CHAPTER 6

BOOKS OWNED BY MARY

The previous chapters have all examined book dedications to Lady Margaret Beaufort and the six consorts of Henry VIII, Mary Tudor, and Philip II. This chapter moves away from dedications to the books that comprised Mary’s personal library. The following is a brief explanation of the books that were part of Mary’s personal collection, not including the dedicated books and manuscripts from the previous chapters which may have been in her personal collection as well. I do not claim that this chapter contains a comprehensive list, as many books have been lost over time and extant books may have changed owners and bindings over time so that they are no longer traceable to Mary. Also, I was not able to corroborate every book that other scholars have mentioned that Mary owned. This list will most likely be augmented as more books are discovered that she once owned. However, this chapter is the first and most comprehensive list of the all of the books in Mary’s personal library that exists thus far.

My account below suggests that the books that can be identified as having been owned by Mary reflect not only her love of beautiful objects, but also her conception of her role as a humanist queen. To do so, I have broken this chapter into two sections. First, I will explore the books in Mary’s collection that were bound by the so-called King Edward and Queen Mary Binder as having the strongest possibility of having belonged to Mary. Second, I will explicate all other books that are known to have been given to Mary, those that she inherited, and those with bindings (not by the King Edward and Queen Mary Binder) related to her. The books in Mary’s personal library reflect that once Mary’s formal education ended, so did most of her reading and ownership of humanist texts. Mary did not have nearly the interest in humanism and learning that her parents shared. Rather, the books that Mary collected and that were given to her were almost all religious in scope. I suggest that this pattern of ownership reflects Mary’s acknowledgment that as queen; understanding humanist

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texts was not nearly as important as encouraging reading and reflection on religious texts that promoted Catholicism. This chapter argues that the books that Mary personally chose as her own and got bound with her own imprint were primarily religious, as part of her self-definition as a religious queen who was going to restore true religion. Her interest in classics, while mild compared to her humanist upbringing, reinforced her religious position, as good Catholics were supposed to have a classical education.

While Mary was very interested in creating her own personal library, she was not as interested in making substantial additions to the Royal Library as Edward IV and Henry VII had been. On January 15, 1556, John Dee sent “A Supplication to Queen Mary” asking her for her permission to gather texts for a Royal Library. Wisely Dee linked the construction of a Royal Library with preservation of Catholicism, arguing that with the dissolution of religious houses many libraries had been disseminated and destroyed, but if quick work were made, many collections could be recovered and centralized. He devised a plan to recover and preserve these important collections, which would in turn build Mary a famous library. Mary’s role as queen would be reflected in a larger Royal Library.

Dee followed his supplication with five articles explaining how he would create a Royal Library at no cost to Queen Mary or any damage to her subjects. The first article explains that the queen should issue a commission to search for old books (or “monuments” as he calls them), the commission will borrow the books, copy them, and then the originals will be returned to their owners. The second article suggests that Cardinal Pole and the Synod should make allowance to cover the expenses of locating the monuments and copying them, including the presses and materials needed to copy the books. The third article states that the commission should be dispatched with speed so that more books may not be lost or hidden, so that the Synod has good faith that the efforts of the commission will work, and that the expenses of the project will have a good estimate. The fourth article offers that a place should be designated to send the books before they are copied and put in the Royal Library. The final article asks permission to find books that are in foreign libraries and recover them. No action was taken based on his supplication.

While Mary’s lack of action suggests an uninterest in moving knowledge outward or her not wanting to be seen as a source of learning, I think that Mary had a specific reason for not answering Dee’s supplication. As previously mentioned, Mary had a strategic plan for