 318-321.

Rose Nosterfeld for selling ale by an incorrect quart measure, sealed with a counterfeit seal of the Alderman of Dowgate.[20] The Nosterfelds admitted to selling ale using a measure that was one third short of the city's standard measure, and for charging a higher price for it than was permitted; however, they denied forging the Alderman's seal, a more serious offence, and they were later found not guilty by a jury. The connection between the two separate parts of the indictment are striking: that just because the Nosterfeld's measure was manipulated, the pair must also be using a fraudulent seal. Certainly the latter crime was not unheard of: an example of a counterfeit seal survives in London at the British Museum (figure 3.03).[21] Nor was it unheard of for an aldermen's measure to be incorrect: when a complaint was lodged against the bailiff of Queenhithe in March 1365 concerning inconsistences in the measures he used, he explained to the court that he had inherited outdated measures for mussels when he took office that had been sealed by the Alderman of his ward.[22] The measures had been approved in 1362 or 1363 when Stephen Cavendisshe was mayor.[23] The bailiff had had to put the matter right himself, but not before (apparently unwittingly) using these measures for some time.

Why, then, were those accusing the Nosterfelds of forging a seal specifically so concerned? Again, identity surely plays some part, for the suspect seal was not a ward seal, passed between different holders of the office of alderman, but the personal seal of the particular alderman in charge, as was customary for medieval officials generally. [24] The fact that city officials used their own seals shows that, in the right hands, a personal seal could carry as much

[20] *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls Preserved Among the Archives of the Corporation of London at the Guildhall, A. D. 1364-1381*, ed. Thomas, 6.
[21] Seal (medieval forgery) of the Bishop of Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, London, British Museum, 1856,0701.2190 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1856-0701-2190 . Fraudulent use of seals will be discussed in more detail below in this chapter.
[22] *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls Preserved Among the Archives of the Corporation of London at the Guildhall, A. D. 1364-1381*, ed. Thomas, 29-30.
[23] Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, 332.
[24] Harvey and McGuiness, *A Guide to British Medieval Seals*, 96.

authority as an institutional seal.[25] Indeed, London's system of government depended on the principle that the city's officials were more worthy of trust than private individuals. David Harry, in his study of London communities in the later Middle Ages, argues that after the Black Death the city's governing elite increasingly used rhetoric that emphasised their piety and portrayed an image of them working towards a Christian common good, as well as being heavily engaged in charitable endeavours, so that they would be trusted by London's citizenry.[26] Aldermen were usually wealthy merchants and high-profile members of craft guilds.[27] They were elected annually and oversaw government and justice at ward level, expected to purchase and wear special livery during important events, and even perhaps to mark them out as officials on a day-to-day basis. As such, their authority and status as agents of London's government was visible, and their image was used to create a civic sense of wealth, power, and unity. Putting seals on products as certification, and then trusting those seals by default, was also part of this illusion of control that was in fact precarious and vulnerable to abuse and human error. At the heart of the Nosterfeld accusation, then, was the simple reality that, at least at first, more trust was placed in an alderman's seal than in the mere word of everyday Londoners like them.

With the context of a case like this in mind, it is interesting to consider how our 'CREDE MICHI' seals may have functioned within this ecosystem of trust and authority. As has already been noted, these seven seal matrices all have round designs and share the same layout of having the legend encircling the motif; these were features they in fact also share with the vast majority of seal matrices owned by private individuals, no doubt including those of Londoners such as the Alderman of Dowgate. In the same manner as this disputed seal, a second

[25] During the twelfth century personal seals were sometimes stamped on the back of an official seal as an extra layer of authentication, for example the personal seal of a bishop might be used to counter seal his official episcopal seal. See, Harvey and McGuiness, *A Guide to British Medieval Seals*, 70. There will be further discussion of privy seals below in this chapter.
[26] Harry, *Constructing a Civic Community in Late Medieval London*, 3. He also makes the point that such public relations measures were necessary because, unlike many other ruling elites, their power was not hereditary and was therefore much less stable and dependent on personal circumstance.
[27] For in-depth information about aldermen see, Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, 136-146.

purpose for the 'CREDE MICHI' examples reveals itself: their design communicates identity that is founded principally within the parameters of community, a community that came together to agree on their authority.

Importantly, it does not seem that either part of such seals, the epigraph or the motif, had more authority invested in them than the other. The authority of the seal matrix was such that when a seal matrix was obsolete, it needed to be destroyed to prevent it from falling into the wrong hands and being used fraudulently. Several examples found in London show signs of sustaining such deliberate damage, and these do not reveal a more intentioned obscuring of either their legend or their motif. For example, Walter Reigate's copper alloy matrix has been cut and torn at the sides by a sharp blade, both text and image obscured by the markings: the cancellation of the seal defaces the inscription in two places, and severs the lion motif's tail and one of its legs (figures 3.04 and 3.05).[28] Another copper alloy seal, with an intricate motif that shows the Agnus Dei looking up at a tree in which a pelican sits, has had its top corner snapped off, again obscuring both part of the inscription and a small fraction of the incised bird (figure 3.06).[29] In a third example, a small circular seal showing a squirrel has been cut completely in half (figure 3.07).[30] Patterns of destruction, therefore, do not show a practice of selectively disfiguring either the inscription or the motif; it seems to have been the combination of these elements that gave a seal its authority.

Security and Fraud

[28] Seal 2 listed in Spencer, 'Medieval Seal-Dies Recently Found at London', 377-379.
[29] London, British Museum 1856,0701.2199 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1856-0701-2199.
[30] London, British Museum 1868,0805.28 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1868-0805-28.

As well as projections of personal positions, London seals functioned in a more practical authoritative sense too, with archival evidence again providing context for our seven 'CREDE MICHI' seals in this regard. In January 1355, the Wardens of the Mistery of Goldsmiths enclosed some counterfeit silver—in the form of cups, plates, a seal matrix, and an unworked bar—in a linen bag, which they secured with their own seals and gave to the Chamberlain of London, Thomas de Walden, manager of the city's finances.[31] As we saw in Chapter One, the control of currency and precious metals was the jealously guarded obligation of London goldsmiths, making them the city's most powerful guild.[32] And seal impressions worked in tandem with these authorities in securing illicit goods.

The design of seal matrices, and the fragile wax impressions they produced, made it easy to detect when a sealed object or document had been tampered with. Most commonly, seals were used to close and secure letters, to ensure that only their intended recipient opened them.[33] While this was a widespread use for seals, survival of impressions used in this way are understandably rare, as they would be destroyed when a letter was opened by its addressee, and because correspondence was personal and informal, and consequently not archived as scrupulously as legal documents. Two seal matrices found in London with the rhyming medieval French epigraph, 'PRIVE SV ET POY CONV', *privé suis et peu connu* (I am private and little known), exemplify how seals could guard privacy, as well as communicate identity. The practice of using secret seals, whose legends included the word 'secretum', began with the seals of those holding offices, such as monarchs and bishops.[34] They had institutional seals, usually held securely by other officials when not in use, and their personal privy seal, which was used

[31] *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls Preserved Among the Archives of the Corporation of London at the Guildhall, A. D. 1323-1364,* ed. Thomas,242-243. Chamberlains were elected annually to oversee collection and spending of London's revenues. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages,* 176-179.
[32] Davies, 'Crown, City and Guild in Late Medieval London', 254-255.
[33] Harvey and McGuiness, *A Guide to British Medieval Seals,* 4-5.
[34] For more information on privy seals and secret seals see, Harvey and McGuiness, *A Guide to British Medieval Seals,* 34-38.

inconsistently but often in conjunction with a great seal as an extra layer of authentication.[35] Correspondence between London and the monarch often explicitly mention the presence of a privy seal. Seals with legends that convey secrecy or privacy highlight the fact that in their practical use seals were not always intended for public posterity. One of the examples of private seals found in London alluded to above has a motif depicting a two-headed grotesque (figure 3.08).[36] This curious beast reflects that idea of being 'little known', an obscure secret to its viewers: T. A. Heslop has discussed private gem seals belonging to high-ranking clergy during the twelfth century that acknowledge in their motifs the idea that their owners had both a public persona and a private personality, and used the appropriate seal for private correspondence and public writ respectively. [37] This London seal matrix is a less materially precious example, but the fact that one of its creature's faces is human and the other animal perhaps has a similar flavour of conveying that whatever the seal secured was of a private nature only fit for its recipient, and not comprehensible or interesting to others.

As much as the delicate nature of wax was a problem for charter seals, it made seal impressions ideal for the purposes of security. When investigating a robbery at the Royal Wardrobe Treasury in Westminster, the judges in the case carefully examined the key to the treasury, which was kept in a leather pouch secured with a wax seal impression.[38] In their indenture, they describe at length how the keys were brought to them at the treasury by the

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[35] Harvey and McGuiness, *A Guide to British Medieval Seals*, 34-37; 97. It is acknowledged in this volume that the use of secret seals needs to be more systematically studied. From London's Plea and Memoranda rolls mentions of seals are inconsistent, with some entries concerning letters and writs explicitly recording what kind of seals were attached and others not mentioning seals at all.

[36] Copper alloy seal matrix, London, British Museum, 1856,0701.2228. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1856-0701-2228.

[37] T. A. Heslop, 'What is a Secret Seal? Ancient Gems and Individuality in Twelfth-Century England' in, *Status, Identity and Authority: Studies in medieval and Early Modern Archives and Heraldry presented to Aidrian Ailes*, eds. Seam Cunningham, Anne Curry, and Paul Dryburgh (Bristol, 2021), 133.

[38] *Documents Illustrative of English History in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries Selected from the Records of the Department of the Queen's Remembrancer of the Exchequer*, ed. Henry Cole (London, 1844), 277. This seal guarded the keys to the only door of the Treasury, which was in the crypt of Westminster Abbey. The locked door was only one of the obstacles that might impede and intruder. After entering the door, the floor dropped away and the only way to get across to the vault was by using a specially-constructed wooden bridge kept by the monks.

Cofferer of the King's Wardrobe, and how the seal was unbroken, proving that the robbers had somehow forced their entry into the Treasury by removing part of its exterior wall. The wax seal impression did not render this pouch physically impregnable. However, it did exonerate the Cofferer of any suspicion, and ruled out an 'inside job', at least where Treasury officials were concerned. Seals could not prevent crime, but could make detection much more straight-forward. In 1298, Peregrine de Orde, John de Rames, John de Sataly, and Arnald de Sere were imprisoned after they had arranged for Bernard du Pyn, who was a minor and therefore excused from incarceration, to recover goods that had been confiscated by the Sheriff.[39] The court noted that the Sheriff had secured these goods with a seal, which Bernard Pyn had broken in order to carry them away. Despite getting someone else to steal the sealed merchandise, the original owners of the goods were thought to be the most likely culprits.

As the Goldsmiths example above attests, seal impressions could be mobilized in the prevention of theft, and seal matrices could be the subject of thefts themselves. Indeed, as tools within a system of justice, authenticity, and personality, these objects were themselves ripe for tampering with – all the more reason for the makers of the 'CREDE MICHI' seals to mark their surface with statements compelling truth and belief. On the 6th May 1341, the Mayor of London, Andrew Aubrey, was delivered a letter apparently from the Earl of Salisbury, asking for a loan of £40 that he was to hand over to the Earl's messenger, Thomas Beneyt.[40] The Earl of Salisbury's seal on the letter gave Aubrey pause, its awkward positioning on the letter cast doubt in his mind. He instructed his household to stall Beneyt for as long as possible, while he subtly

[39] *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls Preserved Among the Archives of the Corporation of London at the Guildhall, A. D. 1298-1307*, ed. Thomas, 30.
[40] *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls Preserved Among the Archives of the Corporation of London at the Guildhall, A. D. 1323-1364*, ed. Thomas, 137. The Earl of Salisbury was William de Montagu, a powerful magnate who was close to the King. He was a leading military figure in England's campaigns in Scotland and France, and was therefore often absent from his household. In 1341, however, he had just returned to England having been imprisoned in Paris in the course of Anglo-French hostilities. W. M. Ormrod, 'Montagu, William [William de Montacute], first earl of Salisbury (1301–1344)' in, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) https://doi-org.uea.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/19001. Andrew Aubrey was mayor of London from 1339-1341 and again from 1351-2. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Its Government and People*, 328-331.

made enquiries. Beneyt, anxiously awaiting payment as the Mayor's staff labouriously stretched out the process of counting out the money, realised that he had been rumbled and fled the house. Now positive of Beneyt's guilt, Aubrey had his men set out to find him and take him into their custody. Beneyt was apprehended near St Paul's, despite having cunningly changed his clothes since his meeting with Aubrey so that he might not be recognised. At the Guildhall, in front of the Mayor and Aldermen of the city, Beneyt admitted that he had forged the Earl's seal by taking an impression from another letter. Andrew Aubrey's reaction to a fishy-looking seal impression reveals that the presence of this wax sign alone was not taken for granted as proof of authentication. Seals were not an implicitly trusted formality, but were in fact scrutinised by viewers. It is not mentioned that Aubrey noticed anything amiss with the document itself. In fact, while he was in custody for this crime in Salisbury, Beneyt cheekily drew up and sent a quitclaim to the Mayor for any damages incurred by his incarceration. Beneyt was clearly experienced in drafting documents and had working knowledge of various legal and business processes.

A more effective way of committing sigillographic fraud was to steal a seal matrix, or compel its owner to use it against their will. In 1305, Walter Cote alleged that his guardian, Roger de Evere, who had taken advantage of his role to variously extort money from him when he was under-age, had two years previously forced him to seal a quitclaim relating to several houses he owned, among other things, to Roger's benefit.[41] In another example, a woman named Alice Pas said that a man, Adam atte Rose, had invited her to his house to dinner, which turned out to be a ruse to make her seal a document, the contents of which she did not know.[42] Neither

[41] This included a scheme whereby Walter was to pay Roger £42 at the rate of £4 per year. *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls Preserved Among the Archives of the Corporation of London at the Guildhall, A. D. 1298-1307*, ed. Thomas, 203-204.
[42] *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls Preserved Among the Archives of the Corporation of London at the Guildhall, A. D. 1298-1307*, ed. Thomas, 176. The jury ultimately found against Alice as she was unable to produce this document for the court, and Adam atte Rose obviously denied its existence altogether.

case resulted in conviction, demonstrating that seal mis-use of this kind was extremely difficult to prove. Ultimately, it was not just the seal owner who needed to be trusted, but the system of sealing itself. Viewers were required to lend their belief to these objects, and the systems in which they operated, as well as to the individuals who owned them.

Geographical Identity

The systems of seal use thus far described in London are useful for better contextualising our seven 'CREDE MICHI' seals, but these systems were not exclusively a London phenomenon cut off from the rest of the world. On the contrary, as a national centre of trade and part of commercial networks that crossed borders, the use of seals in the city forms a key point of potential connection between our seven London 'CREDE MICHI' seals and an international body of seal-users within and beyond the city.

While the seal matrices anchoring this chapter were all found in London, they did not necessarily belong to citizens or permanent residents of the city. Only around a quarter of the adult male population in later medieval London were technically London citizens, birth in the city not being a guarantee of this status.[43] London drew people from across the country (referred to as foreigners) and from abroad (administratively designated aliens) to work or trade in the city.[44] While some did seek to become London citizens themselves, for example by undertaking apprenticeships, many immigrants were transient and are therefore difficult to trace in

[43] Davies, 'Aliens, Crafts and Guilds in Later Medieval London', 124.
[44] Davies, 'Aliens, Crafts and Guilds in Later Medieval', 119. There has been lots of work done on immigration in medieval London, and England more broadly. Recently the AHRC-funded project 'England's Immigrants 1330-1550' has yielded new insight into this section of medieval English society with many scholars citing this project as a key source. 'England's Immigrants 1330-1550', 22nd August 2022, https://www.englandsimmigrants.com/. For a summary of this project see, Jessica Lutkin, 'England's Immigrants 1330-1550: A Study of National Identity, Culture, and Integration', *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (2013), 144-147. 'England's Immigrants', and other studies at least partially rely on evidence from alien subsidy rolls from the fifteenth century, which record the taxation of alien households.

documentary sources.[45] Research on the subject of immigration to medieval England, and London especially, has proliferated in recent years, and is particularly concerned with establishing numbers and other demographic details. A few scholars have tried to assess the immigrant experience in some form, but, as is the case for many aspects of research into medieval society, the sources available have a particular agenda or purpose that highlights periods of conflict, and ignores the unrecorded carrying out of business as usual. The Plea and Memoranda Rolls are littered with xenophobia, or more generally, as Matthew Davies warns, 'rhetorics of inclusion and exclusion', particularly as these documents record the proceedings of a court whose purpose was to uphold and enforce rights of groups such as craft guilds and misteries.[46] From the evidence of extant seal matrices found in London, seal design did not reflect geographical origins of these potential owners. Compare three London seals whose original owners were almost certainly not native Londoners. The seal matrix of Clais van Ende, probably of Flemish origin, follows the same conventions that an English seal would (figure 3.09).[47] It is round, 24mm in diameter, has a shield motif in the centre, around which is an inscription in delicate textura quadrata letters, 's•clais•van•ende••' (seal of Clais van Ende). There is no visual reference to his geographical identity; only the generous spacing of the letter-forms, and the larger proportion of the design given over to the inscription rather than the motif are subtle factors that might point to a seal made outside of England. Another very similar example in terms of composition is that of Tassart Petit, also from Northern Europe, probably

[45] Lutkin, 'Settled or Fleeting? London's Medieval Immigrant Community Revisited', 155.
[46] Davies, 'Aliens, Crafts and Guilds in Later Medieval London', 124. Helen Bradley's work on documents relating to merchant hosts of aliens in fifteenth-century London led her to surmise that the attitudes of Londoners towards aliens depended on economic circumstances and England's conflicts with other countries, which could have severe effects on relations that usually focused on reciprocal profit and other interests. Helen Bradley, *The Views of the Hosts of Alien Merchants*, 1440-1444 (Woodbridge, 2012), xii-xiii.
[47] Copper alloy seal matrix, London, British Museum, 1856,0701.2207 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1856-0701-2206. I have not found mention of Clais van Ende, or Claes van Ende, but there was a Giles van Ende described as Flemish living in Bristol between 1458 and 1459. 'England's Immigrants', 22nd August 2022, https://www.englandsimmigrants.com/person/54018.

France (figure 3.10).[48] And a third seal, a square quartrefoil in shape, follows a pattern distinct to Spanish seals (figure 3.11).[49] These characteristics are minor variations of an established layout that defined seal matrices wherever in Europe they originated. Geographical identity was rarely foregrounded in seal design, ensuring that seal matrices could hold their currency of credence wherever they were used on the continent, and potentially beyond.

As well as helping form the multifaceted identities of medieval Londoners, the standardised formula followed in seal design allowed their authority to translate across borders. Once more, London's Mayoral Court records afford us glimpses of the way in which this functioned, especially when business was conducted between Londoners and aliens, with cases of the Court often pertaining to debts between merchants from the city and those from abroad. In January 1372, a dispute was brought to the Mayor's Court in which Stephen de Caresse, a merchant from Bayonne in south-west France, was sued for a debt to London fishmonger, John de Blakeney.[50] Stephen de Caresse asserted that the debt had been settled earlier in the courts in Bayonne and was asked by the Mayor's court to provide letters with the seals of the Prince of Bayonne and Bayonne's common seal attached. He brought these letters to the court, but John de Blakeney tried to dispute their validity on the basis that on examination the seals attached

[48] Copper alloy seal matrix, London, British Museum, 1856,0701.2207 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1856-0701-2207.

[49] Seal 24 listed in Spencer, 'Medieval Seal-Dies Recently Found at London', 381-382. All examples of square quatrefoil seals in the British Museum's collection are from Spain, OA.1551, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_OA-1551; OA.1548, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_OA-1548; OA.1549, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_OA-1549; OA.1570, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_OA-1570; 1866,0714.43, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1866-0714-43;

[50] *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls Preserved Among the Archives of the Corporation of London at the Guildhall, A. D. 1364-1381*, ed. Thomas, 129; 136-137. The location in which a debt was paid could have significant implications on how well the lender did out of the deal because of currency exchange. Blakeney may have wanted Stephen de Caresse to pay him in London because currency is always worth more in its home location, rather than the implication of this case being that Blakeney was expecting to manipulate the system in such a way as to be repaid twice. For more on foreign exchange and how this could act as interest for lenders see, Wright Martindale, Jr., 'Chaucer's Merchants: A Trade-Based Speculation on Their Activities', *The Chaucer Review*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (1992), 309-316, especially 311.

were actually those of the Provostship and the Mayoralty of Bayonne, rather than the Prince and the Commonalty. This was settled by calling to the court citizens of Bayonne including Dominus de Payan, former warden of the Provostship of Bayonne, to explain that the provostship seal was in fact the Prince's seal and that the Mayoralty seal was the equivalent of the common seal. The court found in favour of Stephen de Caresse, who was exonerated and released from prison.

While seals had international recognition, this case reveals some of the problems of translating administrative customs to another geographical context. In London, the seal of the Mayoralty was separate from that of the Commonalty, and apparently used on slightly different occasions to the Mayoralty seal of Bayonne. Just as was the case with seals belonging to individuals, these official seals were not trusted implicitly, and challenges to their validity were seriously examined by the court. First-hand testimony was required where administrative systems failed. The fact that in the space of a day's recess several Bayonne townspeople could be summoned to the court in London, reveals the presence of a community which felt compelled to support its members. It also helped that fighting de Caresse's corner was vintner John de Stodeye, a former Mayor of London, acting as his mainpernor (a guarantor under the mainprise system, similar to modern bail).[51]

As has been seen above, communal seals could be used to vouch for an outsider doing business in the city. These seals that represent whole communities were still designed along the same lines, but, unlike the seals of individuals, were able to use their imagery to assert their collective geographical identity. There is an example found in London of a fifteenth-century

[51] Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, 331. John de Blakeney may also have been from an established family in London in that he may be descended from Peter de Blakeney, who was sheriff from 1310-11, 325. John de Blakeney did not have much luck in the courts and occasionally took matters into his own hands. A few years later he was indicted for threatening and abusing a man who gave testimony against him in another case concerning some wine he refused to pay for, and in which he was suspected of having doctored an indenture in relation to the wine. *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls Preserved Among the Archives of the Corporation of London at the Guildhall, A. D. 1364-1381,* ed. Thomas, 248-250.

communal seal for English merchants in the Low Countries (figure 3.12). [52] The seal motif depicts an English saint, Thomas Becket, crossing the Channel on a ship, an image that echoes examples of ampullae and badges from his shrine in Canterbury (figure 3.13).[53] The iconography refers to Thomas Becket returning to England after a period of exile on the continent, the beginning of the sequence of events that led to his martyrdom at Canterbury Cathedral. Thomas Becket was one of London's most famous sons, and was also depicted on the city's common and mayoral seals (figure 3.14). The severe quadratic textura inscription of the English merchants' seal, its aspect uniform and slightly crushed into the space reads, 'sigillu : anglicor in flandria : brabancia : hollandria: zeeladia : m'cat' (seal of the English merchants in Flanders, the Brabant, Holland, and Zeeland). For any viewer who could not infer from this popular image of Thomas Becket, a scroll unfurls from his hand reaching back behind his shoulders and reads, 's. thomas catuar' (saint Thomas of Canterbury). As has been noted in relation to London aldermen, religious affiliation was often used by powerful groups to inspire confidence and justify authority. In depicting Thomas Becket in particular, and on a ship no less, the London merchants were able to allude not only to their piety, but portray a saint as a compatriot.

This bold assertion of geographical identity is sharply contrasted with the way in which individuals portrayed themselves abroad. Although affiliation with a community of alien merchants was useful, this sort of affiliation is not often overtly expressed in the design of individual seals because, as has been seen in the Bayonne case, uniformity would make business

[52] Seal matrix, London, British Museum 1880,0624.1 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1880-0624-1. This is a mid-sized seal with a diameter of 44mm.

[53] Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges*, 62; 79-81. A number of ampullae and badges with similar iconography have been found in London. The image on this seal matrix is most similar to earlier ampullae made in the early thirteenth century in that an oversize Becket looms large alone in his boat. The fact that this seal matrix was made centuries later than the ampullae shows how influential this image was.

between different geographical locations more straight-forward. Seals needed to be in a recognisable format so that their validity could stand up under scrutiny.

...

'CREDE MICHI' seal matrices make explicit their hope of validation, not just in their legend, but in the way in which it is presented, exuding trust and authority on behalf of their owner. With the support of examples drawn from London's documentary sources we have seen how trustworthiness was interwoven throughout London's systems of governance, and that seal matrices played an important role in personal business interactions, communal cases, and even international affairs. The more prominent an individual's place in London's society, be that a result of wealth or administrative office, the more credence they were given; in this way the 'CREDE MICHI' seals, however apparently anonymous, tell of a quite specific category of owners who possessed a deep understanding of the values of their community. Given this context, however, how precisely did these 'CREDE MICHI' seals evoke these values beyond their grand statement of belief, in the intricacies of their motifs and format of their inscriptions?

Motifs and Inscriptions

The imperative inscription shared by the seven 'CREDE MICHI' matrices is a bald plea for acceptance, bargained for by the motifs with which it is paired. In addition to the contextual sources above, therefore, to fully understand these seals it is vital to explore and understand how visual language worked alongside metal letters to shape their reception. In particular, the design of seal matrices was used to inspire confidence in their viewers. As we have observed in the

cases discussed above, a seal matrix participated in an economy of trust, a system that functioned differently according to a user's status or situation. For some, their family name was their currency; for others, it was their trade; for many, their own faith in God might be hoped to instill trust in fellow members of the community of the faithful. Taking some of the most prevalent types of group identity expressed in extant seal matrices from medieval London, all represented among the 'CREDE MICHI' seals, my argument will now turn to examine how imagery and legends worked together to assert the power of these small but significant objects.

First, it is important to acknowledge that medieval seal motifs functioned within the broader visual ecosystem of medieval London, and as a result closely follow various socially accepted patterns of meaning. This too was another opportunity for their owner to impress their trustworthiness upon their community. For example, the pelican feeding its offspring—seen in one of the 'CREDE MICHI' seals—is an image associated with the sacrifice of Christ for humanity and the Eucharist, as well as charity generally (figure 3.15).[54] The use of this motif in a seal, therefore, could allude to the faith and piety of its owner, inspiring other Christians to have faith in them. Another of these seals features a merchant's mark consisting of an 'R' with a cross shooting upwards from the letter's vertical stem (figure 3.16).[55] This alludes to the owner's occupational identity, and makes this seal much less anonymous, despite the absence of their name. A third seal from the group features an abstract motif, a simple radial flower design (figure 3.17).[56] Unassuming radial motifs have been traced recently by Elizabeth New, who has explored the possibility that certain designs were shared in Wales by kinship groups.[57] Although her study does not reveal links between owners with certainty, she suggests that patterns in their use may point to meanings of these designs that scholars have yet to understand. As with their

[54] Copper alloy seal 10 listed in, Spencer, 'Medieval Seal-Dies Recently Found at London', 379-380.
[55] Copper alloy seal matrix, London, Museum of London 84.125.
[56] Bronze gilt seal matrix, London, British Museum 1891,0520.2. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1891-0520-2.
[57] New, '(Un)conventional Images: A Case-Study of Radial Motif on Personal Seals', 151-161.

open-ended text, the motifs on these seals may at first appear generic or anonymous, but closer inspection reveals that they have much to say.

Faith

Consider, first, images associated with religious devotion, among the most common to appear on medieval London seal matrices. One of the most frequent motifs in this vein is the Agnus Dei (figure 3.18), a popular image across medieval visual culture functioning commonly as an amulet protecting against sudden death: it appears on medieval jewellery to serve this purpose, and was likewise etched onto wax discs made from the Paschal candle at Rome.[58] Seal matrices which also replicated the image might therefore be seen as multipurpose, acting both as seals and having additional devotional or protective uses. The same might have been the case for other frequent forms of religious imagery. Aubrey, daughter of Hugh, had a fleur-de-lis on her seal, a particularly apt image for a woman due to its symbolic association with the Virgin. The image was equally popular among men, for example the seal of Ralph le Scoden which used the same symbol (figures 3.19 and 3.20).[59] Such saintly motifs are common across the London corpus, for instance an ambitious Saint Catherine complete with wheel, was included on a small matrix of only 18.5mm diameter (figure 3.21).[60]

The function of this symbolism was social as much as it was religious. It has been noted above in the context of London's government officials, that trustworthiness was closely linked to piety. Ian Forrest, in his study of trustworthy men (*viri fidedigni*) who were called upon by bishops in ecclesiastical courts to act as witnesses, has painted a picture of a medieval legal

[58] Copper alloy seal matrix, London, British Museum 1856,0701.2198. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1856-0701-2198.
[59] Seals 3 and 5 listed in, Spencer, 'Medieval Seal-Dies Recently Found at London', 377-379.
[60] Copper alloy seal matrix, London, British Museum, 1856,0701.2201. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1856-0701-2201.

system to which *fides* (faith) was central.[61] Aside, but not divorced, from its religious connotations, he defines *fides* in this legal context as the 'concept of reputation or respectability consisting in the opinion in which an individual was held by other people'.[62] Portraying personal faith on a seal thus signalled that its owner was worthy of the faith of others. Image and text could work in consort on the matter. Many seal epigraphs begin with a cross and 'S.', an abbreviation of the word *sigillum* (sign). P. D. A. Harvey has traced the origins of this epigraphic tradition to the gesture of making the sign of the cross, as was customary in England during the early Middle Ages when making a contract with another party or parties.[63] This gesture was the seal owner's sign of authentication. He theorizes that by the later medieval period, the word 'sigillum' was understood to mean the seal itself. The purpose of the small cross by this time was partially to ground the seal in a tradition of seal use, but also as signalling that the seal's owner was a member of the Christian faith.[64] In signalling their place within the community of the faithful, the cross also denoted the ultimate authority to whom a seal owner answered, and with which any agreement they made was underwritten.

On other occasions, the complex relationship between affiliation and devotion could function on a more subtle level. A less common religious motif to appear on seals was the head of John the Baptist, portrayed severed on a plate on a seal matrix found in the Thames belonging to Luke Cissor (figure 3.22).[65] Although John the Baptist, the figure who baptized Christ, was undoubtedly a symbol of belonging to the Christian faith, a more typical manner of evoking the saint would be his appearance wearing his habitual fur outfit, his head firmly on his shoulders.

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[61] Ian Forrest, *Trustworthy Men: How Inequality and Faith Made the Medieval Church* (Princeton, 2018). Forrest draws from examples of diocesan courts held in England to observe how trustworthy men were chosen and the influence that they exerted in their communities. The concept of *fides* (faith) in Roman and Canon law was a pillar of secular as well as ecclesiastical judicial practice.
[62] Forrest, *Trustworthy Men: How Inequality and Faith Made the Medieval Church*, 77.
[63] Harvey, 'This is a Seal', 2. Harvey argues that the small cross and the word 'sigillum', sign, that begins many seal inscriptions is referring to this gesture of making the sign of the cross.
[64] Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago*, 138-9.
[65] Copper alloy seal matrix, London, British Museum, 1848,0828.6. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1848-0828-6.

Instead, the decapitated saint might be a reference not only to the faithfulness of the owner but his name: Luke Cissor, perhaps a relation to Edmund Cissor, a tailor who also served as keeper of the keys of Aldgate in 1319.[66] The name 'Cissor', was often associated in medieval England with the occupation of tailors.[67] Moreover, in London, John the Baptist was associated with this craft as the patron saint of the tailors' guild.[68] The first recorded mention of this guild, including its association with John the Baptist was in 1299, although the two may have been linked prior to this. There is no stylistic reason not to attribute a date to this matrix in either the late thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries.

Religious imagery on a seal matrix was thus an effective way of identifying with a broader community. These seal motifs speak to more than just Christian identity. Religious faith underpinned the systems of sealing. In presenting Christian identity, these 'CREDE MICHI' seals were part of a socio-religious ecosystem. The application of religious affiliation in worldly spheres, as seen in Cissor's seal, meant that these seal matrices signified multiple levels of association.

Occupation

The example of Luke Cissor's seal leads us onto a second category of group identity which we might explore in the visual elements of London seals and their partnership with metal letters: profession. The linking of religion and occupational identity gives a sense of how

[66] 'Medieval Londoners Database', New York: Fordham University, accessed 15th July, 2021, https://mld.ace.fordham.edu/v2/s/mld/person?id=2785.
[67] 'Introduction chapter III: the language of the rolls', in *Two Early London Subsidy Rolls*, ed. Eilert Ekwall ([s.l.], 1951), 25-34. *British History Online*. The name 'Cissor', derived from the Latin word 'cisoria' and the medieval French 'cisoires' referring to a cutting tool, the etymological root of the word 'scissors'.
[68] 'Memorials of the Fraternity: I, The Company', in *Memorials of the Guild of Merchant Taylors of the Fraternity of St. John the Baptist in the City of London*, ed. C. M. Clode (London, 1875), 1-22. *British History Online*.

important professional identity was to medieval Londoners. Another seal matrix, that of Thomas le Purser, illustrates why a Londoner might wish to draw attention to this element of their identity on these small metal objects. Thomas's matrix is a small piece made of copper alloy, with an inscription that simply says '+S'THOMLEPVRSER' (the seal of Thomas the purser); appropriately, its motif is a sketched purse, with a handle and little hatched detail to represent gathered fabric (figure 3.23).[69] Clearly, Thomas chose not to include a family name on his seal, but to define himself instead by his occupation. The motif also underlined his affiliation to his trade, representing Thomas's skill in his craft. For Thomas, this represented more than a livelihood: there was a community that came with being a purser, with which he was consciously aligning himself every time he imprinted his seal matrix into wax. Individuals who belonged to craft guilds in London enjoyed rights and protections, as well as a platform from which to engage in the city's political sphere. And in the case of London pursers, we know these were particularly hard-fought. Take, for example, a case involving a group of pouch-makers heard at the Guildhall.[70] In January 1365, a pouch-maker named William Gedelyne indicted William de Ely, another pouch-maker, alleging that the latter had spread rumours about him. Ely had apparently trashed Gedelyne's reputation, specifically fabricating a story that he had stolen six purses from his employer. As a result, Gedelyne said that he had had to leave town, moving all the way to York to find work. He had returned to London armed with a certificate in which his employers at York attested his good character, determined both to salvage his reputation and to publicly call out William de Ely for defamation.[71] In response to these allegations, William de

[69] Copper alloy seal matrix, London, British Museum, 1856,0701.2226 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1856-0701-2226.

[70] *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls Preserved Among the Archives of the Corporation of London at the Guildhall, A. D. 1364-1381*, ed. Thomas, 14. Pursers and pouch-makers had two distinct guilds in medieval London until they were amalgamated with other leatherworkers in 1478. John Cherry, 'Leather' in, *English Medieval Industries*, eds. John Blair and Nigel Ramsay (London, 1991), 316.

[71] Providing written certificates or testimonials of good character was an established way in which courts would acquit someone of a crime or by which someone might prove their innocence. In this case it is not clear, but M. T. Clanchy has found cases from the thirteenth century where these certificates are described as letters bearing seals of those providing the testimonials. Occasionally even these were not accepted by courts. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 50-51.

Ely told the court that if they could find four London pouch-makers who would state on oath that he was guilty, he would submit to their judgement. Unfortunately for Ely, four pouch-makers, John Rosemond, John Storm, John Norfolk, and Richard Spark did just that. His punishment for contriving defamatory gossip about William Gedelyne was to stand on a stool in the Great Hall of the Guildhall so that his error would be visible to all, his reputation permanently scarred.

For William Gedelyne and Thomas le Purser alike, reputation was a commodity that allowed them to participate economically and socially in the community. The question in this case was not whether or not William Gedelyne ever stole from his London master; after all he had never been formally accused of this crime, and therefore did not need to disprove it. Nor did the court try to actually prove that William de Ely ever spread this specific rumour. The four pouch-makers were not required to say why they believed him to be guilty, or give any evidence to this effect. What was being judged, and what was at stake, was whether or not William Gedelyne was the sort of person who would steal, and whether William de Ely was the sort of person who would lie. The testament of his employers at York was enough for the court to make up their minds about Gedelyne's character. However, he clearly felt that his reputational rehabilitation was also contingent on discrediting his accuser. William de Ely seems to have miscalculated the faith that his fellow pouch-makers had in him, they gave their faith instead to Gedelyne's version of events, which is just as intangible a thing.

In this case, both parties called on the opinions of others to prove their trustworthiness. Their first reaction when their credibility was called into question was to draw on the feelings of others, specifically the members of a group to which they identified as belonging. Belonging to groups had the potential to protect the identity of an individual from the stain of disrepute, but they also had an accepted role in defining individual identity. Including a merchant's mark on a 'CREDE MICHI' seal thus tapped into important professional structures that could come to the aid of an individual whose credibility was in question. As we have seen in the case of William

Gedelyne, cultivating an identity within professional networks could be highly advantageous, and both metal imagery and metal letters helped Londoners in this goal.

Family

Beyond religion and profession, what other points of communal identity might we divine in these London 'CREDE MICHI' seals? One strand in particular alerts us to degrees of class at work in these objects, for among medieval English aristocrats, familial identity was the dominant visual theme on seal matrices. The earliest noble seals featured figures of mounted knights for men, and of standing female figures for women, and had worked into their designs shields of arms associated with their families.[72] By the fourteenth century, these designs had been simplified to often just include the shield, and had been adopted by those from less established families.[73] A typical late medieval armorial seal to be found in London is that of Sir Walter Bluwet (figure 3.24).[74] A Walter Bluwet (Bluet) of Devon appears in the Close Rolls of Henry IV in 1401, writing to the sheriffs of London to release a prisoner in Newgate under mainprise, and so it is likely that this seal was created in the last quarter of the fourteenth century.[75] This round seal is 27mm in diameter, and rather than a full mounted figure the motif consists of a helm topped with the head of an eagle. The shield is incorporated in a couché

[72] Harvey and McGuiness, *A Guide to British Medieval Seals*, 43-50.
[73] There are plenty of examples of seals matrices with shield motifs found in London in the British Museum, see 1856_0701.2215 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1856-0701-2215; 1856_0701.2225 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1856-0701-2225 ; 1856_0701.2214 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1856-0701-2214 ; 1856_0627.134 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1856-0627-134 ; 1856_0701.2206 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1856-0701-2206 ; 1856_0701.2207 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1856-0701-2207 ; 1856_0218.6 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1858-0218-6 ; 1863_1223.16 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1863-1223-16 .
[74] Copper alloy seal of Walter Bluet, late 14th century British Museum, 1889,1204.3. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1889-1204-3.
[75] 'Close Rolls, Henry IV: June 1401', in *Calendar of Close Rolls, Henry IV: Volume 1, 1399-1402*, ed. A. E. Stamp (London, 1927), 347-365. *British History Online*.

position beneath and consists of three flowers mounted on a bend, a diagonal line across the shield. The flowers are possibly cornflowers as a play on the owner's surname, although stamped in red wax this colour play would be lost. The inscription, in textura semi-quadrata letter-forms after a capital 'S', 'S': walteri / bluwet: milit' (seal of Walter Bluwet, knight), is arranged on either side of the motif, its usual circular field having been displaced by the tall helm, and dangling shield, as is common in seals of this particular design. The inscription has been spaced so that it is not divided mid-word, with the first portion having more empty space than the second.

A seal with a similar design found in London, once belonging to a John Tuwetfelde, is an example of someone with a less established family using a similar armorial design for their seal (figure 3.25).[76] In terms of overall arrangement Tuwetfelde's seal is emulating this style of a helm seal like Bluwet's, but it is significantly smaller at 19mm in diameter. In the centre is a boar's-head helm with a shield in a similar position to that of Walter Bluwet's. The shield consists of a boar's head on a bend sinister, on a cross-hatched field. The legend, 'IHONETVW / ETFELDE' (John Tuwetfelde), is again placed at either side of the motif, but the words, in capitals, have been split asunder in deference to the motif's placing. Compared to Bluwet's seal, Tuwetfelde's looks untidy, partially because the size of the letter-forms conforms to the space available in their field, which has been spliced by the aggressive motif. The helm depicted here is not as elegant as the Bluwet example, and is quite difficult to make out without knowing the broader visual context of this type of seal motif. The boar's head on the shield would be similarly hard to decipher, if it were not for the matching motif on the helm. These seals are

[76] Copper alloy seal matrix, London, Museum of London, 82.230. https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/29769.html. Brian Spencer suggests from his name that the owner of this seal is north German, although I do not think the name ending 'feld' would necessarily not be English as this is Middle English for 'field' and appears in many medieval English place names and names of people living in London. Spencer, 'Medieval Seal-Dies Recently Found at London', 382. I have not found a Tuwetfelde in relevant records but have found the name 'Whetefeld' appear in 1302, who were from Dorset. 'Inquisitions Post Mortem, Edward II, File 99', in *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem: Volume 6, Edward II*, eds. J. E. E. S. Sharp and A. E. Stamp (London, 1910), 446-453. *British History Online*.

likely broadly contemporary with each other, as heraldic seals with helms and shields in this position were popular in the last quarter of the fourteenth century.[77] Therefore, the factor responsible for their differences is the relative status of their owners.

The imitation of noble seal motifs can be seen in London among those of merchant status, who also owned seals with familial armorial imagery. Particularly in London, where elected officials such as aldermen self-consciously gave themselves the title of 'baron', an armorial seal could give the illusion of longevity and stability for an individual whose status was in fact wholly based on fickle market forces.[78] In practice, some families did emerge who monopolised the political power of the city, as merchants passed their financial success and influence onto their offspring. One such family was the Picot or Pycot family. There are two seal matrices relating to members of this family in the Museum of London. Both individuals were related to the mercer Nicholas Pycot, who served as alderman (1298), chamberlain (1300–1304), and sheriff (1307–1308).[79] The most pertinent of these seal matrices to this discussion of family identity is the copper alloy seal of John Picot, which has a central motif consisting of a shield of three crosses, separated by a cross-hatched chevron (figure 3.26).[80] Atop this, a cross and banner, similar to that depicted in Agnus Dei motifs, extends to the outer edge of the round seal. Around the motif is the inscription, 'S'IONIS.PICOT.' (seal of John Picot) in slightly bulbous capitals. These seals established a useful link between name and image to be replicated and

[77] Harvey and McGuiness, *A Guide to British Medieval Seals*, 55.
[78] Political status was dependent on income in a city run by elected officials, who were usually merchants or goldsmiths rather than members of the aristocracy. Candidates for the office of alderman had to be wealthy in order to be considered because their responsibilities incurred a personal financial cost, so much so that in 1469 an actual figure was put on the minimum income of a prospective alderman. Several alderman were excused from office during their tenure on the grounds that they could not afford to be in office. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, 138-144.
[79] 'Medieval Londoners Database', New York: Fordham University, 15th July, 2021, https://mld.ace.fordham.edu/s/mld/person?id=562; Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, 325; 361.
[80] Copper alloy seal, London, Museum of London, 8935. https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/35703.html. There are a few John Picots in records from London. Judging from the style of the seal, I would favour the candidate who was active during the 1330s rather than those from the early 1400s. 'Medieval Londoners Database', New York: Fordham University, 15th July, 2021, https://mld.ace.fordham.edu/s/mld/person?id=6481.

reinforced time and again on the documents they sealed, because arms took time to be associated with particular families and could be contested.[81] Aldermen displayed their arms at civic events, highlighting the fact discussed above that their personal identity was linked to their office through the use of their personal seals for official business. In creating a familial identity, an official might hope that their privilege could be passed down the generations.

Nods to heraldic imagery on an anonymous seal points to another way in which London seal matrices could express aspiration identity through metal letter and image. Among the 'CREDE MICHI' seals, the matrix with the flower motif and the example with the stag's head—whose antlers intruding on the legend field bring to mind the knightly compositions discussed above—may hint at an invocation of familial identity, suggesting how relationships could be distilled on a small metal objects and deployed to sure up an individual's credibility.

Conclusion: Seals and Identity

Two of the 'CREDE MICHI' seal matrices feature as their motifs a bust in profile, one wearing a hood or veil, holding something in front of them, the other appears to be that of a tonsured monk (figures 3.27 and 3.28).[82] Given the rich documentary and visual context for medieval London seals outlined above, how are we to interpret these two previously overlooked matrices? At first glance, they appear to be the most personal of the seven anonymous 'CREDE MICHI' examples. Are the miniature faces representations of the owners themselves? Even if this is the case, this choice of motif also alludes to long traditions of sealing. The engraved

[81] Coats of arms could sometimes be so similar to each other disputes sometimes arose. Geoffrey Chaucer once had to testify in a dispute about a coat of arms that was being used by two families. Marion Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life* (Princeton, 2019), 80.

[82] Copper alloy seal matrix, London, British Museum 1865,1220.89. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1865-1220-89.
Copper alloy seal matrix, London, Museum of London 84.194/2.

images are reminiscent of classical intaglios, many of which feature the profiles of strong-jawed magnates or allusions to pagan gods, but the figures are distinctly medieval. These motifs therefore hark back to ancient practice, implying an awareness of history and tradition on the part their owners. As a result, these final two 'CREDE MICHI' seals seem to ask for the belief of viewers even more keenly than their counterparts. When stamped in wax, who could tell whether or not these seals were in fact gem seals rather than base metal matrices? Unlike real gem seal matrices, these are both drably monochromatic, their stern little faces etched insistently in thick blunt lines. The unmistakably medieval styling of these miniature portraits would not necessarily give them away as being made of metal, as later medieval goldsmiths carved contemporary imagery into stones for seals (figure 3.29).[83] This, then, is not just a question of one style of seal posing as another, but of the alchemy of one material becoming another, metal moulded into stone. Whether this was an intentional fraud, or simply a clever trompe l'oeil, these examples indicate an awareness on the part of seal makers and owners of the complex visual rhetoric that was at play in seal design, and a desire to partake in a trend in seal ownership that not only displayed wealth but also intellectual status.

To explore this point further, we can compare these base-metal bust seals with a classical intaglio also found in London, set into a medieval silver seal matrix. In this example, the gem creates an ochre-swirled yoke in the centre of a round puddle of silver (figure 3.30).[84] Delicately etched into the chalcedony are two peacocks, one perched atop a small globe, while the other pecks at the ground. The stone has a rounded surface that bulges out from its silver setting, so that the front of the seal is shaped like a saucer. Engraved onto the silver rim is an inscription that starts with a cross and ends with a crescent moon and star. They speak in Latin,

[83] Silver and glass seal matrix, London, British Museum 1875,0201.2 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1875-0201-12.
[84] Silver seal matrix, London, Museum of London, 84.434/1. Brian Spencer suggests that this seal dates to the thirteenth century see seal 6 listed in Spencer, 'Medieval Seal-Dies Recently Found at London', 377-379.

another anonymous legend, '+DVLCIS : AMORIS : ODOR' (the sweet scent of love, or, the scent of sweet love), alluding to the motif incised into the stone over a millennium before they were engraved. The letter-forms are blocky capitals. The words are separated by colons to aid in reading, once the matrix has been stamped into wax. It has a loop cast into its back, which protrudes slightly from the top, just above the cross in the inscription. This loop could act as a handle, aiding its owner in plucking the seal out of viscous wax after stamping. But the loop could also be threaded onto something for the purpose of suspending the silver matrix most probably around the owner's neck. It is slightly larger than the two 'CREDE MICHI' seals, with a diameter of 23mm, making it a similar size to a modern pound coin. Unlike the copper alloy examples, silver seal matrices have intrinsic worth aside from their role in making wax seals; as a pendant, the intaglio set into silver would make an attractive accessory. The practice of setting seals with gems was particularly popular during the thirteenth century. This stone has been dated to the first century BC, its age and rarity no doubt adding to its appeal for the owner. When stamped into wax, the righted letter-forms are more delicate in aspect, their gradual undulations the result of careful engraving, the cross sections of the letters being a broad, controlled trapezoid.

The peacock had a significance in the Middle Ages that it did not when this pair were originally cut into chalcedony. Since St Augustine's claim that the flesh of the peacock was incorruptible, this bird had become associated with resurrection and immortality.[85] The resistance of post-mortem decay apparently evident in the flesh of peacocks is shared by many Christian saints, with the 'aroma of sanctity' being a sign of their connection with heaven.[86] The spectacle of a corpse not exhibiting signs of decomposition occurred in Billingsgate in 1497, when builders doing some work in the church of St Mary disturbed the grave of Alice Hackney,

[85] St Augustine, Book XXI, Chapter 4 of *City of God*.
[86] Suzanne Evans, 'The Scent of a Martyr', *Numen,* Vol. 49, No. 2 (2002), 196.

who had been buried in 1322.[87] They were amazed to find her body untouched by decay, and she was left above ground for several days 'without noysanse'. Her preservation proved to be freak rather than miraculous, however, as after five days she 'waxed vnsauorie' and was swiftly returned to her grave.

The Christianised reinterpretation of a gem created in a pagan past has precedent in the sphere of twelfth and thirteenth-century seal intaglios, which could even reimagine the figure of a Roman goddess as an image of the Virgin.[88] The reference to love in the inscription, not at all uncommon in seal epigraphy, may also be a classical reference to Roman goddess Juno, whose attribute was a peacock. Martin Henig characterises this object as a love token based on its inscription, but I would argue that there is no reason why this object could not also have devotional meaning. Seal matrices of this kind can distil complex meaning into their compact and efficient forms. This can especially be observed in the chalcedony example, as lodged in this seal matrix is a piece of some organic material that might be a relic, or a plant with curative properties.[89] Perhaps it is not just the imprint of the image on the intaglio, but the power of the fragment that is also communicated onto wax when this seal is stamped. In the context of private correspondence, which may have been the primary purpose of this seal, passing on protective traits of a stone and concealed plant to the recipient adds another layer of significance and value to this seal matrix.

The differences between the copper alloy bust seals and the silver and chalcedony seal cannot only be summed up in terms of the visual impact of the materials that make them: these materials also contributed to how each seal matrix was used by their owners. The impression

[87] John Stow, *A Survey of London Written in the Year 1598*, ed. William John Thoms (Oxford, 1876), 79.
[88] Martin Henig, 'The Re-use and Copying of Ancient Intaglios Set in Medieval Personal Seals Mainly Found in England: An Aspect of the Renaissance of the Twelfth Century' in, *Good Impressions: Image and Authority in Medieval Seals*, eds. Noël Adams, John Cherry, and James Robinson (Oxford, 2008), 25-26.
[89] Henig, 'The Re-use and Copying of Ancient Intaglios Set in Medieval Personal Seals Mainly Found in England', 30.

they make is only one part of their function. The intaglio seal is evidently multifunctional in a way that the ‘CREDE MICHI’ seals are not. It was wearable in a way that the ‘CREDE MICHI’ seals, with their conical handles were not, since, though both could be worn successfully, these handles would mean that their design would not be visible to viewers, only the shape of the seal matrix. The fact that the intaglio seal has a possibly medicinal or protective plant hidden inside further suggests that this seal matrix had multiple significances for its owner, and that these were then communicated to others via its impression onto wax. However, intaglio seals have more significance then just their material preciousness, and it was perhaps these aspects that the ‘CREDE MICHI’ seals were keenest to tap into. As mentioned above with respect to secret seals or privy seals, for which intaglios seal were frequently employed during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it could be that there were perceptions of status bound up in intaglio seals beyond their materials, that came with usage, and the types of people who usually owned these seals. The complex meanings that can be attributed to this London intaglio seal point at there being a sense of intellectual prestige at play, as well as material preciousness. The base metal intaglio trompe l’oeil seals are not just imitating the visual characteristics of intaglio seals, or imitating more materially precious materials, but alluding to the intellectual acumen associated with intaglio seal matrices and their owners.

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Situating these seven anonymous seal matrices within the context of their usage has revealed that they share more than their legend. In defining personal identity by affiliation to networks—religious, professional, familial—and ideas—faith, tradition—these seal matrices make powerful cases for their owners’ trustworthiness. Seal matrices offer remarkable evidence of values shared by communities put into practice, and of fundamental principles translated across

borders. In this chapter we have seen a different use of metal letters to that of the last. The necessary communal appeal of seal epigraphs is reflected in the presentation as well as their content. The next chapter will look closely at how metal letters could convey messages across vast geographical areas, engaging Christians of all social statuses.

Chapter Four: Pilgrim Souvenirs and Mass Communication

Any study of the metal letter, especially one focusing on small metal objects from medieval London, would be incomplete without the inclusion of pilgrim souvenirs. Fragments of these small lead-tin alloy badges, rattles, whistles, and bells, have been found in vast quantities, produced from the twelfth century until the end of the medieval period. They represent travel of people and goods across medieval Europe, with badges from shrines in France and Italy washed up on the shores of the Thames. Pilgrim souvenirs were usually cast from moulds in batches, or later in the medieval period stamped with the same design. Because of this, as a corpus they do not display the same variety of metallic materials that has been noted in the previous two chapters. However, it does not follow that the owners of these pieces were similarly un-diverse; the popularity of souvenirs sold at shrines crossed social boundaries.[1] Even in fragments, their once silvery shine faded into a dull brown-grey patina, these are immensely appealing objects. Shards of delicate openwork, a disembodied face or hand, promise a meeting of the legendary and the mundane, objects that might have been touched against sacred relics by the hand of a medieval everyman. Art historians have recently pored over the iconography of these replicable,

[1] While luxury precious metal souvenirs were made for those with significant means, see Ann Marie Rasmussen, *Medieval Badges: Their Wearers and Their Worlds* (Pennsylvania, 2021), 122, evidence, such as the practice of sewing badges into books, reveals that mass produced souvenirs were purchased even by the wealthy. See, Hanneke van Asperen, 'The Book as Shrine, the Badge as Bookmark: Religious Badges and Pilgrims' Souvenirs in Devotional Manuscripts' in, eds. *Domestic Devotions in the Early Modern World* Marco Faini and Alessia Meneghin (Leiden, 2019), 288-312.

cast metal monuments.[2] But it has not to date been fully acknowledged that they also constitute a valuable resource in the study of private epigraphy. For instance, just under a quarter of badges in the Museum of London's collection of over seven-hundred such souvenirs include inscriptions.[3]

In many cases, the contents of souvenir inscriptions are simply the name of the saint who they were commemorating. Perhaps as a result of this, inscriptions on pilgrim souvenirs have not hitherto been given close scrutiny, with the imagery on these pieces and the practices of their pilgrim owners taking up the majority of scholarly attention. I will argue here, however, that these epigraphs are not merely labels to help identify and differentiate souvenirs from a particular shrine. This is suggested simply by the fact that some makers included inscriptions on their badges and others did not, even in examples from the same shrine. For example, there are

[2] Art historians have recently been particularly interested in using technology to provide digital access, and share research about pilgrim souvenirs. This can be seen in projects with the Kunera project in the Netherlands at Radboud University, 'Kunera',12th August 2022, https://kunera.nl/en, the Pilgrim Badge Project in Canada at the University of Waterloo, 'Pilgrim Badge Project', 12th August 2022, https://www.medievalbadges.ca/interactive-3d-models; and the Digital Pilgrim Project at the University of Cambridge, 'Digital Pilgrim Project', 12th August 2022, https://www.hoart.cam.ac.uk/research/past-projects/the-digital-pilgrim-project . While there are no studies that examine pilgrim souvenirs with the intention of analysing their inscriptions, there has been highly accomplished work carried out on pilgrim souvenirs. There is too much material to list every publication on pilgrim souvenirs here, but, to summarise thematically, books and articles have been published on: aspects of their iconography, see Ann Marie Rasmussen, *Medieval Badges: Their Wearers and Their Worlds* (Pennsylvania, 2021); Amy Jeffs, 'Pilgrim Souvenir: Hood of Cherries', *British Art Studies*, Issue 6 (2017); Marike de Kroon, 'Medieval Pilgrim Badges and their Iconographic Aspects' in, *Art and Architecture of Late Medieval Pilgrimage in Northern Europe and the British Isles*, eds. Sarah Blick and Rita Tekippe (Leiden, 2005), 385-403; Jennifer Lee, 'Beyond the *Locus Sanctus*: The Independent Iconography of Pilgrims' Souvenirs', *Visual Resources*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (2005), 363-381: in devotional practice, Hanneke van Asperen, *Silver Saints: Prayers and Badges in Late Medieval Books. Art History* (Turnhout, 2021): manufacture, see Brian Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges* (Woodbridge 2010): trade, see Adrian R. Bell and Richard S. Dale, 'The Medieval Pilgrimage Business', *Enterprise and Society*, Vol. 12 (2011), 601-627; Esther Cohen, 'In Haec Signa: Pilgrim-Badge Trade in Southern France', *Journal of Medieval History*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1976), 139-214: within the context of medieval pilgrimage in Europe, see Jennifer M. Lee, 'Searching for Signs: Pilgrims' Identity and Experience Made Visible in the *Miracula Sancti Thomae Cantuariensis*' in, *Art and Architecture of Late Medieval Pilgrimage in Northern Europe and the British Isles*, eds. Sarah Blick and Rita Tekippe (Leiden, 2005); Diana Webb, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in the Medieval West* (London, 2001), 473-491.

[3] 163 (23 per cent) badges out of a total 718 include inscriptions. This is a conservative figure as 241 (33.5 per cent) of these objects are fragmentary to the extent that it is not clear whether or not they included inscriptions as whole objects. The figure of 718 does not represent this many distinct designs, just distinct object as some share the same design.

many surviving versions of a badge from the shrine of Thomas Becket in Canterbury that show his reliquary bust. Some of these include an inscription reading 'THOMAS' at their bust's base, while others instead have a simple, cross-hatched detail in the same place (figures 4.01 and 4.02).[4] If this text was essential for identification, surely it would appear uniformly. So what, then, were the purposes of these metal letters? I argue that the inclusion of letter-forms in souvenir design was a creative choice decided by their makers, rather than an essential part of their stylistic conventions. As such, pilgrim souvenirs represent a deep well of epigraphic creativity.

In confronting this large corpus, it is necessary to be selective in the choice of souvenirs for discussion. My approach here is to pick out six souvenirs, or groups of souvenirs, that under close analysis demonstrate two key points that I wish to advance about their makers. The first is that souvenir epigraphers skillfully borrowed epigraphic strategies from other genres of object. They translated the visual language of common artefacts onto their subject matter to enrich their messages, referencing established traditions and the worlds in which they operated. Pilgrim souvenirs, I argue, borrow from some types of objects that have already been encountered in previous chapters of this thesis, namely seal matrices and jewellery, and they also visually cite the inscription styles of large, monumental objects. However, for all their intriguing similarities with other categories of metal inscribed object, pilgrim souvenir inscriptions had a style of their own. Recognising this, the second half of this chapter will explore three souvenirs whose innovative inscriptions play with expectations of epigraphy. Rather than using visual language to convey ideas through words, their makers often treated text as a visual component in their design, engaging in a rhetoric of style and placement. These examples stretch the definition of inscription and blur the boundaries between inscription and image: rather than a text which

[4] Thomas Becket badges, London, Museum of London, 86.202/7 and 8798 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/29253.html and https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/37256.html.

clarifies an image, like a caption, metal letters in this context instead engage in a cooperative relationship with souvenir imagery, with elements concurrently adding to and absorbing meaning from each other.

Part 1: Epigraphic Borrowing

Pilgrim souvenirs, more than any other medieval object, lend themselves to explorations of 'copying' because of two defining characteristics. The first is their method of production. Pilgrim souvenirs are often referred to somewhat anachronistically by art historians as being 'mass produced' because they were cast in base metals from stone moulds, meaning that multiple badges of the same design could be replicated. Secondly, the imagery of pilgrim souvenirs has also prompted discussions of copying. The idea that pilgrim souvenirs copy imagery from pilgrim sites, both to capture some of the holy place's essence for a pilgrim and to aid their memory, has been accepted and explored by art historians.[5]

I am concerned here, however, not only with copying but with borrowing. The design of pilgrim souvenirs does not only draw from the monuments they commemorate, and the resemblances discussed here are not intended exclusively as a way of capturing the essence of a place or aiding the memory of a souvenir's owner. Instead, they are invocations of other aspects of the material culture with which they co-existed, intended to lend their connotations to effectively promote a cult in the world outside of the shrine.

[5] Sarah Blick succinctly explains the ideas around pilgrim souvenirs and copying in her introduction to an edition of contributions about copying. See, Sarah Blick, 'Exceptions to Krautheimer's Theory of Copying', *Visual Resources*, Vol. 20, No. 2-3 (2004), 132-135. Vibeke Olson, 'The Significance of Sameness: An Overview of Standardisation and Imitation in Medieval Art', *Visual Resources*, Vol. 20, No. 2-3 (2004), 168.

Signum and Sigillum: A Badge from the Hospital of Our Lady, Le Puy

In most pilgrim souvenir epigraphy, letter-forms are arranged to read clockwise around a souvenir's iconography, similarly to the seal matrices discussed in the previous chapter. In fact, the similarities between these two types of object do not stop there. Pilgrim souvenirs were referred to as *signa* (signs) in documents, and their inscriptions often began with the word *signum* or, less frequently, *sigillum,* a word consistently used in the context of seals.[6] The co-opting of sealing terminology and design demonstrates that souvenirs were outward-looking objects designed to send unambiguous messages that could be understood across Christendom. It is also an indication of cross-over in terms of practice and logics.

A typical example of this type of pilgrim souvenir is a badge from the cathedral and hospital of Our Lady of Le Puy in France, discovered during an excavation of upper Thames Street (figures 4.03 and 4.04).[7] The badge is in two pieces, which were found close to each other, and evidently are two halves of the same object. The inscription reads '+ SIGILLVM BEATE MARIE DE PODIO' (seal of the blessed Mary of Le Puy). This badge's pointed oval shape, placing of the legend, and use of the word *sigillum*, rather than *signum*, all contribute to make it resemble a seal. Le Puy was not the only shrine that used seals as inspiration for their pilgrim souvenirs. The shire of Our Lady of Rocamadour, approximately 250 kilometres west of

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[6] The relationship between terminology for seals and pilgrim 'signs' is discussed in Jennifer Lee, 'Material and Meaning in Lead Pilgrim's Signs', *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2009), 163. The parallels are material as well as in nomenclature, in that lead was a common material for both types of object.

[7] This badge is in two pieces. London, Museum of London TEX88[1072]<1028> https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/399912.html and TEX88[1073]<1027> https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/399913.html. Pilgrims had visited Le Puy since the tenth century to venerate a statue that is possibly the first example of a black Madonna in Europe. The original no longer survives as it was destroyed during the French Revolution. Legends about the statue's origin assert its antiquity, stating that it was brought from Egypt or the Holy Land to France by crusaders. For an in-depth analysis of the statue, its origins and its copies see, Elisa. A. Foster, 'Out of Egypt: Inventing the Black Madonna of Le Puy in Image and Text', *Studies in Iconography*, Vol. 37 (2016), 1-30. The pilgrimage and the statue are discussed in detail in, Virginia Reinburg, *Storied Places: Pilgrim Shrines, Nature and History in Early Modern France* (2019), 107-154.

Le Puy, is also a pointed oval shape with a legend that begins with the word *sigillum*. A few examples of Rocamadour badges of this design have been found in London: one was also found during an excavation of Upper Thames Street and is extremely close in design to that Le Puy badge, with a legend that reads 'SIGILLVM BEATE MARIE DE ROCAMADOR' (sign of the blessed Mary of Rocamadour.[8]

In the case of the Le Puy and the Rocamadour badges, the remnants of four loops used to affix the badge to clothing and possessions, and the fact that the images and letter-forms are cast in relief rather than incised, with the letter-forms the correct way around, precludes these badges from too closely resembling seal matrices. They are instead modelled on seal impressions, but with the advantage of being made of a more durable material than wax. To make most of the souvenirs discussed here, a mould would have to be designed and carved in stone, or incised in copper-alloy, and then this would be cast in metal.[9] The Le Puy shrine produced some of the few documentary sources on the subject of pilgrim badge production. These record instances where the hospital of Le Puy clashed with local merchants while asserting their monopoly on producing and selling badges.[10] In 1210, the bishop of Le Puy stepped in to confirm the rights of the hospital, excommunicating those who continued to make and produce badges without the shrine's permission. Cases of conflicts regarding pilgrim souvenirs at Le Puy continued until the fifteenth century, and one measure that the shrine put in place to support their own badges against those of competitors was to only allow pilgrims to touch official badges to the statue of the Virgin. Physical exposure to a saint or holy place imbued an intrinsically low-worth piece of metal with value far beyond that of any design cast onto its surface.

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[8] London, Museum of London, VHA89[+]<738>, listed as number 245 in Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs,* 234-237.
[9] Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs,* 7-12.
[10] The case is explored in detail, with transcriptions of original documents in Ester Cohen, 'In Haec Sina: Pilgrim Badge Trade in Southern France', *Journal of Medieval History*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1976), 193-214.

Le Puy's disputes with local metalworkers and merchants reveal two things about the involvement of shrines in the badge trade. The first is that shrines were directly involved in the design and production of their souvenirs, meaning that these objects should be viewed as conveying complex messages that shrine-keepers wanted to make about their particular cult. The other, even more pertinent to the specific discussion of seal-like badges, is that, like seals, pilgrim souvenirs at Le Puy were policed to ensure authenticity, albeit with different motivations at play than in the case of seals. Much has been made of pilgrim souvenirs being more than one-dimensionally devotional objects, with scholars also framing them as consumer goods that fuelled a lucrative business.[11] No shrine has left more evidence that underlines this fact than Le Puy, and the badge is a reflection of the shrine's priorities. The inscription of the badge, as a reference to seals, gives this souvenir a legalistic, official quality that would have been a valuable design feature from the point of view of the clergy running the shrine. The prospect that the only souvenirs from Le Puy to be elevated to the status of touch relics were official badges would make them much more attractive to pilgrims than those of competitors.

Authentication was not just important in terms of protecting a monopoly: given the place of pilgrimage in the judicial system, it was also part of a shrine's practical function. For much of the Middle Ages, people could be sentenced to perform a pilgrimage in penance for committing a crime.[12] Souvenirs could act as proof that a pilgrim had completed their penitential pilgrimage, but writs sealed with the seal of a shrine could also perform this function. The Fonthill letter, written in 920, reveals how a thief's sentence was reversed by visiting the tomb of Alfred the Great and presenting the seal of that shrine to King Edward.[13] At Le Puy,

[11] Cohen, 'In Haec Sina: Pilgrim Badge Trade in Southern France', 193-214; Bell and Dale, 'The Medieval Pilgrimage Business', 601-627.
[12] Martin Locker, *Landscapes of Pilgrimage in Medieval Britain* (Oxford, 2015), 4.
[13] A transcription and translation of this letter can be found in, S. Keynes, 'The Fonthill Letter' in, *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of his Sixty-fifth Birthday*, eds. M. Korhammer et al. (Munich, 1992), 53-97. For research on this document in relation to penitential pilgrimage see, Nicole Marafioti, 'Seeking Alfred's Body: Royal Tomb as Political Object in the Reign of Edward the Elder', *Early Medieval Europe*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2015), 204-205.

pilgrimage was similarly an important evidentiary industry and authorities attracted pilgrims with plenary indulgences if they visited the cathedral on specific occasions.[14] A pilgrim who completed this journey would be keen to bring back proof in the form of a letter. Therefore, visually referencing a seal, an accepted mark of authentication, had a logic that tapped into a visual culture of authority that stretched beyond a single shrine.

Sonic Signum: A Miniature Canterbury bell

Another object that could be referred to with the word *signum* during the Middle Ages was a church bell.[15] At the shrine of Thomas Becket, pilgrims could purchase souvenirs in the form of tiny miniature bells. These differ in material composition from their counterpart pilgrim badges: rather than being made of a lead-tin alloy, bells were made of an alloy that was usually at least 90 percent tin with a small percentage of copper.[16] The result was that these miniature bells, fitted with clappers inside, would make a jingling sound. Take the example of a tiny bell found in London, only 38mm wide and 39mm tall (figure 4.05).[17] Around the top of the bell is delicate dotted decoration within two even lines. Encircling its base is the inscription '+CAMPANA:THOME' (bell of St Thomas). The epigraph's capitals are intricately designed, with a rounded 'M' form and a curvaceous 'A', whose lines undulate according to their

[14] Reinburg, *Storied Places: Pilgrim Shrines,* 127.
[15] Arnold and Goodson, 'Resounding Community: The History and Meaning of Medieval Church Bells', 107-108. The term *signum* in this context might be more usefully thought of as meaning 'signal' rather than 'sign', and could refer not only to bells but also clackers or horns.
[16] Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs,* 125.
[17] Becket bell, London, Museum of London, 8809 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/37290.html. Spencer states that these bells were popular among Canterbury pilgrims because it was said that when Becket was murdered, the bells of the cathedral spontaneously bust into deafening peels, Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs,* 123. However he cites H. B. Walters who does not give a primary source reference for this see, H. B. Walters, *Church Bells of England* (Oxford, 1912), 261. This story is not mentioned in any of the medieval Lives of Thomas Becket and therefore I have not been able to find any satisfactory evidence that it is connected with Becket bells.

direction, rather than being all of equal thickness. The Thomas bell is topped with a quatrefoil loop—a decorative touch that does not exactly reflect the reality of full-scale bells—through which a pilgrim would be able to attach means of suspending the bell about their person, perhaps around their neck or dangling from a girdle, or from a horse harness. So, for the pilgrims who took them home, and those around them, these bells branded with the saint's name would be an insistently tinkling reminder of the power of St Thomas in the world, a ringing endorsement of the bishop martyr.

For pilgrims who owned these pieces, their direct likeness to actual bells dedicated to Thomas Becket was not their primary attraction. Unlike souvenirs that recall a relic or the architectural features of a shrine, pilgrims would not have seen the inside of a bell tower as part of their Canterbury experience. In 1316, a bell was added to the bell tower at Canterbury Cathedral that was dedicated to Thomas Becket and later destroyed when the campanile at Canterbury collapsed during an earthquake in 1382.[18] While it is likely that the bell was inscribed we do not know for certain what that inscription was, and therefore whether it would match its miniature counterpart is unclear. Yet regardless, it certainly could not have proven a model for all such bell souvenirs, as not all extant miniature Becket bells are exactly alike.[19] Some have their inscription at the shoulders of the bell rather than the base, while others name the saint rather than the bell, inscribed simply 'SANCTE THOME'. The use of the vocative case implying that the bell was calling out to St Thomas when sounded. There are also examples, likely to be from Canterbury, that do not have an inscription at all.

Without a specific visual referent, then, Becket bells are not so much borrowing from the form of a bell dedicated to Thomas Becket, but from its function. There are two elements to this proposition. The first, considers the role played by inscriptions on church bells. In terms of

[18] Edward Hasted, 'History of the cathedral', in *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent: Volume 11* (Canterbury, 1800), 306-383. *British History Online*.
[19] Several examples are published in Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs,* 122-125.

their content, bell inscriptions during the Middle Ages often included the name of a saint, a prayer or invocation, or a maker or donor.[20] In their tolling, bells offered up prayers to God from whole communities rather than just an individual or specific congregation.[21] Some bell inscriptions state explicitly in their inscriptions that their sounding invoked divine protection, especially from storms.[22] Bells dedicated to saints harnessed the intercessory power of a holy figure by affiliation in their sounding. The inscription on the tiny bell thus put the power of a saint in the hands of its owner. Secondly in terms of function, the broader significance of the sounding of bells in medieval Christian communities is important to consider, not only in their invocation of holy figures, but in their association with momentous occasions. Bells were used in Christian worship for various different reasons and had symbolic weight to equal their often gigantic stature. Diocesan statutes of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries repeatedly mention bells being rung to mark the canonical hours, when visiting the sick and dying, to mark a death, and to signal the moment of transubstantiation during the Eucharist.[23] Bells that were used for these purposes would either be church bells situated in a bell tower, but also hand bells particularly in the context of visiting the sick or for funerals.[24] The ringing of bells during Mass,

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[20] For a list of bell inscriptions from Norfolk see, John l'Estrange, *The Church Bells of Norfolk* (Norwich, 1874), 89-246.

[21] Michelle E. Garceau, '"I Call the People": Church Bells in Fourteenth-Century Catalunya', *Journal of Medieval History*, Vol. 37 (2011), 202.

[22] Jacqueline Leclercq, '"Vox Dei Clamat in Tempestate" À Propos de l'Iconographie des Vents et d'un Groupe d'Inscriptions Campanaires (IXe-XIIIe Siècles)', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 42e Année, No.166 (1999), 186; Garceau, '"I Call the People": Church Bells in Fourteenth-Century Catalunya', 202-203.

[23] The Synod of Lambeth in 1281, the Synod of Exeter of 1287, and draft statutes of Archbishop Peckham all legislate how bells were to be used for these purposes. *Councils and Synods: With Other Documents Relating to the English Church Vol.02, pt.2 1265-1313*, eds. F. M. Powick and C. R. Cheney (Oxford, 1964), 894; 990; 991; 1006; 1019; 1020; 1023.

[24] The shape of Becket bells is specifically reminiscent of church bell rather than a hand bell. Some possibly draft statutes connected with Archbishop Peckham between 1279 and 1292 mention, 'campane manuales' (hand bells). Also The Statutes of Exeter refer to, 'campanella deferenda ad infirmos' (bells to be brought to the sick, implying small portable bells) *Councils and Synods: With Other Documents Relating to the English Church Vol.02, pt.2 1265-1313*, 1123; 1006. There is a strong connection with bishops and hand bells in Irish early medieval hagiographical tradition see, Sarah Erskin, 'Is the Cloc ind Édachta St Patrick's Oldest and Most Important Medieval Bell-Relic?', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, Vol. 142/143 (2012-2013), 74-85. There are several extant hand bells such as that of St Conall Cael adorned with images of saints and inscriptions at the British Museum 1889,0902.23 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1889-0902-23.

signalling the miracle of transubstantiation, is particularly significant in the context of bells given out at shrines, for bells would also be rung at shrines when miracles took place.[25] In this sense, bells bought at Becket's shrine commemorate not just Becket, but specifically his miracles; each time they sounded they would re-enact the sonic experience of a miracle. Stories of bells tolling spontaneously at the death of a holy person, or at the moment of a miracle, is a trope of medieval hagiography.[26] In his catalogue entry for similar Becket bells to the one discussed here, Brian Spencer refers to a legend that the bells of Canterbury Cathedral had rung by themselves at the moment Thomas Becket died as possible justification for why these were such popular souvenirs from Canterbury.[27] Even without this story, it is not surprising that these souvenirs were popular given the significance of bells in religious worship and their association with miracles, and also because, as Spencer also states, similar souvenirs were popular at other shrines such as Amiens and Rocamadour.[28] While visually the Becket bell has dissimilarities from that found in Canterbury's campanile, it distils the essence of its meaning. It takes an echo of a sound, like seeds from a dandelion, and transplants it into a world out of earshot.

Integrated Meaning: A MARIA Monogram Badge

The use of letter-forms as signs that refer to more than sounded words is a theme that has recurred throughout my discussion of private metal epigraphy, and makers of pilgrim

[25] John H. Arnold and Caroline Goodson, 'Resounding Community: The History and Meaning of Medieval Church Bells', *Viator*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (2012), 106. They point out that this would not necessarily have been a church bell but perhaps a hand bell.
[26] Garceau gives numerous examples from medieval Spain in, '"I Call the People": Church Bells in Fourteenth-Century Catalunya', 207-209.
[27] Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs,* 123. He cites the work of H. B. Walters as the source, but Walters does not reference the source of this story, which he calls a popular belief, and there are no mentions of such an occurrence in the accounts of Becket's biographers, so it is difficult to substantiate, see, H. B. Walters, *Church Bells of England* (London, 1912), 261.
[28] Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs,* 123.

souvenirs were no strangers to this idea, skilled in manipulating letter-forms to open up new meanings. In some instances, letter-forms alone constitute the whole sign without further iconographic elements. One particularly intriguing example of this is a London badge formed in the shape of a capital 'M', carefully constructed to contain all of the letters of the word 'MARIA' in a single, hybrid character (figure 4.06).[29] The round capital 'M' has a prominent central line creating the letter 'I', with an overlarge stature and extreme concave upper serif. The 'A' and 'R' take some of their form from this 'I': the 'A' buttressing the left side of the letter, while the reduced 'R' peeks out from behind it. Cross-hatching to the central portion of the monogram adds texture and the hint of an outline to otherwise flat lines that make up these letter-forms, its slightly haphazard execution creating an uneasy quiver in the character. The two limbs splayed on either side of the 'I', at once the arches of the 'M' and one of the 'A's verticals, are etched with steep diagonal stripes in opposing directions, as if the cross-hatching of the 'I' is the collision of these lines. The overall effect is that the word emerges gradually as the viewer's eyes take in the curious overall form.

Why did this object's maker choose to represent the name of the Mother of God in this manner? After all, several more simplistic Marian badges survive that consist of only a straightforward initial 'M' wearing a crown, signifying the Queen of Heaven.[30] This MARIA badge, I would argue, borrows letter-making practices from a variety of parallel fields in order to produce a more complex and delightful object. In particular, it imports into the realm of spiritual badges two broad concepts we encountered earlier in Chapter Two during our discussion of lettered jewellery from a similar period. On the one hand, it borrows from the secular world the idea that badges might be used to signal relationships between the wearer and another person, entity, or idea, to whom its metal letters might be made to refer. And on the

[29] London, Museum of London, SWA81[2113]<CP12>. Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs*, 157-158.
[30] Several examples are listed in, Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs*, 155-157.

other, it borrows the sense that such messages might be more effective, and affective, if they are obscured, a contemplative step prompted by cryptic presentation.

Both of these ideas can be developed in relation not only to jewellery but to the numerous different forms of letter badge from the later Middle Ages that have been found in London.[31] Take, for instance, some similarly formed Canterbury badges connected to the Becket bell discussed above, whose form centres on a rounded capital 'T' topped with a crown, also incorporating a representation of Becket's bust reliquary (figure 4.07).[32] Several different iterations of this design survive from Canterbury, indicating that it was a popular choice with consumers.[33] Moreover, Jennifer Lee, in discussing a similar Canterbury badge, has linked such souvenirs to an even broader late medieval visual culture of affiliation.[34] Such a culture, she argues, included items of jewellery and other dress accessories, where the presence of a single letter worn on the body might intimate the name of a lover, or suggest the first word of a phrase such as *amor vincit omnia* (love conquers all).[35] This would certainly be an apt referent for the monogram 'M' souvenir badge too, prompting a reflection on the processes of borrowing at work in its creation. In contrast to the Becket bell, as well as the seal-type badges discussed earlier, both of which resemble a real-world referent visually but enact an aesthetic change in either purpose, scale, or material, the 'M' souvenir takes a different tack: it resembles an object with an agreed meaning, but rather than changing it, the badge instead layers its referent to produce further significance. The sense of devotion that motivates the wearing of a loved one's

[31] Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs,* 219-221.
[32] London, Museum of London, 8807b https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/446191.html. The crown of life, or martyr's crown, is referred to in *Revelations* 2:10, as the reward for Christians who undergo suffering for their faith, 'Be thou faithful until death: and I will give thee the crown of life'.
[33] Numerous other examples of 'T' badges from Canterbury are listed in Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs,* 121-123.
[34] Lee, 'Beyond the *Locus Sanctus*: The Independent Iconography of Pilgrims' Souvenirs', 374.
[35] For example, belts fitted with initial studs have been found in London. Spencer, *Dress Accessories,* 200-203. In the Canterbury Tales the prioress has a crowned 'A' badge, worn attached to her rosary beads, which is explained as referring to this phrase. General Prologue, lines 158-162.

initial is mirrored in the 'M' monogram badge, borrowing sentiments from one cultural realm and extending them to a holy figure.

A deeper reach into the context of medieval letter-badge wearing suggests further aesthetic points of departure for the 'M' monogram souvenir. It was not only feelings of amorous affection but also a sense of affiliation that motivated medieval Londoners to wear badges bearing letters. From the mid-fourteenth century in England, livery badges were widely worn by those serving particular families or magnates. They were distributed by the nobility to lower-ranking people in their service, with those of higher status being given livery collars.[36] These secular badges usually took the form of simplified heraldic motifs. Established Marian emblems, such as the rose and the fleur-de-lis, were frequently incorporated in heraldic motifs, and consequently badges, meaning that it could have a political significance.[37] For example, the rose took on particular significance in fifteenth century England as the Yorkist emblem, which was widely distributed as badges to supporters.[38] The 'M' badge avoids using such emblems to create a sign that could not be mistaken for another. While the 'M' badge differentiates its content from livery badges in this way, the idea of protection being combined with affiliation and loyalty, as is the case with livery badges, reflects the character of Marian devotion in the later Middle Ages.

The 'MARIA' badge, however, clearly moves some way beyond both simplistic ideas of amorous connection or political fealty, sidestepping more overt devotional traditions of iconography in favour of more cryptic dimensions. Cynthia Hahn, discussing early medieval

[36] Matthew J. Ward, *The Livery Collar in Late Medieval England and Wales: Politics, Identity and Affiliation* (Woodbridge, 2016) 1-2.
[37] I say incorporated, rather than co-opted, as these signs retained their Marian significance when used in heraldic design. Part of the appeal of armorial design was that images could have multiple layers of meaning. See the discussion of the collar of esses in, Ward, *The Livery Collar in Late Medieval England and Wales*, 78. For a detailed exploration of the links, sacred and secular, between the French monarchy and the fleur-de-lis that developed during the Middle Ages see, Mary Channen Caldwell, '"Flower of the Lily": Late Medieval Religious and Heraldic Symbolism in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS. Français 146', *Early Music History*, Vol. 33 (2014), 1-60.
[38] Ward, *The Livery Collar in Late Medieval England and Wales*, 38.

manuscripts of religious texts, sets out a variety of strategies that were used by scribes and limners to preserve the mysteries of *nomina sacra*.[39] These included using archaic lettering, incomplete or abbreviated forms, holy languages, and visual novelty. The contemplative behaviours prompted by this object-monogram would, therefore, have been similar to the obscurantism we have seen in other examples earlier in this thesis. And while this is a tradition that has its origins in early medieval manuscript culture and Romanesque epigraphy—for instance the Christian monograms IHS or IHC, and the *chi rho*—it appears in material cultures across the medieval period in a variety of forms, from personal objects, coins, and manuscripts to architecture.[40] Although examples of the word 'Maria' being constructed from an 'M' form are not as common or long-established as chrismons, christograms, or staurograms, Maria monograms can still be seen in a number of locations: from the late medieval flint flushwork in a number of East Anglian churches through to medieval floor tiles.[41] One tile in particular, found in the north of England, bears closer comparison with the badge (figure 4.08).[42] Their features are not identical: the tile's monograph is of a slightly different configuration, less concerned with maintaining the symmetrical outer silhouette of the 'M' form than its metal counterpart. It has sacrificed the letter's outline in favour of a more efficient rendering of 'MARIA', avoiding the inequality of the two sides of the 'M' we see in the badge's monogram by making the 'A' and 'R' forms smaller to fit within the 'M's arches. But while the differences in the

[39] Cynthia Hahn, 'Letter and Spirit: The Power of the Letter, the Enlivenment of the Word in Medieval Art' in, *Visible Writings: Cultures, Forms, Readings*, eds. Marjia Dalbello and Mary Shaw (New Brunswick, 2011), 56-57.
[40] Vincent Debiais, 'From Christ's Monogram to God's Presence: An Epigraphic Contribution to the Study of Chrismons in Romanesque Sculpture' in, *Sign and Design: Script as Image in Cross-Cultural Perspective, 300-1600 CE*, eds. Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak and Jeffrey F. Hamburger (Washington, 2016), 135-152.
[41] Maria monograms can be seen on churches in Woodbridge and Bungay. See, Stephen Hart, *Flint Flushwork: A Medieval Masonry Art* (Woodbridge, 2008), 14; 114. Rickinghall Superior church has a motif of alternating IHC and Maria monograms. See, Stephen Hart, *Flint Architecture of East Anglia* (London, 2000), 117.
[42] Tile number 23.25, the only known example of which is from Whalley Abbey listed in, J. Stopford, *Medieval Floor Tiles of Northern England Pattern and Purpose: Production between the Thirteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Oxford, 2005), 230. J. Stopford estimates that this tile dates from the late fourteenth century or after.

compositions of the tile and badge motifs indicate that the formulation of a Maria monogram was less standardized than other Christian cryptograms, the presence of such parallel objects nonetheless suggests such letters as well-established features of ecclesiastical architecture and church fabric.

In invoking this tradition in a badge, therefore, the 'M' borrows from two traditions to unite them in one object. On the one hand, it recalls practices of fealty and affiliation, on the other, it situates itself within the material culture of religious devotion. In this way, this badge repurposes political practices for the promotion of Marian devotion.

...

In all three instances discussed above—seal badge, bell, and monogram—we find souvenirs that invoke the form of another object that has a widespread and agreed purpose: the bell which called to the faithful, the seal which authenticated documents and pardons, the badge which signaled secular and spiritual affection, affiliation, and the mysteries of religious cryptography. Re-employing these in their specific purpose of communicating and promoting the cult of a saint, these souvenirs mobilised both preexisting visual tropes and their pilgrim wearers to carry their message far and wide. In short, these souvenirs reframed the meaning of familiar objects with specific recourse to their metal lettering, piggy-backing on ideas that were already deeply ingrained in medieval society and working with systems or traditions that already existed.

Part 2: Playing with Epigraphic Expectations

The next group of pilgrim souvenirs that will be discussed also display an awareness of established conventions of material culture. However, rather than coopting the purpose of another inscribed object, these badges specifically play with epigraphic norms.

Letters that Locate: A Badge of the Rood of Grace in Time and Place

Compared with the examples explored above, a pilgrim badge from Boxley Abbey depicting the Rood of Grace uses inscription in a far more complex manner: on the one hand as representation, but on the other also as a chronological marker which grounds the object in both time and place (figure 4.09).[43] The only detailed descriptions of the original object we now know as the Rood of Grace come from witnesses to its destruction. This occurred just outside St Paul's Cathedral, where the wooden Rood had been transported from its home at Boxley Abbey in Kent as part of the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1538.[44] These accounts each mention the fact that when examined, the wooden carving of Christ was discovered to have mechanisms allowing an operator to move its lips and blink. In an article on the subject, Leanne Groeneveld makes a compelling argument that these accounts, and further similar stories informed by them and embellished in the following decades, were constructed through a lens of Reformist propaganda that framed this discovery as uncovering a deception, supporting prevailing perceptions of the toppled Catholic clergy as charlatans and medieval pilgrims as superstitious and ignorant. Groeneveld goes on to assert that this object did not in fact constitute evidence of Boxley Abbey's clergy willfully manufacturing fake miracles to mislead a credulous audience,

[43] One of the few complete examples of this badge that shows both inscriptions in situ was found at Toppings Wharf in Southwark and is listed as number 180d Brian Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges* (Woodbridge, 2010), 164-166.
[44] Leanne Groeneveld, 'A Theatrical Miracle: The Boxley Rood of Grace as Puppet', *Early Theatre*, Vol. 10.2 (2007), 11-50.

but rather that theatre and spectacle were an established part of events of Christian devotion, such as cycle plays and processions, in which the medieval laity participated with keen enough insight to distinguish reality from performance.[45] I contend that the Rood of Grace badge itself presents a similarly complex design that walked a careful line between spectacle and deception. It was a site for the juxtaposition of ancient and medieval, legendary and quotidian, and—unlike accounts of the Rood's destruction—reflects contemporary experience, specifically the pre-Reformation vision of the Rood that shrine-keepers worked hard to create for visiting pilgrims.

The badge itself is quite large, 93mm in height, with a shape that follows the image of the elaborately decorated cross cast onto it. At its three upper extremities are prominent diamond bosses each containing a quatrefoil. Three-leafed buds seem to grow from the main body of the cross, as if the wood is sprouting to life. The Christ figure, his head inclined to his right, wears a crown of thorns, his slightly enlarged hands impaled with nails to the cross. Above him is the traditional inscription in capitals, 'INRI' referring to a sign present at the crucifixion itself. There is nothing unique about this image of the crucifixion, this portion of the badge could portray a rood from anywhere. Below the cross, however, are two features that pronounce the provenance of this badge. The first is a small altar at the base of the cross, the front of which is inscribed, as if superimposed, with the word 'gras' (grace) in minuscule letters. Beside this altar is perhaps the only depiction of a shrine keeper in any extant pilgrim souvenir design. His stature is diminutive in comparison to the figure of Christ. The sculpted figure on the original Rood was life-size, so this differentiation does not literally indicate an oversized sculpture but rather denotes relative status. The shrine keeper is wearing a cowl over a long robe. His hair may be tonsured, suggesting he is one of the abbey's monks. He holds a string of rosary beads in his left hand, while his right rests on the top of the altar, his fingers inclined towards offerings that have been left there by pilgrims. His serene expression, his eyes almost smiling, is jarring

[45] Groeneveld, 'A Theatrical Miracle: The Boxley Rood of Grace as Puppet', 43-44.

against the image of torture that looms over him; this is made even more so when we consider the fact that customarily roods are flanked by the solemn figures of the Virgin and St John in mourning, not smiling monks. The imagery of badge, therefore, temporally inhabits two simultaneous yet distinct worlds: the biblical past of the Crucifixion, and the medieval present of Boxley Abbey and its Rood shrine. This is something that the badge's two inscriptions help to demarcate, signalled stylistically by the difference between the distinguished, traditional letter-forms for the 'INRI' sign and the scrawny minuscule used for the 'gras' inscription, looking as though the letter-forms have been crushed to fit onto the altar.

The maker chose to portray these epigraphs in different styles because they each have a distinct role to perform in the badge's overall composition. Consider the upper inscription first. As has already been mentioned, the 'INRI' inscription evokes a sign described in the Gospels as originally being attached to the cross of the Crucifixion, reading 'Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum' (Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews). It appears commonly on depictions of the Crucifixion across different media created during the Middle Ages, including all surviving souvenirs from Boxley Abbey, but rather than merely reproducing these four letters out of slavish accuracy to biblical text, we get a sense that these badges use them instead as an opportunity to play with time. We must remember that the Rood of Grace itself did not attract pilgrims because it was directly associated with relics of the original Crucifixion, nor a miraculous holder of a piece of the True Cross or Terra Sancta; instead the object itself was thought miraculous, said to have appeared at the Abbey fully carved and borne auspiciously on a horse. It was the monument itself that was venerated at the site, and therefore this badge should not be viewed as simply another depiction of the biblical Crucifixion, but also as a miniature copy specifically of the Boxley Rood: it is a depiction of a depiction of a historical event. This complex compression of originals and referents is glossed in the badge by the letter-forms used for the 'INRI', which differ from the 'gras' letter-forms in their deliberately archaic style. The use of capitals for these letters visually references older inscription styles from before the mid

fourteenth century, especially when compared with the 'gras' epigraph's softer letter-forms, which would have appeared much more current to fifteenth-century contemporaries of the Boxley badges' creation.

This chronological play can be further understood in the context of other inscribed badges from the late medieval European corpus. Broad capitals like those that appear on the 'INRI' epigraph are the most common style of letter-form on pilgrim souvenirs. A comparatively well-preserved example of these letter-forms appear on a thirteenth-century souvenir from Montpellier, discovered in London, commemorating a shrine there dedicated to the Virgin (figure 4.10).[46] Its inscription reads '+S[IGNVM] BEATE MARIE DE MONTEPESSVLANO' (sign of the blessed Mary of Monpellier) in wide, sturdy, capitals. Like the 'INRI' initials, they have a consistent triangular cross-section. In both examples the letter-forms have strong-looking triangular serifs. As they are capitals, none of these letters extend above or below the base or top lines; they are all the same height and, as a whole, form a block of text. Both of these epigraphs feature straight 'N' forms with the cross bar inclining the opposite way to more conventional forms, which was not at all unusual in devotional objects and also manuscripts. For example, in a Book of Hours made in the mid fifteenth century, illuminations depict inscriptions on textiles and stone that use reversed 'N's, where no other letter has been reversed or manipulated (figure 4.11).[47] In this manuscript it is interesting to note that the text was written in a gothic textura hand, contrasting with the representation of inscription letters in the illumination.

In contrast, the letter-forms used for the 'gras' epigraph are similar to textura minuscule styles that were adopted by some makers of pilgrim souvenirs and other inscribed objects from the mid-fourteenth century to the late fifteenth century, contemporary to the functioning of

[46] London, Museum of London, 91.185 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/38036.html.
[47] Book of Hours, c. 1460, London, British Library Harley 2887, fols. 28v.-29r.

Boxley's Rood. A badge from St Anthony's Hospital in London from the fifteenth century (figure 4.12) also includes a textura inscription that reads 'Sig/[num]' (sign).[48] The inscription is arranged on a tau Crucifixion image, seemingly disappearing behind the Christ figure's arms. Whereas capitals used in the previous examples could create a sense of solid borders, and can be expanded and contracted to fit perfectly in a frame, the undulations of textura minuscule styles give them a fluid quality. The design of the overall complex of letter-forms to create a word is an additional visual consideration to the individual letter-forms. In the St Anthony's Hospital example, the letter-forms seem to merge with the background, becoming part of the cross itself, in a similar way to the 'gras' inscription seeming to be part of the altar. Another fifteenth-century example from France takes a different approach to the properties of textura minuscule letters. A stamped badge from St Leger takes advantage of the fluidity of these letters, and the contrast from the building-block constraints of capitals, to create an inscription that flows from the rest of the badge's imagery (figure 4.13).[49] In a similar way to the crozier in the bishop's hand, the letter-forms sprout leaves, reflecting the floral decoration in the corners of the badge. These letter-forms do not create any boundaries, but are camouflaged in the badge's visual lexicon. The 'gras' inscription, like the St Leger and St Anthony's Hospital epigraphs, fades into the design.

What these examples demonstrate, is that textual style follows conceptual and aesthetic function in both the 'gras' inscription and 'INRI' epigraph. Both locate their elements of the badge in time and place; they add specificity and locale to a common subject of iconography. The use of these two distinct styles of letter-forms in the Boxley Abbey badge clearly indicates that its maker understood how epigraphic style could affect meaning and function, based on visual traditions both contemporary and past. Moreover, this epigraphic play had an important

[48] London, Museum of London, 2009.24/2 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/776166.html.
[49] London, Museum of London, 3002.49 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/725921.html.

purpose, for portraying time in this manner also reflected the experience pilgrims would have had when visiting the Rood and collecting this badge. The moving lips and eyes of the Christ figure in this Rood would have brought to life a scene that was usually a static object, at the same time the Crucifixion of the Bible and the specific Rood of Boxley moving in front of them. Where a medieval person may have seen the passion of Christ re-enacted in plays during Easter celebrations, and wooden Christ figures were habitual elements of church fabric, a moving sculpture would have been novel, something worth commemorating in metal. As Groeneveld suggests, Boxley Abbey's inhabitants were not duping an unsuspecting public, but animating their Christ figure to create an immediacy to the miracle of humanity's salvation. The late medieval church in England did have reservations about idolatry that are evident in measures taken by bishops to regulate the veneration of such images.[50] But the Rood of Grace was not a renegade idol, worshiped on its own account or credited with having powers. It was part of an established pilgrimage site frequented by pilgrims on their way to Canterbury.[51] The unusual presence of the shrine keeper, resting his hand on the rood, in the badge's composition thus clarifies the true force behind the movement of the wooden icon, his hand visible for all to see. In this sense, the badge—metal imagery and metal letters combined—communicates with exceptional transparency what went on at the shine, and what should be taken away from it by the pilgrim: the Biblical scene brought to life by a contemporary monk through an ingenious moveable miracle statue, figures of past and present confirmed by their proximity to appropriate epigraphic markers.

[50] Richard Marks, *Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England* (Stroud, 2004), 225.
[51] Boxley Abbey was a Cistercian monastery founded in 1146. As well as the Rood, Boxley Abbey also attracted visitors with a relic of St Andrew and an image of local child-saint Rumwold. John Cave-Brown, *The History of Boxley Parish* (Maidstone, 1892) 46-47; Ronald Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London, 1977) 208-209; Peter Marshall, 'The Rood of Boxley, the Blood of Hailes and the Defence of the Henrician Church', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 46, No. 4, (1995) 689-692.

Letters as Image on a St Andrew Badge

So far, all of the examples of epigraphs on pilgrim souvenirs have been presented in a conventional manner, taking inspiration from seal matrices, jewellery, and other inscribed objects such as bells or sculpture. But pilgrim souvenirs could also use inscriptions in ways that were deliberately unfamiliar and pushed the definition of epigraphy. An example of a Scottish pilgrim badge from the shrine of St Andrew presents private metal epigraphy at its most puzzling (figure 4.14).[52] The lean figure of St Andrew, his arms and legs spread to represent his martyrdom on a saltire, takes up most of the space. Around him are what appear to be a scattering of letter forms, of various sizes and orientations. At the top right of the badge, beside St Andrew's outstretched left arm, is a cross, which would normally indicate the beginning of an inscription; thereafter follow nine other letter-forms arranged four on each side of the saint, and one between his legs. The meaning and even the writing system to which they belong is ambiguous. While the letters could be interpreted as Latin forms, they could just as easily be interpreted as Greek. Four of the letter forms are 'A's or alphas, two are 'I's or iotas, and one a 'T' or tau. Another of the letters might be a 'C' or an omega, but on its side, while the last could be an 'A' or alpha or could also be a 'V' or lambda. An entirely Greek transcription, '+IAIΩ[]A[]ΛAAT', is no more legible than a wholly Latin one, '+IAIC[]A[]AAAT'. Their variation in orientation, size, and style, all work together to obscure the interpretation of the inscription as a whole. While there are other badges with pseudo-script inscriptions, and we have encountered the use of this technique elsewhere on other forms of London metal object, the pseudo-script or nonsense epigraph on this St Andrew badge seems willfully bizarre.

[52] London, Museum of London, 82.8/9 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/28994.html.

While the words of this badge are indecipherable, its epigraphic spirit, I argue, is not. First, consider the design of this badge in its entirety. The overall aspect of the badge is of a typical 'plaque badge' type, more reminiscent of pilgrim souvenirs found in continental Europe than those from the British Isles. The badge is an oblong shape with loops at the corners for attaching it to clothing or other dress accessories.[53] The letter-forms float in the negative space around the image of St Andrew, but if we disregard them for a moment we would see that there are in fact many other examples of pilgrim badges designed along similar lines. For instance, badges from a shrine to St Giles in France, at least one of which was present in medieval London, depict the saint standing upright with the inscription 'S[IGNUM]:BEATI EGIDII:A[BBATIS]:' (sign of the blessed Abbot Giles) on either side of his body (figure 4.15).[54] This is a fragmentary badge in that St Giles's nimbed head has been snapped off. From looking at similar examples, however, it is likely that rather than being an oblong, the badge cut away in a semi-circle around St Giles's head. Still, the style of letter-forms is uniform and their arrangement is linear and reads clockwise. Their chunky forms give a sense of solidity to the inscription; they are all the same height and a similar width, as if each letter has a guiding square around it governing its dimensions. These letter-form blocks are assembled in two walls of text that do not touch or interact with the image.

Seeing the St Giles and St Andrew badges side-by-side emphasises their distinct approaches to presenting metal letters, and encourages reflections of the stories that surrounded these two figures. The St Andrew badge depicts the suffering in martyrdom of a saint, whereas St Giles is presented as a blessing abbot. Where the St Giles badge has clear delineation between

[53] This could include hats, purses or pouches. During the fifteenth century people began stitching pilgrim souvenirs into books but this was only ever done with the flat stamped badges, rather than cast examples like this St Andrew badge. Hanneke van Asperen, 'The Book as Shrine, the Badge as Bookmark: Religious Badges and Pilgrims' Souvenirs in Devotional Manuscripts' in, Marco Faini and Alessia Meneghin eds., *Domestic Devotions in the Early Modern World* (Leiden, 2019), 288-312.
[54] London, Museum of London, 84.129/4 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/28967.html.

text and image, an ordered, conventional portrayal of letters, the figure of St Andrew seems to be stretching out of the way of the letters that surround him, pinning him into position.[55] The St Andrew letter-forms not only expand but rotate to interlock and fill the space surrounding the prostrate body. The 'A' form between his legs pushes against his shins. The two badges portray their saints in dissimilar ways, which is hardly surprising given that the legends of St Giles and St Andrew contrast sharply with each other. St Giles was a hermit, whose life was led largely in contemplation and overseeing the serene following of monastic rule; he was not a martyr saint, and never suffered the indignity of the torments that St Andrew endured by being crucified.[56] The St Andrew badge, therefore, could be said to have been designed to evoke or emphasise his martyrdom. Among the symbols cast onto his badge, three potentially signify the objects of his torture: in addition to the central image, depicting Andrew's own saltire, there is also the cross on his left, and on his right the Tau cross.

Another continental badge found in London offers an interesting counterpoint to the letter-forms on the St Andrew badge and also depicts a martyrdom: an example from the shrine of St John the Baptist in Amiens, with letter-forms arranged around his severed head (figure 4.16).[57] A large piece of this badge has broken off, so half of the inscription has been obscured. The epigraph fills the space either side of the saint's bearded visage, reading '[IOHA]…NNES', the circular shape of the badge representing the dish on which his head was placed when it was presented to Salome. The head's vacant, bulbous eyes stare out, his lips slightly parted, his beard apparently dripping off his face onto the platter, presenting a grizzly scene. Unlike those of the

[55] There is a story associated with St Giles that Charlemagne confessed to him, but would not divulge the nature of his sin. An angel wrote down the sin and through prayer St Giles managed to erase the angel's letters. This story gives the saint a command of visual letters that is pleasingly consistent with the presentation of his badge inscription. David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford, 1980), 173.

[56] According to the Golden Legend, he was wounded by an arrow, but was healed by his faith. However much of his life was spent in contemplation and pilgrimage, and his death was particularly peaceful. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints Volume II* (Princeton, 1995), 147-149.

[57] London, Museum of London, 79.327/1 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/29064.html.

St Giles example, the letter-forms on the St John the Baptist badge are not presented in neat rows, but are instead malleable, twisting and bending around his head. Similarly to those on the St Andrew badge, the orientation of the letter-forms that can still be seen on the piece is not consistent, rather they have been rotated to make their shapes fit better in the available space. While this is not a linear arrangement like in the St Giles example, the presentation of these metal letters is not haphazard either. The 'E' has been tilted backwards about 90 degrees, so that its widest point is facing the outside of the circular frame, where there is a greater surface area. The 'S' has been tilted forwards 90 degrees so that it did not need to be shortened relative to the other letters. Even between the letters the maker of this item has included simple roundel details, so that all blank metal has texture that makes the Saint's face stand out all the more. The letter-forms themselves are all curvaceous capitals, the first 'N' featuring a bending bar bridging its two halves, differentiating it from its neighbour, whose shape is much more conventional.

While the John the Baptist badge presents similar subject matter to the St Andrew example, with a similar treatment of metal letters, the differences between the two in terms of the letter-forms themselves are significant. The letter-forms of the John the Baptist example—'N' forms notwithstanding—can all be described as being executed in the same style; but the St Andrew badge is an unusual example of a mixture of styles being used. This is not done in the same way as the Rood of Grace souvenir mentioned above, in which there is clear distinction between the two styles for the purpose of situating its imagery. Rather, in the St Andrew badge, one letter-form is designed to contrast stylistically with those on either side of it. For example, there are a variety of styles presented among the possible 'A' forms in this single inscription. Two of them have a bar at the top, but no cross bar, and flick serifs. Another is similar but with the unusual inclusion of dot serifs. Another has no bar at the top, though this may represent a 'V' form rather than an 'A'. Another does not have serifs or a top bar, but does have a broken cross bar. The last possible 'A' form is a 'V' shape with a bulbous, rounded top.

The second significant difference between the metal letters of the St Andrew and John the Baptist badges is that on the St Andrew badge, either there is potentially a mixture of two alphabets being used, or there is the partial use of a non-native alphabet. Both this, and the variation in styles, signal that the St Andrews badge is an extreme example of obscurantism, a term that was explored above in Chapter Two. Against Cynthia Hahn's discussion of *nomina sacra* mentioned earlier that set out some of the strategies used in their presentation, the St Andrew badge letters demonstrate the use of archaic forms, novelty, and the use of holy languages.

We have seen in examples of obscurantism in previous chapters that practices of playing with linguistic presentation in this way clearly show that letter-forms have great potency in themselves, making the endeavour of trying to find definitive meaning in this badge epigraph fruitless. While their exact linguistic interpretation may be elusive, the letter-forms on this badge contribute to its meaning. The St Andrew badge's metal letters, therefore, do more than inspire a sense of holy mystery. Their chaotic, aggressive presentation adds a sense of discomfort and wonder that its subject matter requires. These letters interact with saintly narrative and literally set a disorientating backdrop for the scene of martyrdom that unfolds before them.

Creating and Communicating a Cult: The Badges of Richard Caister

The badges discussed thus far in this chapter use the presentation of their inscriptions to say more than simply words being spelled out. These objects communicate creatively with visual letters, signs, and images, packing big ideas into tiny spaces. Moreover, while the five preceding objects are all from well-established shrines, or dedicated to well-known canonised saints, this final section considers a group of badges made during the fifteenth century to

promote a brand new cult, the epigraphic power of metal pilgrim souvenirs turned towards a figure whose own cult was all about communication.

Richard Caister was a vicar at St Stephen's Church, Norwich, who died in 1420. While Caister never officially became a saint, badges were made in his honour to argue his cause; in fact, this was done in a far more thoughtful and convincing manner than the examples we have seen above of established, top-tier saints, such as St Andrew. There is evidence of some early success for Caister's cult. A will made only nine years after his death in 1429 mentions a pilgrimage to his shrine.[58] Likewise, Caister was known for his various religious writings, none of which survive besides a hymn written in Middle English copied into several manuscripts.[59] He was also known for preaching to his parishioners in the vernacular, and in his own will he stipulated that most of his money and possessions be distributed among the poor, stating that the goods of the church are the goods of the poor according to canon law.[60] Still, the cult was in a fledgling state. Unlike those celebrating apostles whose deeds were copiously recorded in scripture, Caister's badges had heavy lifting to do.

Analysing three badges from Caister's cult offers an insight into how one group of makers in particular experimented with lettering and design in the medium of metal pilgrim souvenirs. There are at least four distinct designs of Caister badges that have been found in London, three of which include inscriptions and will therefore be the focus of my discussion

[58] Norman Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370-1532* (Wetteren, 1984), 231. Protestant figures later claimed that Caister had been a Wycliffite, but there is no evidence of this from his life. Norman Tanner, 'Religious Practice' in, *Medieval Norwich*, ed. Carole Rawcliffe (London, 2005), 151. Caister's local supporters included, most notably, Margery Kempe, for whom private devotion was taking a startling individualistic turn that shook the established church whose existence was based on its universality, see, Anthony Bale, *Margery Kempe: A Mixed Life* (London, 2021). As Anthony Bale puts it, Kempe saw herself as an 'ethical watchdog of the clergy', much to the resentment of most clergymen, 105.

[59] His hymn, *Ihu lorde, þat madest me*, is transcribed in, *Religious Lyrics of the XVth Century*, ed. Carleton F. Brown (Oxford, 1939), 98-100.

[60] Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, 232.

here.[61] All of them depict Caister preaching from a pulpit, and each of the inscribed badges features a different epigraph.

One such badge is now in the British Museum (figure 4.17).[62] It depicts the priest in a pulpit within five sides of a hexagon. It was cast in a lead tin alloy, which now has a dull brownish-grey patina obscuring its once silvery shine. Its silhouette is punctuated by fronds, which burst out and scroll in on themselves, giving the piece a sense of movement. The interior hints at being edged with dots, like pearls or beads, though much of this detail has been lost, or did not translate from the mould in casting. The Holy Ghost appears at Caister's right ear, its wings, head, and tail articulated in openwork. The structural weakness of this badge is in the conical shape of the pulpit, meaning that the whole badge has a jaunty tilt that was not part of its design but has come with wear. Caister clutches the side of the pulpit with his left hand, his right hand raised as he preaches to enunciate his point. Its inscription reads 'MR CAƧT OF NORWIHE' (Master Caister of Norwich), and is arranged within the hexagonal frame arching over vicar and pulpit. It is formed of capitals, the only Caister badge of the three inscribed examples to opt for these over textura minuscule. This use of a reversed 'S' is unusual for English badges of this time period, as is the inclusion of Caister's title, 'MR' for *magister* (master), emphasising that he was an educated man but not officially a saint; the promotional purpose of the badge made clear in its lettering. Also unusual is the inscription's use of English, as evidenced by the use of the word 'OF' rather than the Latin 'de' which would be more usual in saintly inscriptions. But again, this appears to be propagandising at work, referencing Caister's renown for vernacular preaching.

[61] Portable Antiquities Scheme SF-640C85 https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/447740. This last example is the badge that does not seem to include an inscription. The piece is damaged and so it is not impossible that once it may have had an inscribed scroll incorporated into its design, but I think looking at what remains that it is more likely that it did not include an inscription.
[62] London, British Museum, 1836,0610.48 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1836-0610-48 this example was found in London near London Bridge.

A second form of Caister badge, the most common type to survive, shows the vicar within a rectangular frame with slightly bowed sides (figure 4.18).[63] Most extant examples, including one now in the Museum of London, are usually missing the figure of a bearded, nimbed God looking down on Caister from above the ruffled clouds that undulate across the top face of the badge's frame. The stylised clouds also resemble a repeated pattern of scallop shells that are synonymous with souvenirs from Santiago de Compostela, perhaps the most famous of all European medieval pilgrimage sites. This visual evocation of established sainthood worked into the design of a piece promoting the cult of an aspiring saint sends a clear message, perhaps the most conspicuous assertion of divine approval within the Caister corpus. In the Museum of London example, all that remains of the figure of God are hands that wave disarmingly at the viewer from the top of the badge. Clearly, this badge shares some of the features found on the previous example, for instance the scrolling fronds that punctuate the vertical outline of the badge's frame. But this badge has its own unique details too. Here, the inscription surrounds the preaching figure at his sides and along bottom of the frame in the form of a scroll. Its textura letters expand to touch the outline of the frame and read, 'solidəohooəthonoret::gloria': this is a quote from St Paul's first epistle to Timothy, *soli Deo honor et gloria* (to the only God be honour and glory). An extract from one of Paul's Pastoral Epistles that set out good practice for Christian clergy, this inscription is commenting on Richard Caister's orthodoxy as a preacher and spiritual leader. Visually, too, the link between Caister and divine intention is emphasized by the line of the first 's' that begins the inscription, which borrows its curvaceous form from one of the heavenly clouds along the top of the badge.

While it seems counter-intuitive to put a Latin inscription on a miniature monument to someone celebrated for his use of the English language, the presentation of this inscription reveals an idea behind text and image that concisely sums up Caister's significance. The way in

[63] London, Museum of London, 82.314 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/28985.html.

which the inscription seems to be a continuation of the cloud design at the top border indicates that the letter-forms of this epigraph are intended to be part of the badge's imagery as much as a separate piece of textual commentary. Indeed, the inscription uses a number of unusually manipulated letter-forms. There are ligatures between the 'so' in 'soli', the 'de' in 'deo', and 'or' in 'honor'. The 'e's and 't's in 'et' are upside-down. And, perhaps most unusually, the whole phrase reads counter-clockwise, in the opposite direction to the vast majority of inscriptions on souvenirs and many other types of small metal object. In this sense, its contents are far more complex than most inscriptions found on pilgrim souvenirs; it is virtually unheard of for the inscription of a pilgrim souvenir not to refer directly to the saint's name or an aspect or event in their life. But, once more, within the context of the Caister cult and its keen promotion, the badge still makes sense. After all, the part of the inscription that is beneath Caister is upside-down to the viewer, as if the inscription was oriented not to be read by the viewer but from inside the frame, that is, from the perspective of the figure in the pulpit: Caister is depicted as an ingenious interpreter, taking Latin scripture and preaching its messages in the language of the viewer.

The third form of epigraphic Caister badge can be seen as the culmination of the promotional strategies developed in the other two badges. Similarly to the Thomas Becket 'T' badge discussed above, this badge has itself been shaped into an enormous initial, a capital 'R' (figure 4.19).[64] The lines of the 'R' are thick and flat—without indentations to suggest an outline filled, or the triangular or trapezoid contour that has often been noted in this thesis as a feature of metal letters—creating a solid surface, which has been softened by the presence of delicate, rambling branches, climbing up the stem and down the bow of the letter-from, as if the word is living and growing. The outer border has the scrolled fronds observed in the previous examples, while from the crook of the 'R's bow blossoms a single flower. Below that, the foot of the letter

[64] London, Museum of London, 86.202/18 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/28939.html.

that would have originally extended to its left has snapped off, and with no other extant examples of this badge design its shape can only be guessed, but the fact that the line becomes rather broad before it is cut off to me indicates that this giant 'R' would have terminated in a sweeping rounded scroll, a larger version of the flourish that extends from the top of the stem on the letter-form's opposite side. Inside, the inner borders of the 'R' are studded with round metal pearls and nestled within the giant initial is the preaching figure of Caister, depicted once more in his pulpit undertaking the pastoral duties that were the source of his renown. He seems to expand out of the pulpit, an impression accentuated by its conical shape, gripping its sides to steady himself as he is inflated by the Word, which again is whispered into his right ear by the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove.

Beneath the pulpit a simple caption reads in a craggy, jagged textura, 'rkaste', denoting Richard Caister. The uneven, organic style of the letter-forms blend in with the creeping foliage that decorates the 'R' form's surface. Yet while its actual letters are slight, this badge does the most eloquent job of the three epigraphic Caister examples in portraying a chain of communication, one that starts with divine inspiration and culminates in the oral communication between preacher and congregation. Efficient and effective, the dissemination of the Word is the very subject of this piece, conveyed first through the Holy Ghost whispering in Richard's right ear, and second by Richard in his pulpit preaching to the viewer. This badge also depicts both internal and external language in a way that is relevant to the debates about internal and communal devotion during the later Middle Ages. Its 'R' clearly evokes the initial badges we have already explored above, objects which marked fealty and allegiance; but it also seems to refer to the historiated initial of contemporary manuscripts. In this sense, as well as being dedicated to the memory of a person, persuading others that he should inspire their devotion, we might also see the badge as dedicated to depicting language, the historiated initial representing knowledge that was once in the hands of the *literati* but was now being shared through Caister's translation. In using the imagery of manuscript culture, this badge portrays visual language and

the learned credentials of Richard Caister highly effectively: the complex imagery and epigraphy of translation that characterises each of the Caister badges is skillfully layered here with coherence and efficiency.

Conclusion

The Caister badges and those that preceded them here demonstrate the versatility and efficiency with which makers of pilgrim tokens communicated by metal letter. In these objects, we can see strategies of promotion, with graphic forms doing the bidding of shrine keepers.[65] These examples engage with their contemporary material culture, using objects with established functions and familiar significance as a short-hand to get their message across in objects that fit into the palm of your hand. Sometimes letter-forms protected the authority of a shrine, sometimes they tried to express the nature of a saint, and define how they should be venerated. On other souvenirs letter-forms replicate those on monuments, so that pilgrims can take a part of a notional holy place onward on their journey. Metal letters can also channel how a shrine is, or should be, experienced. They also participate in creating the image of a saint or holy person in miniature, promoting their power and mystery in a form that can reach out from a place and make new devotees among strangers.

[65] The extraordinary measures of shrine promotion, including negative marketing aimed at other shrines, that the management of shrines went to are set out in, Bell and Dale, 'The Medieval Pilgrimage Business', 601-627.

Chapter Five: Playful Letters: Text, Image, Object, and Function in Private Epigraphy

This chapter turns to assemblages of household possessions from medieval London, objects where inscriptions could make unexpected and puzzling appearances across the faces of otherwise unassuming quotidian objects. The makers of these objects played with letters, manipulating their meanings and their forms, employing visual language to illustrate the interaction between owner and object. This reveals an elastic and creative relationship with letters, which in some cases could literally be bent to the will of their makers. The household artefacts discussed here had various functions that they performed for their owners. One is a spoon handle, another is the metal frame that was once part of a purse, the third is a diptych, next is a mirror case, and the final object is a whistle. While text is on display on each of these artefacts, I have chosen them because being worn and admired by others was not their primary purpose. Their interaction with their owners in their everyday lives during eating, shopping, praying, and playing is what is under consideration. While their uses are diverse, the messages they communicate are unified. They each bear epigraphs that are religious in nature, consisting of well-known Christian phrases and holy names. We have already discussed in Chapter Two how devotional inscriptions were presented on jewellery and, while it is true that of the extant medieval items found in the UK, functional items are less likely to include religious epigraphs than dress accessories, religious inscriptions were nonetheless a feature of the material culture of the household more broadly. According to Roberta Gilchrist, out of the 302 medieval inscribed objects surveyed from the Portable Antiquities Scheme, 143 of them can be classed as dress

accessories.[1] The next highest group were seal matrices with 84 recorded as having inscriptions, and the remaining 75 objects were other items across thirteen different categories that included horse furniture, vessels, tokens, and book fittings.

All of the epigraphs discussed here are composed in Latin, meaning that they would not have shared their mother tongue with their owner. But language is not the only way in which these inscriptions conveyed meaning. As we have seen in the prior chapters of this thesis, inscriptions on objects offer communication that is subjective, that pulls in its surroundings to express ideas more complex than the sum of its letters. Their placement on active objects means that text interacts with action, object, form, and image. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to put into practice the methods that have been refined on objects categorized by their purpose, reversing my approach to explore objects used in different ways. In doing so, the emphasis will be placed on the role that metal letters play in the experience of an object by its owner. The intentions behind the inclusion of epigraphs on the part of a maker can be observed by exploring how text affects the use, or the countenance, of an object. These observations get to the heart of what characterises private epigraphy the later Middles Ages. A playfulness of text, text that is not born within codices or trust up in parchment scrolls, but that participated in the life of an object—and by extension its owner—ensues. Playfulness and word games in the medieval west have been the subject of scholarship, but most serious discussions revolve around this phenomenon in medieval literature, particularly with the popularity in the twelfth century of cryptograms, puzzles, riddles, and acrostics.[2] Even in studies of epigraphy, manuscript sources are turned to as the inspiration for letter-play. For example, in his analysis of architectural inscriptions, Robert Favreau asserted that word and letter play on architectural inscriptions were an expression of a contemporary literary trend for incorporating acrostics and similar word

[1] Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, 274.
[2] Benjamin A. Saltzman, 'Vt hkskdkxt: Early Medieval Cryptography, Textual Errors and Scribal Agency', *Speculum*, 93/4 (October, 2018), 1008.

games into poetry.[3] In discussing numerous examples of particularly complex christograms inscribed in the masonry of medieval churches, he suggested that it is safe to assume that the majority of congregations did not understand them, implying that ordinary people were not their intended audience, despite being on prominent display.[4] This assumption does not apply in the cases of small scale epigraphy on base metal possessions discussed here, where letter-play is used in a way that is inspired by potential interactions between an object and its user, the material from which it is fashioned, a purpose in which the inscribed object is intended to participate. Viewers were not required to 'look up the answers' to the visual riddles posed by these private epigraphs, they were simply invited to look more closely at the object itself. The charisma of playful letters in private epigraphy is not inscrutable, but engaging.

The letter-forms discussed here, all of them cast in metal, are integral to the fabric of these objects, yet the way in which they are fashioned shows them to be pliable, adaptable to their surroundings, and to serve the semantic purposes of their maker. Letters inhabiting the surprisingly permissive environment of hardwearing base metals, and often accompanied on their shining surface by other cast imagery, offer an opportunity to take stock of the relationship between text, image, and form. I will use this insight to confront the status of text on these objects, arguing that the place of text on small inscribed possessions challenges assumptions often made by scholars of text and image: that text possesses an implicit seniority to image.[5] The

[3] Favreau, 'REX, LEX, LUX, PAX: Jeux de mots et jeux de lettres dans les inscriptions Médiévales', 628.
[4] Favreau, 'REX, LEX, LUX, PAX: Jeux de mots et jeux de lettres dans les inscriptions Médiévales', 630-631.
[5] Sonja Drimmer makes the point that in the field of manuscript studies, images are perceived as 'subsequent to the word, and by extension as subordinate to it'. Sonja Drimmer, *The Art of Allusion: Illuminators and the Making of English Literature, 1403-1476* (Philadelphia, 2019), 10-11. It should be acknowledged, however, that manuscript scholars have recently been exploring a relationship between text and image that is more nuanced. For example in Jeffrey Hamburger's work, he considered instances in which text was presented as an image, such as in diagrams. See, Jeffrey Hamburger, *Script as Image* (Leuven, 2017). In Judith H. Oliver's article on historiated initials in the Douce Homilary, while she does analyse the influences of accompanying text, she also explores other visual strategies behind the composition of miniatures and the effects of these on how the book was experienced. Judith H. Oliver, 'Christmas Lessons in Word and Image in the Douce Homilary', *Studies in Iconography*, Vol. 37 (2016), 109-145.

evidence of these small metal possessions shows that such simple hierarchies are not applicable to this corpus, and that the dynamics between epigraph, image, and form, vary from object to object. Text, instead, has different roles that it performs differently depending on its object; it is subject to the creativity of its makers, the way in which they perceived the object and intended it to be perceived by consumers. Ultimately, this chapter will conclude that, seen in this new light, some metal letters were invested with power in their presentation, as well as their content, and were designed to reassure and strengthen the one who possessed them. Others fulfilled parallel, illustrative purposes, a supporting role to visual stimuli but which served no less practical a function. In the cases of all of the five objects discussed here, their spiritual content confronted earthly concerns embodied by the everyday tools—and lives—of which they were part.

Spoon Handle

The first everyday object to be discussed here is a fragmentary remnant of a spoon (figure 5.01).[6] The extant part of this artefact is its handle cast with the inscription in capitals, '※IESVS:ÐAZARENVS:' (Jesus of Nazareth). The handle, which is 65mm long, has a slim triangular cross section. Its inscription is situated on the flat face that joins the bowl of the spoon.[7] At its widest, this face is 5mm, and tapers away from the bowl towards the end. The end of the handle has been broken, which may indicate that it once terminated in a knop. Its dimensions and design make this a dainty handle, and although handles on spoons contemporary to this do tend to be very slim and have triangular or diamond cross sections, it has been suggested that this is a condiment spoon.[8] Whatever substance this spoon was used for, its

[6] Lead tin spoon handle, London, Museum of London, BWB83[4635]<299>.
[7] Bowls of medieval spoons tend to be made of very thin pewter, unlike their handles, so the join between the two parts was a point of weakness. For examples of numerous disembodied spoon handles see, Egan, *The Medieval Household: Daily Living*, 248-252.
[8] Egan, *The Medieval Household: Daily Living*, 250. Egan suggests that this spoon may have been used in conjunction with a salt cellar.

association with food and the household invites speculation about the interaction between this spoon handle and its user, and how its inscription fits in with medieval ideas of consumption and nourishment. In examining the ways in which this inscription engages users, I propose that the playfulness of the spoon's inscription is in its comment on action, accentuated and made irresistible by its effect on form.

As action is the crux of my understanding of this inscription's design, it is useful to examine how such objects operated, and were seen to operate, in medieval London. A handle, the place of contact between human and object, also seems an apt example to prompt a discussion of objects and agency, and how current thinking on this subject might allow insights into private epigraphy. Recently the questions of the agency of objects has been explored in the medieval context. Bettina Bildhauer has analysed medieval German literature to define medieval thought around agency based on narratives concerning objects.[9] She coins the term 'pragmacentric' to describe her object-centred analysis of literary texts.[10] Bildhauer emphasises that in medieval German literature the material qualities of objects, such as shine, can themselves have agency in addition to, and independently of, agency given by their maker in creating them and their owner in using them.[11] It is worth pointing out here that my aims and materials are very different to Bildhauer's, in that one of the central goals of my thesis is to draw attention to the agency of metalworkers, which I have repeatedly called out as being underestimated by other scholars of medieval material culture. But Bildhauer's observances are still useful to me in my object-led, rather than object-centric, analysis, as they prompt me to pay attention to how makers use materiality in their creations, and what it was that made objects

[9] Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Things: Agency, Materiality, and Narratives of objects in Medieval German Literature and Beyond* (Columbus, 2020).
[10] Bildhauer, *Medieval Things: Agency, Materiality, and Narratives of objects in Medieval German Literature and Beyond*, 5.
[11] Bildhauer, *Medieval Things: Agency, Materiality, and Narratives of objects in Medieval German Literature and Beyond*, 23.

alluring to their owners.[12] In the context of personal possessions in medieval London, Katherine French also explored the agency of belongings, and how these could affect the lives and behaviour of their owners.[13] She synthesises theories about objects and agency from the field of archaeology to explore how objects shaped the behaviour, and thereby contributed to the identities, of those who interacted with them. She discusses how objects, including spoons, interacted not just with people but with broader social ideals of household life. This approach is also valuable for this study looking at religious inscriptions on household artefacts, which bring moral and devotional dimensions to objects, action, and user. With a similar literary source material to that of Bildhauer, the agency of inscribed objects in the medieval world has also been explored in a collection of essays.[14] In their introduction to this collection, Christine Nuefeld and Ricarda Wagner argue that the presence of inscriptions blur lines between 'human-power' and 'thing-power' because language, an exclusively human attribute, leads them to be 'anthropomorphised in ways that potentially subvert their thingness'.[15] Certainly, metal letters add a dimension of communication to an object. There is a sense that the inscription placed on the handle of this spoon is commenting on the owner's actions when it is placed in their hand. Taken together, this recent scholarship opens up avenues of analysis of objects like this spoon handle that will lead me to investigate the meaning of the communication proffered by this inscription, its intention, and how it asserts itself and engages viewers and users as part of an object.

[12] While Bettina Bildhauer, and other new materialists, consciously chooses the word 'thing' in her work, rather than object, defining the former as a term that implies agency, I am avoiding this term because it is human agency, making, owning and using objects, that is under consideration here. For her analysis of the word 'thing' see, Bildhauer, *Medieval Things: Agency, Materiality, and Narratives of objects in Medieval German Literature and Beyond*, 5-8.
[13] French, *Household Goods and Good Households*, 5.
[14] *Writing Beyond Pen and Parchment: Inscribed Objects in Medieval European Literature*, eds. Lieb, Neufeld, and Wagner (Berlin, 2019).
[15] Nuefeld and Wagner, 'Introduction' in, *Writing Beyond Pen and Parchment: Inscribed Objects in Medieval European Literature*, 4.

Starting with the content of this inscription, it is familiar from the discussion of devotional inscriptions on jewellery from Chapter Two of this thesis. The presence of a holy name on an object associated with eating demands consideration of food in medieval Christian thought to reveal its situational meaning. In the hands of the user, it seasons the worldly action of eating with spiritual power. It comments on the act of ingesting, and imbibes it with a moralistic message. Many extant medieval spoons feature religious inscriptions and imagery incorporated onto their handles, bowls, and knops.[16] Stina Fallberg Sundmark, surveying finds from medieval Scandinavia, found that such imagery was not only common on spoons, but on other items of tableware such as knives and jugs.[17] Katherine French states in her book about household objects in medieval London that spoons with devotional inscriptions were a 'reminder to inculcate Eucharistic piety into family meals'. They are artefacts that reflect the strong links between Christianity and eating in terms of its devotional practices. As Caroline Walker Bynum put it, the Eucharist 'hovered in the background of any banquet'.[18]

The sense that spiritual concerns exerted a presence in medieval homes leads me into a closer discussion of the inscription on this spoon handle, and how its presence was experienced by its user. The care taken to produce uniform, intricate letter-forms, and their prominent positioning and minimal accompanying imagery, corresponds with the findings of Antony Eastmond in his work on what he calls 'textual icons', namely that epigraphs are, to use

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[16] Some precious metal spoons survive with particularly intricate devotional motifs and inscriptions. For example, a gold and enamel spoon with 'AVE MARIA' inscription on its bowl and leather spoon case, London, British Museum,1899,1209.3 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1899-1209-3 ; also another silver gilt spoon with figure of an apostle as its knop, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, M.70-1921 https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O118113/spoon-unknown/. For spoons within the context of London households and table manners see, French, *Household Goods and Good Households,* 144-145. Apotropaic inscriptions on spoons, including the example discussed here, is explored in, Gilchrist, *Medieval Life,* 125. For a catalogue of other spoons found in London see, Egan, *The Medieval Household,* 248-251. For religious inscriptions and imagery on Scandinavian medieval spoons see, Stina Fallberg Sundmark, 'Dining with Christ and His Saints: Tableware in Relation to Late Medieval Devotional Culture in Sweden', *Konsthistorisk tidskrift / Journal of Art History*, 86:3 (2017), 221-223.

[17] Fallberg Sundmark, 'Dining with Christ and His Saints: Tableware in Relation to Late Medieval Devotional Culture in Sweden', 221-223.

[18] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkley, 1987), 3.

Eastmond's words, 'designed to be seen as much as to be read'.[19] A delicate diagonal cross and pellet motif between two parallel lines begins the inscription, that reads from the join between the spoon's bowl and stem towards the end of the handle. The letter-forms on the spoon handle have been expertly formed, their lateral spacing adjusting as they become smaller towards the narrower end of the handle. The slightly pointed crescents formed by the bowls of the first of the two 'E's, produced by a variation in the thickness of the line, is exactly replicated in the second, slightly smaller example, giving the inscription a precise uniformity. The 'A's, by contrast, while they are also perfectly consistent in style, are of an angular composition of four sturdy triangles. The letters are all capitals, although the maker has decided to employ two different forms of 'N' in 'ИAZARENVS', the first being a curved form resembling an oversized minuscule. The iconic status of these inscriptions is reflected and enhanced by their presentation on the object. But the inscription on the spoon is not only designed to be seen, but felt by the spoon's user. The letter-forms in the epigraph have been executed in deep relief in a wide furrow at the centre of the spoon handle. These metal letters protrude from their plain background to such an extent that they have a strong tactile presence as well as a visual one.

The way in which this particular inscription punctuates the form of the spoon handle, and its placement on the part of the spoon that would be, if you like, handled, gives it a participative, playfully insistent quality that the religious motifs and inscriptions on other spoons do not have. It asserts its presence in a way that is unexpected. I have spoken about metal letters in terms of their visual qualities, and the effects of their texture, material, and facture on them. In this case, it is the sculptural elements of the letter-forms that characterises the use of epigraphy on this piece. It is the way in which these letter-forms alter the physical boundaries of the handle, creating a bumpy surface that on metal objects would usually be smooth, that, to return to the discussion of objects and agency above, means that this inscription does more than

[19] Eastmond, 'Textual Icons: Viewing Inscriptions in Medieval Georgia', 78.

anthropomorphise a spoon with speech. The maker of this spoon played with its material and form to ensure that the inscription not only commented on action, but exerted its presence even when it was hidden from view, during use, in its owner's hand. In this way the inscription on the spoon handle therefore seasons the worldly sensations of touch and eating, with a spiritual power.

Purse Frame

Another quotidian object further reveals how makers considered the eventual use of an item, and used inscription to reinforce ideas about its purpose and engage its owner. It is a copper bar, once part of a purse frame, which has inscribed on it in niello inlay the prayer, 'OMATER / DEI MEM' and 'ENTO ME / I AMEN', (O mother of God remember me, Amen) and, 'IHS' and 'M' (denoting a monogram for Christ and an initial most likely for Maria indicating the Virgin, who is the intercessor in the purse's prayer), on a central shield-shaped boss (figures 5.02 and 5.03).[20] The textile pouch of the purse has not survived, leaving only the copper bar that would have comprised part of the purse's closure.[21] Still, it would have been the only metal part of the purse that was visible, the rest covered in fabric.[22] The bar measures 170mm long and has a width of 20mm, so, with a fabric pouch attached, it would not have been a dainty coin purse but a more substantial bag, similar in dimensions to a modern clutch bag, in which one could easily store documents such as letters and seal matrices, just as the unlucky

[20] Copper alloy purse frame, London, Museum of London, A27396 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/32423.html.
[21] Copper alloy purse frame, London, Museum of London, 4487 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/32381.html has had modern fabric attached to show how the complete purse would have been constructed. Two loops of metal would have been attached to the ends of the bar, creating a hinged lid with which the purse could be opened and closed. The fabric was affixed to the bar, onto the two tabs which each have three holes, and around the metal loops to create a pouch.
[22] There were ways of affixing the fabric with wire attached to the loops so that portions of the metal loops were also visible and occasionally these parts were inscribed as well as the top bar. See identity numbers: 87.77/6; 2003.50.

merchant Luigi discussed in Chapter One had done.[23] Each side of the metal bar has a notch that would have been attached to metal loops, one larger than the other; these were covered in fabric to form a pouch and hinged lid that closed over the top, securing the items inside against casual theft when worn in the street.[24] Purses with metal frames such as this became increasingly popular in England in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[25] However, evidence of the purse-making industry and finds from archaeological sites indicate that most Londoners used purses made of leather or linen with draw-string, or lid closures, an essential item as a precursor to the integrated pocket.

This weighty piece of solid metal at first seems a less intimately personal object than the tiny spoon discussed above, that was clutched tight to the hand of the owner. Its inscription in inky-black, inlaid letters against a bright, brassy background, has a dramatic quality that make the other inscriptions, by contrast, appear discreet. But, considered in the context of how this purse would have been used, its epigraph is not easily legible to casual viewers. When worn dangling from a girdle, as was the fashion, only half of the inscription is visible, the other half being obscured against the owner's body. Rather than conforming to conventions of word separation, order or visibility, the words have once more been divided numerically in order to fit evenly on the available space on the bar. Read from left to right, six letters adorn the left-hand side of the central boss ('OMATER'), then six letters on the right-hand side ('DEI MEM'), then on the reverse there are again six letters on the left-hand side ('ENTO ME'), and the remaining five on the right side of the boss ('I AMEN'). This numerical division of letters also corresponds to syllables, with three syllables per section. But, even though the incription's presentation would make the verse easy to enunciate, the words 'memento' and 'mei' have, as a result, been

[23] An average size for a metal seal matrix might have a diameter of 25-30mm. The portion of the seal die on which the engraved matrix was mounted might have an average height of approximately 30mm.
[24] More complete examples show how the purse was constructed see purse frames, London, Museum of London, 4494; 79.327/1, 4479.
[25] Egan and Pritchard, *Dress Accessories,* 342-357.

completely bisected, suggesting that the inscription was only intended to be understood by the person holding the purse, who could turn it around to continue the inscription.

There is a tension inherent in the purpose of this object between showiness and secrecy. The inscription is half-hidden, yet it has been fashioned on a relatively large scale and with the most eye-catching method of epigraphy available in metal, one that is uniquely capable of utilising colour. The front of the frame has 'IHS' inscribed on its central boss. These capitals have been designed with flourishes that mark them out from the rest of the inscription. The ascender of the 'H' branches above the right hand side of the letter and the 'I'; its right foot extends down, twisting into a forked tail below the 'S'. The monogram is also larger than the other letter-forms in the inscription, giving it a greater visual impact than the other letters. The 'M' for 'Maria', on the reverse of this boss, is similarly larger than the letters on either side of it, and also has decorative details. These are in the form of several small round studs that have been fitted symmetrically in the centre of the letter and on its two outer limbs. The effect of these has been obscured slightly by some scratching that has damaged the surface of the 'M', but their presence reveals that as much care was taken with this side as the other, indicating that one side was not intended to be seen to a greater extent than the other. From the numerous examples of metal purse frames from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries found in London, it is clear that these were often luxurious, even ostentatious accessories. One in the British Museum shows extraordinary architectural openwork, with rosettes, tracery, arches, and towers in cast in miniature.[26] Several examples at the Museum of London also reveal that religious inscriptions were a popular choice for these objects.[27] The fact that prayer inscriptions and architectural decorative elements are common on metal purse frames suggests a tradition of visually drawing a parallel between these objects and ecclesiastical liminal spaces. In a medieval church,

[26] Purse frame, London, British Museum, 1998,1001.1 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1998-1001-1.
[27] Purse frames London, Museum of London, 2003.50; 50.2/76; A17930.

doorways often had prayers carved above them, marking the boundary between terrestrial and spiritual space.[28] Inscriptions on purse frames are similarly placed on openings to navigate between the public dress accessory and its private contents. The protective words placed on the opening of this purse at once act as a gatekeeper for personal wealth, while also giving a moral dimension to the transactions in which it was used, in a similar way to the spoon handle inscription discussed earlier. In the owner's hands, these metal letters communicated reassurance when they used their purse in their material or commercial life. This reassurance is partly security-driven, but also conveys a sense of their own righteousness to the purse-owner in the business they carried out, perhaps even the charity they enacted.

So, the inscription on this purse frame interacts with expectations of protection and the demarcation of boundaries. It also plays with the idea of agency, as the inscription asks to be watched over from the perspective of the object itself, with its use of 'ME'. There is evidence that the purse in medieval London was not merely a functional proto-pocket or an excuse for showy decoration. Purses were themselves symbols, demonstrated by the survival of several little pewter purse badges and charms that have been uncovered from London.[29] These objects were imbued with meaning because they were used at moments of uncertainty and risk, but also generosity and celebration. Purses seem to have had a character of their own in the medieval mind. The idea of a purse having agency, even personality, is famously expressed in Chaucer's poem in which he anthropomorphised his purse, addressing a complaint to it as if it were a fickle lover.[30] Where Chaucer speaks to his purse in supplication, the inscription on this purse frame casts the purse as the petitioning party. It removes the undignified concern for material

[28] Eastmond, 'Textual Icons: Viewing Inscriptions in Medieval Georgia', p. 84; For en in-depth study of door inscription on Romanesque churches see, Calvin B. Kendall, *The Allegory of the Church : Romanesque Portals and Their Verse Inscriptions* (Toronto. 1998). This book includes a catalogue portal inscription that include invocations to the Virgin, 212-213.
[29] Six distinct designs are listed in the catalogue in, Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs,* 313-318.
[30] John Burrow, 'Chaucer as Petitioner: Three Poems', *The Chaucer Review*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (2011), 349-356.

possessions from its owner, just as Chaucer spared his patron 'any unduly direct or persistent pressure' by playfully beseeching an inanimate possession, diffusing a delicate subject matter with humour.[31] An inscription that gives speech to an object reflects a perception that attributes to it symbolic meaning as well as functionality.

Diptych

The next item to be discussed plays with imagery and form to contribute to the purpose of the object, rather than seek to define or comment on its use. A mudlarking find, now in the British Museum, activates the relationship between text and image in just this manner, its inscription playing on both the object and its imagery.[32] It is a diptych or shallow container in lead, measuring 43mm by 42mm, made of two recessed halves fixed together with a hinge and closure (figures 5.04 and 5.05).[33] On the outside of one of the halves is depicted the Virgin and Child in shallow relief, her long veil and robes flowing down to partially shelter the infant Christ. The background behind the two figures is cross-hatched, and around the image is a border with flowers punctuating its four corners, as well as the textura inscription, 'ave maria gratia plena dominus tecum benedicta' (hail Mary full of Grace the Lord is with you, blessed [art thou among women]). Unusually, judging by the orientation of the central figures, the inscription begins at the bottom right-hand corner of the border before making its progress clockwise around the outside of the image. On the other half of the object is an image of a nimbed St John the Baptist holding a lamb, depicted in a strikingly similar attitude to the holy family depicted on the other side. Again there is a border, with quatrefoils at the corners, and an

[31] Burrow, 'Chaucer as Petitioner: Three Poems', 350.
[32] Lead alloy diptych, London, British Museum, 1852, 0616.1, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1852-0616-1.
[33] The hinge pin survives but there is not a second closure pin. It design means that the object could be opened and closed freely by its owner.

inscription reading clockwise, this time from upper left: ‘agnus dei qui tollis peccata mundi don no pa’, (Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, grant us peace). The inside of the diptych has been damaged to the extent that what it depicted, and what materials were employed, can only be speculated. Crucially, this object cannot be identified simply as an empty container due to the presence of a partial thin layer of worked gold affixed to both halves of the interior. The half on the reverse of the Virgin and Child image has a larger fragment of gold remaining. This has a lined checkerboard pattern pressed onto its surface with a suggestion of a foreground shape sweeping towards the bottom right-hand corner. Two other fragmentary layers can be discerned that rest above the gold layer—perhaps resin, glass, or adhesive—that do not give an indication of any imagery or decoration they once formed.

The figures of the Virgin and John the Baptist are striking in their similarities. The link between the lamb and the child could not be made more plainly: both are nimbed and placed on the right-hand side of the frame, looking up at the face of the figure carrying them. The equivalence created between lamb and child is underlined by the inscription, in both its choice of content and its design. The epigraph surrounding the John the Baptist image is a liturgical quotation, part of which quotes the reported speech of John the Baptist from John 1:29, *Ecce Agnus Dei qui tollit peccata mundi* (behold the Lamb of God who takes way the sins of the world). The other inscription around the Virgin and Child starts at the opposite corner of the panel to the John the Baptist epigraph. Otherwise, its placement, the size of its letter-forms, and its overall length mean that its aspect matches the other inscription. It also starts with an exclamation *Ave*, quoting the words of the Archangel Gabriel to Mary at the Annunciation. This quotation had also become familiar through use in the tradition of worship, used as a prayer invoking the Virgin. The overall effect of the images and inscriptions succinctly tell a story of incarnation and salvation. One side heralds the miraculous birth of Christ, the other alludes to his death and its significance. The inscriptions start at different positions in the frame, conveying the sense that the images and words are depicting two stages in the same narrative. Nevertheless,

they are visually linked together by the similarities of the overall composition of which they are part.

What, then, is the purpose of this object, and what part does its inscription play in it? I have suggested that it is a diptych, contrary to its identification in the British Museum catalogue as a 'pilgrim badge; tablet case', and its description's assertion that it is 'in the form of a miniature writing tablet'. Although its codexical structure and prominent textura inscriptions makes it tempting to view this object as a miniature book, its size makes this unlikely. Most surviving tablet cases are made of ivory, bone, or wood. While they are small objects, none among the examples at the British Museum or the Museum of London have a height smaller than 60mm.[34] Having ascertained what this object is not, then, there are a number of elements that can be taken to support my identification of this object as a diptych. Its size, the positioning and content of its inscription, the matching compositions of its surviving outer images, are similar to a silver, gold, and enamel diptych in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum (figure 5.06).[35] It is a comparable size to the lead alloy diptych at 40mm high and 60mm wide. The exterior of this diptych also has John the Baptist on one side, with the other half depicting John the Evangelist holding a feather in one hand and ink well in the other. Similarly to the lead diptych, these images are accompanied by textura inscriptions. The inscription on the John the Baptist half starts with the word 'baptist' above the image and then, clockwise, quotes John 1:6, 'fuit homo missus a deo cui nom' erat jon'es' (there was a man sent from God whose name was John). The Evangelist panel has the abbreviated inscription 'eang' (Evangelist) above the image and another clockwise inscription that quotes John 1:14, 'et uerbum caro factum est habitauit

[34] For example an ivory writing tablet, London, British Museum, 1893,0901.1 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1893-0901-1 measures 81 by 53mm. At the Museum of London a wooden tablet measures 73 by 40mm, another bone tablet measures 69 by 48mm, a leather case for holding multiple tablets is 75 by 64mm. Writing tablet, London, Museum of London, 10890 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/36048.html; writing tablet A4725, https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/36052.html; leather tablet case 92.69 https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/38048.html.

[35] Diptych, London, Victoria & Albert Museum, 212-874 https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O105312/diptych-unknown/.

nobis' (and the word was made flesh and lived among us). On the inside of this diptych are two elaborate scenes, with three-dimensional gilded figures and tracery set against a colourful, though partially damaged, enamel background.

Pocket-sized diptychs were popular in the later Middle Ages, with other examples in metal surviving in museum collections.[36] It has been acknowledged by scholars who analyse them that it is difficult to conclude with certainty how these objects were used by their owners because of a lack of pictorial or documentary evidence.[37] Where domestic diptychs are depicted in manuscript miniatures, they hang from bed drapery, or sit on small altars in front of which their owners kneel in prayer. Some surviving examples on the scale of the two diptychs mentioned here have loops incorporated into their designs, so that they can be attached to something, or even someone's clothing.[38] Neither the lead alloy nor the silver gilt examples have loops, suggesting that they were not worn or affixed to anything, but placed on something, their hinged structures making it possible to stand them up when opened.[39]

The association made between these two images on the lead alloy diptych demonstrates the same logics as that of the silver gilt example. The form of a diptych presents an opportunity to construct a mutually enriching dialogue between two images. Both use parallelism, retaining a unified structure for each panel but presenting different subjects and contents. By doing this, the two images engage their viewer with similarities and differences. There is not symmetry, but

[36] The Victoria & Albert Museum has a number of small metal diptychs, for example, London, Victoria & Albert Museum, 215-1874 https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O145014/diptych-unknown/ ; 214-1874 https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O33734/diptych-unknown/ ; 14-1873 https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O16627/pendant-diptych-unknown/.
[37] Laura D. Gelfand, 'Devotion, Imitation, and Social Aspirations: Fifteenth-Century Bruges and a Memling School Madonna and Child', *Cleveland Studies in the History of Art*, Vol. 5 (2000), 6.
[38] For example an enamel diptych, London, Victoria & Albert Museum, 214-1874, https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O33734/diptych-unknown/ ; gold diptych, London, Victoria & Albert Museum, 14-1873 https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O16627/pendant-diptych-unknown/.
[39] Another example also does not have built-in loops but does have a leather case with wire straps in which it could be carried. Enamel diptych, New York, Metropolitan Museum, 17.190.2097a, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/464171.

replication in these images. Images, inscription, and object conspire together to playfully initiate contemplation.

Mirror Case

Symmetry characterizes the playfulness of the next inscription, aptly, because it appears on a round openwork case consisting of two identical hinged halves that would have contained a mirror.[40] Each half of the mirror case is only 34.5mm in diameter, and much of this space on either side is taken up by two identically cast openwork renderings of the Crucifixion, with the grieving figures of the Virgin and St John flanking a slightly enlarged Christ. Above the cross, a sun and moon hang in the sky in a celestial response to the event. Unlike the prominent inscriptions on the purse frame and spoon handle, that expand to fill their fields, the inscription on this piece is much more subtle, blending in to the border of creeping vines which frames the scene. The inscription '+IE⌒Λ⌒' (Jesus) tumbles down half of the right-hand side of the border with branches sprouting and tangling after it (figures 5.07 and 5,08). Glass fragments found with this mirror case indicate that it would have contained a glass mirror.[41] In the early Middle Ages, Europeans used highly polished metal to see their reflection, but by the thirteenth century glass mirrors were available.[42] The process of manufacture limited the maximum size of glass mirrors during this period to that of 'a small tea saucer'.[43] These mirrors were convex, as the fabrication of flat glass mirrors was not perfected until the Early Modern period.[44] A number of extant

[40] Lead alloy mirror case, London, Museum of London, BWB83[130]<257>.
[41] Egan and Prichard, *Dress Accessories,* 361.
[42] Sara J. Schechner, 'Between Knowing and Seeing: Mirrors and Their Imperfections in the Renaissance', *Early Science and Medicine*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2005), 145. Schechner offers details on the materiality of medieval mirrors including the materials and processes of making glass mirrors in the Middle Ages.
[43] Sabine Melchior-Bonnet *The Mirror: A History*, trans. Katherine H. Jewett (New York, 2001), 13.
[44] Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: a History*, 15.

mirror cases of similar dimensions show that these were common objects during the Middle Ages, and were decorated in a variety of different ways.[45]

Unusually for a circular inscription, the letters do not seem to share an orientation, with the 'I' and 'E' represented as one might expect while, relative to these letters, the first 'S' is rotated 90 degrees (clockwise or anticlockwise is impossible to tell), the 'V' is upside-down and the final 'S' is reversed and has also been rotated 90 degrees. The final three letters are larger than the first two, owing to the fact that the 'S's have more space to extend when on their sides in the narrow border. The final three letters also create a symmetrical image. The final 'S' seems to have been transformed into its mirror image after passing through the 'V' which itself, in being turned upside-down, has been transformed in the Greek alpha symbol. As with many objects from this thesis, it is easy to read the manipulation of the word 'IESVS' in simplistic terms as a blunder symptomatic of the maker's ignorance of letters. Yet, once more, I argue this is far from the case. Marcia Kupfer, Benjamin Saltzman, and Ilene Forsyth have all produced work on materials that have previously been seen as mistakes by scholars but proven that their presentation is deliberate and adds to their meaning.[46] The work of these scholars has changed the way in which we must approach characteristics that we might assume to be erroneous. As I put forward earlier in this thesis, creating metal letters is distinct from 'writing'. This inscription is an example of a maker using letter-forms in a composition to convey meaning beyond the word that they spell out. By using the context of word play in the Middle Ages, and by analysing the additional imagery on the mirror case, I will argue that the way in which this inscription was written was a design choice.

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[45] For example, there is an example found in Perth with an openwork scene from the romance Tristram and Iseult see, Mark A. Hall and D. D. R. Owen, 'A Tristram and Iseult Mirror-Case from Perth: Reflections on the Production and Consumption of Romance Culture', *Tayside and Fife Archaeological Journal*, Vol. 4 (1998), 150-165; for more information on small mirrors with metal cases during the Middle Ages see,. Hinton, *Gold and Gilt, Pots and Pins*, 211-212.

[46] Kupfer, *Art and Optics in the Hereford Map*; Benjamin A. Saltzman, 'Vt hkskdkxt: Early Medieval Cryptography, Textual Errors and Scribal Agency', *Speculum*, 93/4 (October, 2018), 975-1009; Forsyth, 'Word-play in the Cloister at Moissac', 154-178.

Revisiting the position of Favreau mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, that architectural epigraphic word play was beyond the intellectual reach of most onlookers, the mirror's inscription presents a playfulness that is characteristic of small scale inscriptions; it does not demand specific knowledge from its viewers. The symmetrical motif created by the manipulation of 'SVS' is pleasing on a superficial level, even without a knowledge of letter-forms. Inscribing letters in a way that deviates from their traditional form, such as changing their orientation, or writing in a non-linear arrangement, is sometimes taken as a sign of 'illiteracy', suspending further discussion. Ilene Forsyth found that this was the case for the capital inscriptions at Moissac Abbey, prompting her to look at them more closely. She found that boredom was acknowledged as a serious problem among religious orders and suggests that, by incorporating word-play into the design of the cloister, monks might be able to stimulate their minds but trying to solve these puzzles.[47] Significantly for this study, Forsyth's work indicated that the practice of reversing letters could be found even in inscriptions created by, and aimed at, a highly literate group.[48]

So, if this inscription can be taken as a playful puzzle, what does it mean? To understand this, I will now turn to the mirror case itself and its other imagery to argue that biblical allusions to mirrors, which link them to both truth and mystery, make the Crucifixion an apt accompaniment for a mirror, an idea emphasized by the playful marginal epigraph.[49] This is not a unique example of the Crucifixion being depicted on a small metal mirror in medieval Northern Europe. There are others made from different moulds in the Museum of London

[47] Forsyth, 'Word-play in the Cloister at Moissac', 167, 171.
[48] Forsyth, 'Word-play in the Cloister at Moissac', 177.
[49] Literary scholars have pointed to a plethora of meanings associated with the mirror in the Middle Ages, both sacred and secular, virtuous and depraved. For a comprehensive survey of the use of mirror metaphors in the literature of the Middle Ages see Herbert Grabes, *The Mutable Glass: Mirror-imagery in titles and texts of the Middle Ages and the English Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1982) I am less interested in the secular uses of the imagery of mirrors, which tend to focus on the conduct of political leaders, than I am in religious, introspective mirrors. For mirrors and civic life see the above and Kristie S. Fleckenstein, 'Decorous Spectacle: Mirrors, Manners and Ars Dictaminis in Late Medieval Civic Engagement', *Rhetoric Review*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2009) especially, 119.

Archaeological Archive and found during an excavation in Cambridge.[50] In symbolising the freeing of mankind from original sin, the Crucifixion on a mirror case might remind the owner of how they should be, inspiring self-reflection:

> *Quia si quis auditor est verbi et non factor, hic conparabitur viro consideranti vultum nativitatis suae in speculo. Consideravit enim se et abiit et statim oblitus est qualis fuerit.*
>
> For if a man be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he shall be compared to a man beholding his natural countenance in a [mirror]. For he beheld himself and went his way and presumably forgot what manner of man he was. [51]

In these verses from the Epistle of St James, the mirror reflects truth. Scripture here is likened to a mirror, a reflection of human nature but also a glimpse of the divine that exemplifies how humans ought to be. The man sees himself as he really is and gains (but then forgets) the knowledge of how he should be, and thus how he can improve himself. Mirrors were often linked to the idea of self-knowledge in medieval religious writing.[52] In this way, mirrors were linked to the pursuit of morally correct behaviour, with mirrors featuring heavily in medieval writing as symbols of truth and faith.[53]

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[50] Egan and Pritchard, *Dress Accessories*, 361. The other example from the Museum of London Archaeological Archive is BWB83[313]<346>. For the Cambridge example see, Julia Park-Newman, Conservation Report, available online at https://dd5o9ssmlz8kk.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/cms/a/ACA_Conservation_Report_pilgrim_badge.pdf [accessed 09.03.2019].
[51] James 1:23-24. *The Vulgate Bible: Volume VI The New Testament*, London, ed. Angela M. Kinney, trans. Douay-Rheims (2013), 916-917. The word 'speculum' is glossed in this edition, as it usually is, as 'glass' but would be more accurately translated as 'mirror', as mirrors were more often made out of polished metal rather than glass.
[52] For example, mirrors were heavily used by St Augustine in his rule, Andrew Hofer, 'Looking in the Mirror of Augustine's Rule', *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 93, No. 1045 (2012), 263-275.
[53] Herbert Kessler, 'Speculum', *Speculum*, Vol. 86, No. 1 (2011), 2.

Placing this inscription and image on a mirror case is also a play on the idea of Christ being a moral example that the viewer of the mirror might strive to emulate. As an image of God in human form, it also reminds the viewer that humans are made in God's image and that Christ is the ultimate example of behaviour that Christians ought to strive for. This is also reflected in the design of the inscription itself. As well as manipulating the name 'IESVS' to create a symmetrical formulae, it also acts to create a sense of separation between 'JE' and 'SUS', which in medieval French would mean 'I am'. The mirror's user, then, is prompted to contemplate how they see themselves in the mirror within the case.

Conversely, mirrors were also associated with immoral behaviour, associated with pride and vanity.[54] In 1311, the bishop of London issued a statute warning against magical practices, including invoking spirits with mirrors.[55] The inscription therefore also acts to caution the owner that the way in which they see themselves in a mirror may not be all it seems. The inscription provides a demonstration of the way in which reflections distort images by reversing them. Another biblical allusion to mirrors treats them in the opposite manner to the former, emphasising that reflections are illusions that distort reality:

> *Videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem. Nunc cognosco ex parte, tunc autem cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum.*
>
> We see now through a [mirror] in a dark manner, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know even as I am known.[56]

[54] Hinton, *Gold and Gilt, Pots and Pins*, 211-212.
[55] *Registrum Radulphi Baldock, Gilberti Segrave, Ricardi Newport et Stephani Gravesend, episcoporum Londoniensium, 1304-38*, ed. R. C. Fowler (London, 1911), 144-145.
[56] I Corintians, 13:12. *The Vulgate Bible: Volume VI The New Testament*, London, ed. Angela M. Kinney, trans. Douay-Rheims (2013), 916-917. Again, I have altered the translation to read 'mirror' instead of 'glass'.

This verse juxtaposes looking at something through a mirror to seeing it face-to-face. Unlike the mirror in James 1:23–24, the reflections in this mirror are not all that they seem. The word 'enigmate' is glossed as 'darkly' but 'aenigma', or 'enigma', in medieval Latin refers to a puzzle.[57] The inscription does not conform to rules that usually govern inscriptions on round objects. The letters are not anchored by an imaginary gravitational force of the object's centre as is the case with inscriptions around medieval coins or seals. This inscription is the mirror's plaything. The name of Christ is undergoing a transformation. Here the viewer sees the crucifixion, part of the miracle of Christ's death and resurrection, but is reminded that they see it 'per speculum in enigmate'. It is at once both truth and mystery. Ultimately, although the mirror case's inscription is not integral to the object's active use, it is more subtly linked to its purpose. Unlike the epigraphs discussed above in this chapter, whose letter-forms have been conventionally formed and oriented, its meaning comes from its visually jarring presentation. It communicates with the viewer like a puzzle, deriving meaning from its interaction with the imagery that surrounds it, and the qualities of the object it encloses.

Whistle

The final object that will discussed in this chapter plays with the function and status of text in a way that most clearly addresses my point in the introduction that inscribed objects can make us question textual supremacy. A capital 'A' confidently starts an inscription along one face of a pewter whistle's hexagonal tube (figures 5.09 and 5.10).[58] The subsequent letters, 'VEAMR', reduce in size along the gently tapering object, and bunch together slightly towards the end, giving them a jaunty, lively quality. The letters are of a uniform style and have been

[57] Benjamin A. Saltzman, 'Vt hkskdkxt: Early Medieval Cryptography, Textual Errors and Scribal Agency', 977.
[58] Lead alloy whistle, London, Museum of London, TL74[2544]<unstratisfied>.

cast in relief. On the opposite face of the tube, the epigraph continues in a similar fashion but with tricolons to separate the words, 'IA⁝GRACA⁝PL', completing, albeit with abbreviation, the opening of the Latin prayer *Ave Maria Gracia Plena*. As the inscription's two parts are on opposite sides of the object, they cannot be viewed together at the same time. Reading along either part of the inscription, the viewer's eyes meet with those of a dragon that has been impaled on the end of the whistle. For all its ferocity, this is a bijou beast; the whole object is only 90mm long and 15mm at its widest point, fitting perfectly in the palm of your hand.

Unlike the inscriptions discussed above, this epigraph is neither the sole form of decoration on this object, nor is it hidden in a border. Rather, my proposition here is that the whistle's inscription is an integral yet blended part of its wider imagery. Unlike the example of the mirror case inscription, the whistle's letters do not comment on the figurative imagery of the dragon, but are nonetheless a defining feature of it. I will start by discussing the presentation of the whistle's inscription, then move on to consider a connection between dragons and prayer in medieval Northern Europe, arguing that despite their surface disconnect the whistle's epigraph is not intended to be taken separately from the image of the dragon. Instead, it fits into a tradition of dragons being defeated by prayer, transforming these metal words and their relationship to their metal monster.

The letters stand out boldly on the sturdy pewter artefact, whose weight gives the object a surprisingly luxurious feel when compared to other small pewter goods of its time. Like the metal letters on the spoon handle, the epigraph on the whistle is well executed with uniform letter-forms which also get smaller with the tapering of the object. The inscription has some idiosyncrasies in the way it has been composed. It reads 'AVEAMR' rather than 'AVEMAR', the 'M' and 'A' in *Maria* swapping places. Executing an inscription on such a small object would take careful planning and, again, there is a numerical pattern and logic to the way in which the words have been abbreviated. As has been mentioned above, the letters of the inscription have been divided; the first half consist of six letters, due to the space taken up by the

whistle's hole, and the second half, 'IA:GRACA:PL' have nine. The ability to contract the words of the inscription has allowed the maker the freedom to create a pleasing symmetry in the second half of the epigraph with its pattern of: two letters – separating dots – five letters – separating dots – two letters.

The interaction between the owner and the pious inscription seems at odds with their interaction with the playful, zoomorphic elements of the object, but these can be accounted for if we consider how the owner might have handled the whistle and how its designer might have allowed for this. The creature's head has a snout, sharp teeth, and a gaping mouth, while delicate cross-hatching along its neck and back creates the texture of scales. Clasped between its teeth, a tube protrudes from its jaws. If we continue to extend the object as an animal body, the inscription is thus positioned along the creature's sides, in place of its wings. If the creature's head dictates the correct way up for the whistle then the first half of the inscription is upside-down. However, if you take the top of the object to be the hole with the first six letters of the inscription and turn it anti-clockwise in your hand then the inscription can be read continuously the right way up. The careful consideration of how this object was used on the part of its designer has allowed them to create the sense of a rolling, looping phrase, rather than two disjointed halves experienced as separate moments. Presenting the inscription in this way also enabled the maker to have the second half of the inscription starting at the wide end of the whistle and finishing at the narrow end, so that both halves of the epigraph follow the same pattern of starting with large letters that gradually get smaller, which follows a logic that facilitates recognition of this common inscription.

While it is not easy to ascertain exactly the context in which the whistle was used, its sound should be acknowledged in this discussion, as well as its visual form. In research about a medieval whistle made from an ivory game piece found in France, the authors commented that it is difficult to establish with any certainty what the purpose of the object was because it could be

used for a variety of things such as hunting, sailing, or farming.[59] They surmise from the context in which the object was found, the latrines of a castle, that it could be a watch-whistle dropped by a soldier, or that it was used by one of the noble householders for hunting. Perhaps being made of base metal makes the latter possibility less likely, but ultimately the true use of this object would only be established if similar examples are found, but currently these types of objects are extremely rare.[60] The place in which the whistle discussed here was found does not discount any of its possible uses because, being a waterfront site in which land reclamation has occurred, it is not possible to link it with the activity of the specific spot on which it was found. Whatever its purpose, in blowing the whistle is the owner performing an act of prayer, giving voice to the inscription? Brian Spencer suggests that small whistles were sold as pilgrims' souvenirs and 'blown to keep the devil away'.[61] As we have seen in the previous chapter, bells were used with similar intent. The whistle, unlike a silent object, imposes itself upon the senses of those in its vicinity.

The choice of a dragon as the shape of this whistle does not reveal more about its original use. The dragon is a common and peculiarly complex image, a cross-cultural creation with diverse visual form and metaphorical meaning. For example, dragons in the Christian tradition are usually depicted as agents of evil—being synonymous with serpents—but can also

[59] Jean François Goret, Catherine Homo-Lechner, Monsieur François Poplin, 'Une Pièce d'échec en ivoire convertie en sifflet provenant de Château-Thierry (Aisne)', *Revue archéologique de Picardie*, No. 3 / 4 (1999), 201.
[60] Goret, Homo-Lechner, and Poplin, 'Une Pièce d'échec en ivoire convertie en sifflet provenant de Château-Thierry (Aisne)', 201.
[61] Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs,* 207.

be associated with positive attributes, such as healing.[62] While I will not go into a full detailed history of the dragon in medieval art here, it is necessary to consider medieval ideas and instances of dragons being associated with prayer.[63] The prayer inscribed here is, as we have seen, a familiar expression of Marian devotion, and invocation of her power to intercede between the human and the divine. Mary is sometimes depicted in the Middle Ages trampling a reptilian creature beneath her feet. The enmity between the serpent and womankind, the curse placed on the serpent by God in the Garden of Eden, is thus embodied by the woman who brought the saviour of humanity into the world standing on a writhing dragon.[64] On the whistle, the placing of this prayer clips the dragon's wings. It is a representation of triumph over original sin, the power of prayer to ask for the forgiveness of personal sin.

But the link between prayer and the vanquishing of dragons does not stop with Mary: it can also be traced through hagiographies of saints made popular during the early Middle Ages and which were still being circulated at the time when this whistle was made. Dragons are often depicted menacing saints in medieval art, representing an obstacle to be overcome, a foe to be vanquished. For a significant number of dragon-defeating saints, the power of prayer in taming

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[62] Serpents and dragons are widely accepted to be interchangeable in medieval culture: Herbert Kessler, 'Christ the Magic Dragon', *Gesta*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (2009), 123; Peregrine Horden, 'Disease, Dragons and Saints: The Management of Epidemics in the Dark Ages' in, *Epidemics and Ideas: Essays on the Historical Perception of Pestilence*, eds. Terence Ranger and Paul Slack (Cambridge, 1992), 59; Annette Reed, 'Blessing the Serpent and Treading on its Head: Marian Typology in the S. Marco Creation Cupola', *Gesta*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (2007), 46
The dragon is not only associated with evil, in Numbers 21:4-9 The story of the brazen serpent in which Moses creates the image of a serpent that can cure people of snake bites introduces the idea of something that looks one way but acts in another. John 3:14. This story is referred to in the New Testament where the serpent, because of its duel nature, is likened to Christ. Herbert Kessler has found that the image of the caladrius, a magical healing bird, became bound up with imagery of the brazen serpent in the thirteenth century. The caladrius was said to be able to heal people by absorbing their sickness into itself. Associations with a caladrius might explain why an object in this form would have appealed to the medieval owner or point to apotropaic function. Herbert Kessler, 'Christ the Magic Dragon', *Gesta*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (2009), 123.

[63] Sara Kuehn, *The Dragon in the Medieval East Christian and Islamic Art* (Leiden, 2011) captures the multifaceted nature of dragon iconography in the Middle Ages with dragons explored in terms of a multitude of different contexts from astrology to combat.

[64] Reed, 'Blessing the Serpent and Treading on its Head: Marian Typology in the S. Marco Creation Cupola', 46.

these monsters is much more explicit than in the case of the Virgin Mary. St Margaret, the Virgin martyr, was a popular saint in medieval England who was chiefly represented in visual culture in her dragon-slaying attitude, as opposed to her demon-slaying one.[65] It is interesting to note that, while her demon-slaying was a rather messy affair involving a hammer or mallet, her dragon slaying was more traditionally spiritual. In the most popular version of her legend she was eaten by a dragon and, by pressing a cross to its belly, she tore the creature apart from the inside. Of course, when a saint like Margaret slays a dragon, she is not just slaying a monster. Historians are fond of asserting the medieval belief in dragons but, that notwithstanding, dragons pitted against saints are a metaphor for evil, for original sin, and in the case of Margaret—a virgin martyr who had pledged herself to the Lord—the threat posed by her own body on her spiritual wellbeing. Prayers are such an effective way of taming dragons because the dragon poses a spiritual threat rather than a physical one. St Martha similarly follows this pattern of taming dragons with spirituality rather than brute force. For the cult of St Martha, being the sister of Mary Magdalene and Lazarus was simply not impressive enough in the early Middle Ages, and into her vita was written a feat of dragon taming.[66] The story is related that Martha was asked by a community to vanquish a dragon that had been eating its inhabitants. Brandishing a cross and showering the monster with holy water, Martha duly succeeded. Returning to the village, having bound him with her own girdle, Martha encouraged its people to perform a violent act of vigilante justice on the beast.[67] Male saints likewise did not always follow the example of the military might of St George to slay their monsters either. The early medieval Irish Saint Coemgen managed to vanquish a dragon by reciting hours and psalms,

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[65] Carole Hill, '"Here Be Dragons": The Cult of Margaret of Antioch and Strategies for Survival' in, *Art, Faith and Place in East Anglia: From Prehistory to Present*, eds. T. A. Heslop, Elizabeth Mellings and Margit Thøfner (Woodbridge, 2012), 105-106; Lois Drewer, 'Margaret of Antioch Demon-Slayer, East and West: The Iconography of the Predella of the Boston Mystic Marriage of St Catherine', *Gesta*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (1993), 11.

[66] Martha M. Daas, 'From Holy Hostess to Dragon Tamer: The Anomaly of Saint Martha', *Literature and Theology*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2008), 2.

[67] Daas, 'From Holy Hostess to Dragon Tamer: The Anomaly of Saint Martha', 15.

which it could not bear to hear. The creature confined itself to a small lake, where the locals would go and find that their ailments would be miraculously removed from them and flow into the lake to be absorbed by the defeated dragon.[68] Other examples of early medieval saints who used holy words to tame monsters include seventh-century bishop of Paris, St Marcellus. When a dragon ate the body of a woman who had recently been laid to rest, and threatened to terrorise the community, the saint approached the beast and 'began to pray and the monster, with bowed head, came to ask for pardon, its tail trailing'.[69] Like St Martha, St Marcellus also placed his stole around the now submissive monster's neck; St Abban, another Irish saint, subdued several monsters by invoking Christ and asking them in his name to desist in attacking the local populace.[70]

The stories of St Marcellus and St Martha are perhaps most pertinent to the inclusion of an epigraph in the depiction of the whistle's dragon. This little pewter dragon is adorned with holy words, in the same way that the dragons in the stories of Martha and Marcellus were tethered with the saints' clothes, their relics. The words branded on its sides also echo the holy water that subdued dragons, or the cross that split them in two. This inscription is not an aid to remember the words of a prayer, it is the force that is taming this pewter monster. The role of the dragon whistle's inscription can, therefore, be viewed not as disconnected image-text elements, but as a miniature depiction of the power of prayer over evil. Observe the beginning of the inscription: it is not upside-down but branded on a recumbent, defeated monster. And as a result, this epigraph is incorporated into part of a story depicted in pewter. Rather than a separate comment or an apotropaic inscription that happens to be on the form of a dragon, the imagery

[68] *Bathada Náem Nèrenn Lives of Irish Saints: Edited from the Original MSS. with Introductions, Translations, Notes, Glossary and Indexes, Vol. II*, ed. Charles Plummer (Oxford, 1968), 131.
[69] Venantius Fortunatus, 'Vita Sancti Marcelli', printed in Jaques le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago, 1980), 187.
[70] *Bathada Náem Nèrenn Lives of Irish Saints: Edited from the Original MSS. with Introductions, Translations, Notes, Glossary and Indexes,* ed. Plummer, 8.

and epigraph of this whistle must be taken together as an overall piece for its meaning to emerge.

. . .

The objects discussed above are examples of the versatility of metal letters in medieval visual culture. In analysing these letters on these overlooked active objects, their active roles may be discovered. They are not just seen but also touched, they can be powerful, they communicate directly and indirectly, inviting interpretation, while remaining so recognisable that they can be manipulated, adapted, and jumbled in a way that adds to, rather than detracts from, their meaning. Inscriptions have an advantage over words written on a page: their tactility gives them greater presence and power. Playing with letter forms allowed makers to give the inscription a greater meaning, without having to find room for more words. Sometimes, similarly to when in a picture direct speech is depicted as part of the image, inscriptions could also complete a figurative representation, rather than commenting on it like a separate caption. Metal letters were employed to communicate narratives but also participate in narratives with their owners, defining how they interact with an object. These objects are a display of composite communication that takes in several elements—not just the form of an object and its other imagery, but also societal connotations behind its use—to convey a complex of meaning.

Conclusion

Approaching metal letters encountered on everyday objects from medieval London, this thesis has attempted to answer the question quoted in its introduction posed by Hoccleve's commoner: 'why stant this word here?'[1] Through the small metal possessions it has discussed, a more intimate history of the city's inhabitants has emerged. Epigraphy in this context has been found to enact emotional states, from mediating presence and satisfying longing, to vouching for the trustworthiness of their owners. And in each example I have explored, metal letters have gone about this task differently. Some were designed only to be seen and understood by their recipient. Others were intended to broadcast publicity across communities and social borders. And in turn these objects conveyed their meaning with differing degrees of excitement: some shared meaning reluctantly, hidden within forms and processes of looking, while others are more insistent, drawing every opportunity from their surroundings to get their epigraphic point across.

In the introduction of this thesis, I said that by its end I would have revealed the value of these objects as a source for medieval London. In the preceding chapters, we have seen how these objects were worn and used by a diverse variety of London residents, some belonging to elite London families who made the city their home for generations, others whose presence there was brief but still made a mark on its material remains. In selecting examples of private epigraphy, I have placed base metal objects alongside precious pieces, allowing insights into owners of diverse social and economic backgrounds. Putting this corpus of previously overlooked small metal finds under firmer, art historical scrutiny, I have made the case that these under-studied objects represent an unexpected yet important

[1] Hoccleve, 'The Remonstrance Against Oldcastle' printed in, *Selections from Hoccleve*, ed. M. C. Seymour (Oxford, 1981), 65.

resource for developing our understanding of medieval material culture. As well as differing sentiments and approaches, the structure of this thesis has also highlighted the different audiences that such small-scale epigraphy could engage. Chapter Two took examples of personal connections, epigraphy helping to embellish substantive feelings of love, friendship, fealty, and religious devotion. Seal matrices discussed in the third chapter were more outward looking in their communication, metal letters aimed at a wider community. Inscription was a customary part of their design, and was much less free in its presentation as a result, compared with the metal letters of Chapter Two. In Chapter Four, pilgrim souvenir inscriptions showed how a metal letter's presentation could convey meaning to people across medieval Christendom, a broad reach carried on objects that may well have travelled far to end up in London. And in Chapter Five, a range of quotidian objects showed how ideas of epigraphic play could have been brought to each and every Londoner on the backs of simple, everyday metal objects.

Despite their enormous potential as a resource for understanding medieval material culture, metal letters and the objects which bear them are rarely the objects of study beyond catalogues of archaeological finds. In Chapters One and Two of this thesis, I set out the historiographical problems which I believe have led to this category of private metal epigraphy being all but ignored in the historical record. 'Mistakes' are a recurring theme in the perception of this corpus, but I have argued that such a term does not reflect the reality presented by these objects. After exploring intentionality and tradition in private epigraphy in Chapter Two of this thesis, idiosyncrasies such as reversed letters and misspellings do not represent oversights on the part of their maker. The word 'mistake' implies that these objects fail to achieve the effect that their maker was aiming for; the assumption that a maker of metal letters had the same priorities as a scribe is to mistake epigraphy for more traditional descriptions of formal 'writing'. In finding ways to circumvent the dominance of the manuscript letter, and resulting historical manuscript language, an approach has been developed and applied to case studies in Chapters Three, Four, and Five, asking instead that we acknowledge just how sophisticated the use of letters and words on these lowly metal objects could be.

Another of the contributions promised in the introduction of this thesis was the exploration of a broad spectrum of use of visual letters. The strategies for epigraphic design revealed in these objects, in which makers adapted letter-forms and their layout to more succinctly convey meaning, offer important insight into how letters were used outside of typical textual sources such as rolls and codices. Contrarily, it is precisely the unusual way in which private epigraphy uses graphic forms that have precluded it from being considered seriously in studies of medieval literacy. But broadening definitions of 'literacy' and 'illiteracy' within research on the subject has allowed me to argue for a reframing of metal letters within the context of medieval textuality, and uses of letters beyond manuscripts. Displayed in private epigraphy are relationships with text beyond educated elites and their book-buying habits. In this sense, the much replicated base-metal examples of small, texted metal objects are extremely valuable, for they offer a perspective on uses of letters that takes in levels of society usually excluded from these discussions. As such, these objects have been reworked to offer rare insights into communication with words by people who would not normally be described as 'literate' in the modern sense of the term. People who made and viewed metal letters in medieval London had different criteria for success or effectiveness than the narrow specifications of modern literate viewers. In short, as well as considering the visual presentation of letter-forms, I have found that metal letters must be viewed in the context of their surroundings. The situation of letters on objects with differing material qualities and active purposes is what ultimately contributes to their revived meaning.

Another aim of this thesis was to access these complex objects by using art historical methods to analyse their use of letter-forms. Viewing examples of private epigraphy as artistic objects, they have revealed insights into the interaction between epigraphy, form, function, and purpose. I did this by thinking about their communication as being subjective or situational, demanding an approach that takes into account their surrounding form, and the ways in which these objects were used and perceived by people in medieval London. More than anything, perhaps, this thesis argues for a shift in our focus as we move forward with developing the art history of medieval London. It has sought to

open up material that is private and small, rather than the large, public inscriptions that are usually the focus of such studies. In naming and classifying private epigraphy, a distinct category of lettered object has been developed. The artworks discussed here have often been the subject of investigations of imagery, or the habits of the medieval household, but their metal letters have not previously been the element that defines them. In using epigraphy as a unifying factor, new connections between different sub-categories of object have become apparent. Mediating presence is a theme that has been explored in the contexts of different kinds of objects, with metal letter-forms used to express both the authoritative and monumental. Speaking objects, whose epigraphs are composed in their voice, are represented throughout this corpus. And the magic of anthropomorphising through language has likewise been seen deployed in surprising and effective ways across a range of texted metal possessions.

In addition, as well as bringing together objects, I have advocated that stronger connections between makers and the products of their labours affords us a novel approach to these types of objects. Letter-makers using any media other than pen and ink are not analysed in relation to their outputs in the same way that scribes, particularly London scribes, have been. In approaching private epigraphy in a way that credits its makers with the level of agency attributed in the existing scholarship to scribes, these objects have revealed logics and traditions of expression that speak to a sophisticated interplay between text and form. This has been explored in case studies in Chapters 4 and 5, allowing communicative elements of individual pieces to emerge. Subjective communication employed by the makers of these objects could be read as obscurantism, but also, taken together with the form and purpose of an object, these letters do not seem evasive. They are arranged and manipulated to communicate with clarity, even to those whose reading skills were limited. These letter-forms convey meaning in their behaviour rather than just their content, the sophisticated work of sophisticated makers.

The final objective of this dissertation was to show how interdisciplinary methods could be used to better understand private epigraphic objects. Using diverse methods and sources to place them

in their geographical and chronological context has allowed me to reveal sophistication in their design. With such a wealth of source material surviving from London in the Middle Ages, my interdisciplinary approach to these small metal finds has been to analyse them in combination with more typical forms of documentary source in order to build a more robust picture of how these inscribed pieces actually operated in practice. This approach addressed the problem that small metal objects often seem dislocated from their owners and makers, answering this potential absence and anonymity with a sense of their context. In Chapter Three of this thesis, for instance, I suggested the motivations behind metal seal epigraphs and their interaction with motifs. In marrying extant seal matrices found in London with the remnants of the city's administrative documentation, the anonymity of base metal seals with generic inscription contents was challenged. Patterns revealed by putting these two sources in conversation with each other in turn revealed how people used seal matrices to participate in systems that rewarded particular constructions of identity. By invoking group identities in their seal motifs, Londoners relied not on their names for validation but rather on the networks to which they belonged. Grounding pilgrim souvenirs in the context of shrine promotion in the subsequent chapter, strategies of mass communication emerged. Metal letters evoked place and time, saintly narratives, and visual rhetorics of affiliation, while borrowing from other objects to imbue pilgrim signs with socially accepted significance from other aspects of material culture. In the final chapter of the thesis, understanding how Londoners interacted with everyday household possessions revealed the different roles inscriptions could perform in defining and commenting on the use of their object. Makers used these letter-forms to play with objects and their purposes, to create everyday objects that were engaging and appealing to their owners.

Finally, it is my hope that, in turn, this approach might contribute to the future framing of the field, employed to better understand similar artefacts beyond the context of medieval London. The geographical boundaries of this thesis allowed me to ground objects whose makers and owners are unknown in a specific location, but it also offers a glimpse of a landscape of private epigraphy beyond London still ripe for exploration in other European cities or more rural locales. The kinds of objects

discussed in this thesis are not widely published or promoted by museums in the way that monumental or elaborately precious objects tend to be, and as a result access to them has traditionally been limited. But important collections of similar objects certainly exist in collections across Europe and further afield, and the field of medieval material culture would be greatly enriched from their study.[2] Projects such as the Portable Antiquities Scheme online database is making objects like those studied here more accessible to researchers than ever before. Viewing this material through an art historical lens can expand the reach of studies in epigraphy and medieval textuality, and further refine the definition of private epigraphy and its characteristics.

[2] Annemarieke Willemsen, '"Man is a sack of muck girded in silver": Metal Decoration on Late-Medieval Leather Belts and Purses from the Netherlands', *Medieval Archaeology*, 56 (2012), 171-202. This article looks at material from the Mackenback Collection that includes medieval dress accessories uncovered from excavation in the Netherlands. Many of these pieces include inscriptions that could contribute significantly to developing the field of private epigraphy.

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