

Codicological Clues to the Patronage of Stowe MS. 39: A Fifteenth-Century Illustrated Nun's Book in Middle English

Peter Kidd

British Library, Stowe MS. 39 is an illuminated manuscript of the first half of the fifteenth century, apparently written for a nun or nunnery in the north of England, whose primary contents are numerous diagrams, miniatures, and two Middle English texts: *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* and *The Desert of Religion*.¹ Manuscripts associated with women have become the focus of greatly increased interest in recent decades, as have 'text and image' studies of illuminated manuscripts, so manuscripts that may be studied from both perspectives might prove to be of particular interest.² Stowe MS. 39 also has the unusual distinction of having been owned by the man who cut down Shakespeare's famous mulberry tree and sold it for firewood.³ This brief note was inspired by a recent 'text and image' study that focuses on a double-page miniature in the manuscript and its unusual placement at the end, rather than the beginning, of the text to which it relates (fig. 1).⁴

The miniature depicts nuns engaged in various activities in an imaginary *Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, and the left-hand half of the double-page miniature is on the verso of the leaf that has the end of the text of *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, proving that the miniature was always in this position relative to its text. But there is evidence that the contents of the volume as a whole have been re-arranged at least twice in the past and it is necessary to reconstruct the original arrangement, as this will have implications for our understanding of various aspects of the manuscript, including its text-image relationships and its original patronage.

¹ A summary description of the manuscript, with further bibliography and images, is included in the online Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts (www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/); at the time of writing (February 2008) this description does not include a collation or a discussion of the original arrangement of the constituent parts of the volume. The textual contents are described in more detail in the *Catalogue of the Stowe Manuscripts in the British Museum*, vol. i (London, 1895), pp. 23–5; this description is also available, with minor OCR errors, as part of the online catalogue of manuscripts www.bl.uk/catalogues/manuscripts/. I am grateful to Michael Foster and Jessica Berenbeim who each read a draft of this article and suggested improvements.

² For example, Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago, 2007), p. 86, states 'Although the relationships among the three manuscripts of the *Desert of Religion* cannot be traced precisely, the question is made all the more intriguing by their common witness to several other text-and-image combinations.'

³ Folio 33 is inscribed 'The Gift of the Rev^d Mr Gastrell / Jan. 11 1756 to / Rich^d Greene Apothecary / Lichfield. 58 Pages'. The Rev. Mr Gastrell (not identified on the online Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts), who also had a house in Lichfield, acquired New Place, Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare's former home, in 1751, and cut down the tree in about 1757. In 1853 Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote a sonnet 'On the Site of a Mulberry-Tree, Planted by William Shakespeare, Felled by Rev. F. Gastrell'.

⁴ Kathleen L. Scott, *Tradition and Innovation in Later Medieval English Manuscripts* (London, 2007), chapter iii, 'The Unique Pictorial "Afterpiece" to the *Abbey of the Holy Ghost* in BL Stowe MS. 39' (pp. 61–86), provides a detailed description of the double-page miniature.

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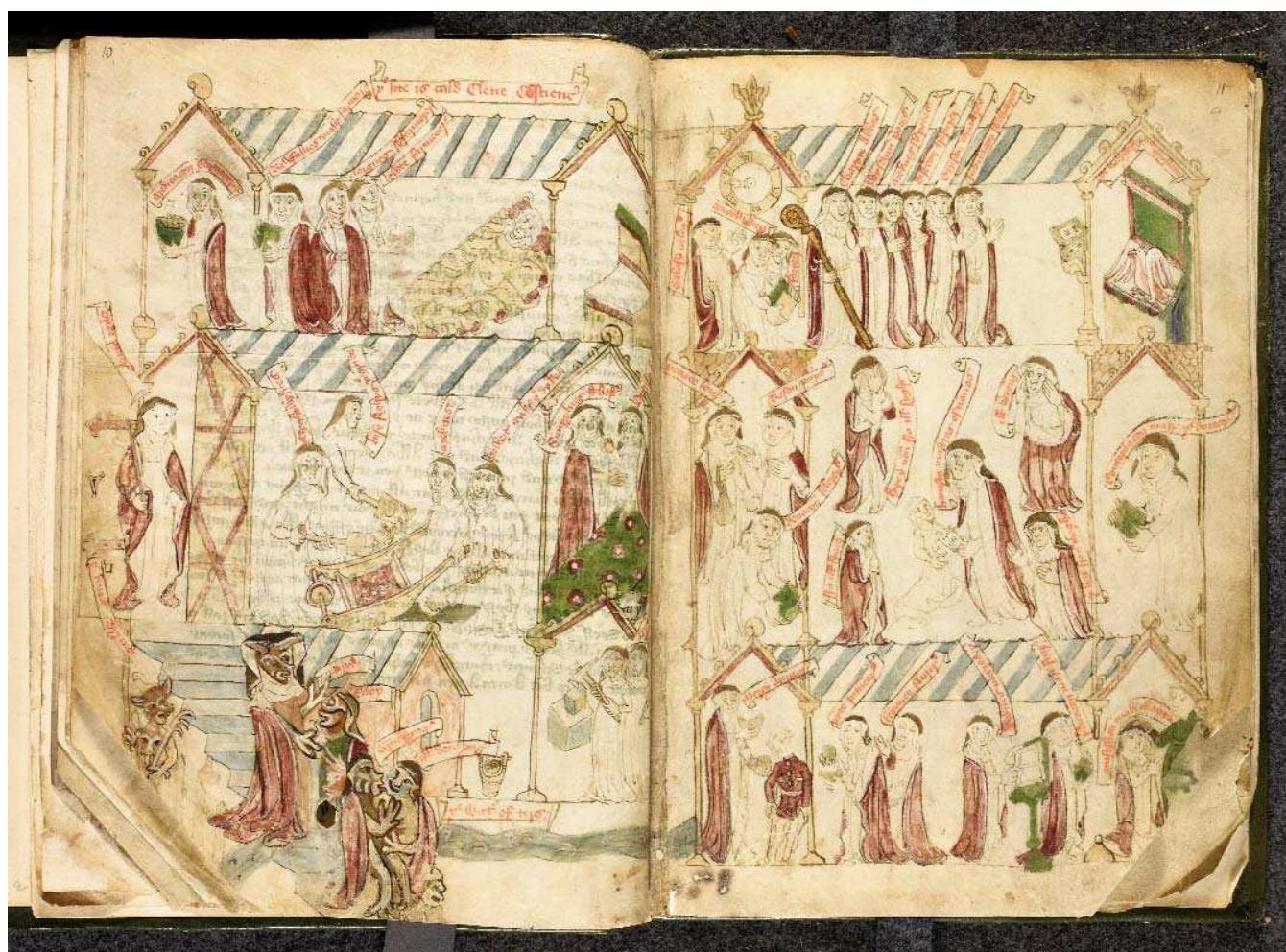


Fig. 1. Stowe MS. 39, ff. 8v-9r.

Original arrangement

The evidence for the reconstruction of the original arrangement is of four main types, which will be discussed in the following order: (i) the internal sense of each text; (ii) a former pagination; (iii) the hierarchy of decoration; and (iv) other physical evidence. But before doing this, it will be worth briefly setting out the contents of the volume as it is arranged at present:

1. (ff. 1r–3v) Flyleaves.⁵
2. (ff. 4r–9v) *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*⁶ (ff. 4r–8r), followed by a double-page miniature illustrating *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* (ff. 8v–9r); f. 9v is blank.
3. (ff. 10r–31v) Full-page miniature of the Virgin and Child, flanked by a kneeling nun and a heraldic shield (f. 10r), followed by *The Desert of Religion*⁷ with miniatures and full-page diagrams (ff. 10v–31v).
4. (f. 32r–v) Two miniatures, each with English verses: A Knight, a King, and an Archbishop, confronting a skeletal personification of Death (f. 32r),⁸ and 'The Debate for the Soul' (f. 32v).⁹
5. (ff. 33r–34v) Flyleaves.¹⁰

⁵ Folio [i] is an unfoliated 19th(?)–century paper flyleaf; ff. 1–2 are 18th(?)–century paper, with notes on ff. 1v–2r signed by Thomas Astle, dated 7 January 1768; f. 3 is a medieval(?) parchment flyleaf, inscribed on the recto with an 18th(?)–century title 'Sacro-Sancto Spiritus Mansio Coenobitica, virtutum & vitiorum arboribus Circumsepta.', and with the Stowe House shelfmark 'Press 3 N^o 26'. On Astle, see Nigel Ramsay, 'Astle, Thomas (1735–1803)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004); online edition www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/816.

⁶ Edited by C. Horstmann, *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole and his Followers*, 2 vols (London, 1895–6; reprinted, Woodbridge, 1999), vol. i, pp. 321–37; and more recently by N. F. Blake, *Middle English Religious Prose* (London, 1972), pp. 88–102; extensive further bibliography concerning this text is provided by Scott, *Tradition and Innovation*, pp. 163–4 n. 233 and by Julia Boffey, 'The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost and its Role in Manuscript Anthologies', *Yearbook of English Studies*, xxxiii (2003), pp. 120–30.

⁷ This text is known in only three manuscripts; the other two are BL, Cotton MS. Faustina B.vi, Part II (now bound separate from the rest of the volume), and BL, Additional MS. 37049; see *A New Index of Middle English Verse*, edited by Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards (London, 2005), no. 672. It is edited by Walter Hübner, 'The Desert of Religion. Mit dem Bilde des Richard Rolle of Hampole. Nach drei Handschriften zum erstenmal herausgegeben', *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, cxxvi (1911), pp. 58–74 and three unpaginated plates. The paper bifolia of Additional MS. 37049 have been separated into single leaves rendering the original collation uncertain, but the Cotton manuscript preserves its original arrangement: three quires of eight leaves each, of which the final leaf is a flyleaf.

⁸ Boffey and Edwards, op. cit., no. 1387; the verses from all three known manuscripts, in each of which they occur in a different order, are printed in Carleton Browne, *Religious Lyrics of the XVth Century* (Oxford, 1939), no. 158, pp. 248–50.

⁹ Boffey and Edwards, op. cit., no. 1834; the text is printed from Stowe MS. 39 by Karl Brunner, 'Mittelenglische Todesgedichte', *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen*, clxvii (1935), pp. 20–35, at p. 23.

¹⁰ Folio 34r–v is a paper sheet containing a 'Glossary to M^r Greene's Manuscript / A Religious piece made Sept^r. 1758 / [signed] T[homas] A[stle]'. Folio 33 is a parchment flyleaf, with inscriptions by Rev. Gastrell (quoted above) and Richard Greene: 'Lichfield 9 October 1767 / Sir / I beg your acceptance of this MSS [sic] / to enrich your collection. / [signed] Rich^d Greene / To / Thos Astle Esq^r.' (*pace* Scott, *Tradition and Innovation*, p. 64). It is followed by two unfoliated 19th(?)–century paper flyleaves. On Richard Greene, owner of a museum of curiosities and friend of Samuel Johnson, see Arthur Sherbo, 'Greene, Richard (1716–1793)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004); online edition: www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11417.

The text leaves within each main text are today in their correct order. Because the double-page miniature starts on the verso of the leaf on which the text ends, we know that ff. 4r–9v are all in the correct order. Likewise, the miniature of the nun kneeling before the Virgin and Child has the start of *The Desert of Religion* on its verso, so ff. 10r–31v are also demonstrably in their correct order. Unless we can ascertain the collation of the quires, however, it is not certain where f. 32 belongs in the volume (it could be a misplaced single leaf, for example), and whether *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* with its double-page miniature belongs where it is today, before *The Desert of Religion*, or after it.

In its present binding the collation is not confidently ascertainable only by looking for conjoint bifolia and for sewing-threads at the centre of each quire.¹¹ An eighteenth(?)-century ink pagination that plainly pre-dates the present binding and late nineteenth-century pencil foliation, however, provides clear clues as to the original quire structure. The present foliation, old pagination, and contents correspond to one another as follows:

Foliation	Pagination	No. of leaves	Contents
1–3	-	3	(flyleaves)
4–9	1–12	6	<i>The Abbey of the Holy Ghost</i>
10–16	45–58	7	<i>The Desert of Religion</i> (beginning)
17–24	29–44	8	<i>The Desert of Religion</i> (middle)
25–32	13–28	8	<i>The Desert of Religion</i> (end)
33–34	-	2	(flyleaves)

This pagination strongly suggests that the volume essentially consists of four quires; that in the eighteenth century they were in the sequence 1 (pp. 1–12), 4 (pp. 13–28), 3 (pp. 29–44), 2 (pp. 45–58); that the quire containing *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* and the double-page miniature is a self-contained unit of six leaves; and that *The Desert of Religion* was written on three quires of eight leaves each, of which one leaf is apparently missing at the beginning of the first quire (it cannot be missing from any other position in the quire).

The eighteenth-century arrangement would thus have been as follows, with *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* quire first in the volume, followed by the three quires of *The Desert of Religion* in reverse textual order:

Pagination	Foliation	Contents
1–12	4–9	<i>The Abbey of the Holy Ghost</i>
13–28	25–32	<i>The Desert of Religion</i> (end)
29–44	17–24	<i>The Desert of Religion</i> (middle)
45–58	10–16	<i>The Desert of Religion</i> (beginning)

Both the present arrangement and the eighteenth-century arrangement have *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* before *The Desert of Religion*, but the present hierarchy of decoration in the volume is not exactly what one would expect, which leads one to suspect that the intended order of the two main texts, and therefore also their associated images, may have been reversed. The first page of text (f. 4r) has a gold initial 'M' ('My dere syster ...') against a blue ground with white tracery, from which spindly foliate branches extend along the inner and upper margins (fig. 2). The double-page miniature that follows the text is painted in rather thin colours (fig. 1), unlike the thicker pigments used for all the other decoration in the volume, except for the diagrams in *The Desert of Religion*.¹² The full-page miniature of

¹¹ Sewing-threads are visible at the centre of quires between ff. 6 and 7, and between ff. 20 and 21. At the bottom edge of f. 16v is the cropped remnant of what looks like a post-medieval quire signature: as will be suggested below, this was originally the last verso of the first quire of the volume.

¹² *The Desert of Religion* is laid out with a text and an image (usually of a saint) on a verso, facing a recto with a full-page diagram of a stylized 'tree'; examples may be seen on the online Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts.

the nun kneeling before the Virgin and Child, which follows, is painted in much thicker, richer colours (fig. 5). The second main text starts on the verso of this miniature and, as on f. 4r, the scribe allowed a space four lines deep for the first initial 'E' ('Elongavi fugiens ...'); but, although the artist supplied a gold initial similar to that on f. 4r, he here supplied a two-sided border composed of considerably thicker and richer foliate and floral ornament (fig. 3).

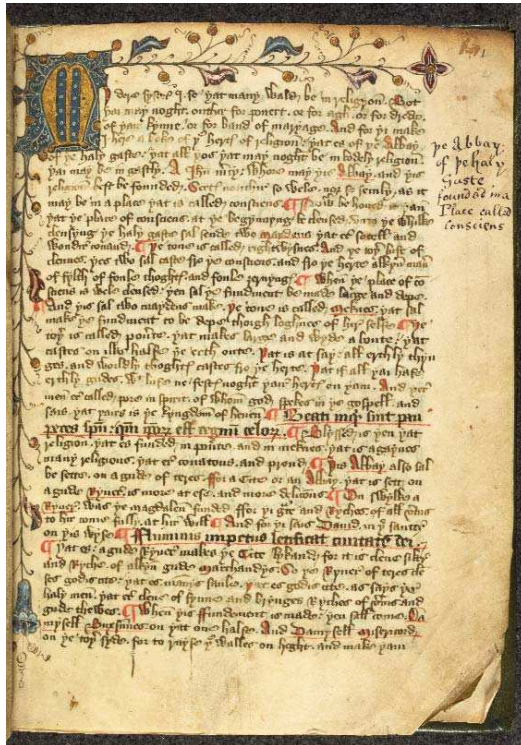


Fig. 2. Stowe MS. 39, f. 4r



Fig. 3. Stowe MS. 39, f. 10v

These are the only two such elaborate initials and borders in the volume: normally one would expect the richer display of decoration to occur at the beginning of the first main text, not at the beginning of a subsequent text.

Immediately after the double-page miniature, and facing the miniature of the nun kneeling before the Virgin and Child, is a blank page (ff. 9v–10r; figs 4 and 5).

This arrangement again suggests that the order of the two main texts has been reversed: if the two main texts are in their original order it would not have been necessary to leave a blank page here, and if the prominent heraldic shield relates to the original owner or commissioner of the volume, it would be normal for it to occur at the very start of the volume, rather than at the beginning of the second text.

Various forms of physical evidence confirm beyond reasonable doubt that the image on f. 10r and the text beginning on f. 10v were formerly at the beginning of the volume, preceding *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*. The upper outer corners of ff. 10–24 have suffered from rodent(?) damage, which can only realistically have been possible if these leaves were at the beginning or end of the volume, rather than in the middle (figs 3, 5).¹³ The lower fore-edge of f. 10 also has

¹³ The rodent(?) damage at these upper corners is not to be confused with the irregular lower outer corners throughout the volume: the latter are the irregular edges of the original sheets of parchment.



Fig. 4. Stowe MS. 39, f. 9v



Fig. 5. Stowe MS. 39, f. 10r

damage and rust-marks of a kind typically caused to the first leaf or leaves of a book by the metal clasp-fittings of a binding (fig. 5). In addition, the upper gutter corner of f. 32v, at present the last medieval leaf in the volume, has an offset of the blue pigment of the initial that is now on f. 4r, proving conclusively that f. 4r formerly followed and faced f. 32v (figs 6 and 7).

Another form of physical evidence adds weight to the suggestion that f. 9v was formerly at the very end of the volume: it bears the mark of a circular (metal?) object, about 125 mm in diameter, as if a tankard or candlestick has been placed on it (fig. 4). This could in theory have happened to a page within a volume left lying open, but is more likely to have happened to the last page of a closed volume without a binding.¹⁴

Offsets on f. 33v, a parchment flyleaf, correspond with the green of the halo of the Christ-child and one of the red diagonals of the red of the heraldic shield on f. 10r, strongly suggesting that what is now the back flyleaf was formerly at the very front of the volume, facing the miniature (fig. 8).¹⁵

¹⁴ That the volume was without a binding in the second half of the 19th century is suggested the fact that the bookplate of Richard Greene, now stuck to the front pastedown, appears to have been moved there from the middle of f. 3r, which bears slight traces of its previous position. There is also a pencil note which reads 'Green Morocco / Stowe Catal. 242' (f. 1v); 'Green Morocco' is doubtless an instruction to the binder, and 'Stowe Catal. 242' refers to the number assigned to the manuscript in the auction catalogue of the Stowe MSS drawn up in 1849 for their sale by the 2nd Duke of Buckingham and Chandos; the present number, 'MS. 39', was assigned between 1883, when the British Museum acquired the Stowe manuscripts, and 1895, when the British Museum catalogue was published. Charmaine Fagan of the BL's Department of Manuscripts kindly informs me that the volume was sent for (re?)binding on 1 May 1893: it may be that in the process of describing the manuscript for the 1895 catalogue it was realized that the quires of the *Desert of Religion* were out of sequence, and it was rebound to rectify this situation.

¹⁵ There also appears to be an offset from the upper part of the Virgin's halo. The verso of the leaf (fig. 3) suggests that both haloes and the Virgin's robe were all painted with an equally mordant pigment, so the reason for this partial offset is unclear.

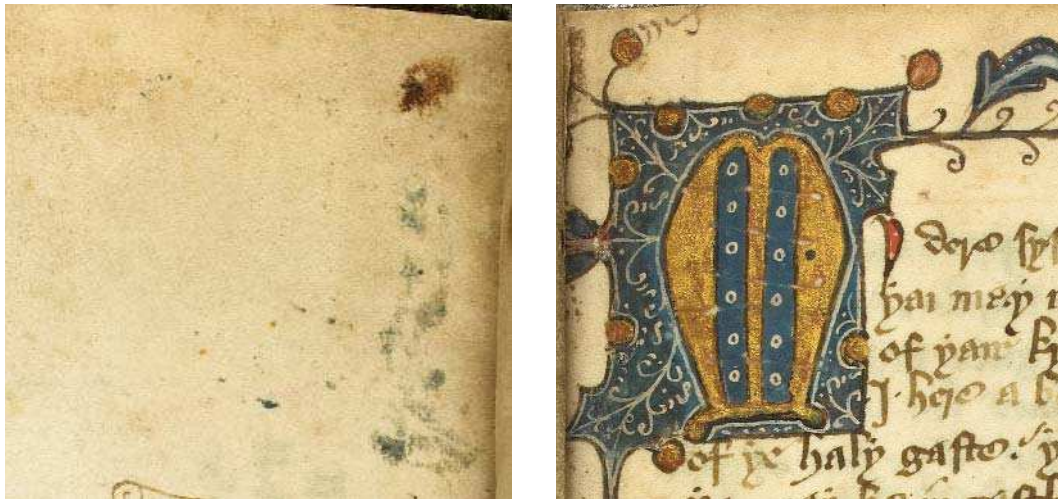


Fig. 6. Stowe MS. 39, details of ff. 32v, 4r

Folio 33 also has damage and rust-marks at the lower fore-edge (presumably from a clasp-fitting) that correspond to marks and damage of f. 10. Folio 33 is therefore presumably the 'missing' leaf from the first quire of the original volume (hypothesized above in the discussion of the collation), which currently consists of only seven, instead of the normal eight, leaves.¹⁶

We can therefore confidently propose that the volume was originally arranged as follows (flyleaves are omitted):

Quire 1 ^s (ff. 33, 10–16)	<i>The Desert of Religion</i> (beginning)
Quire 2 ^s (ff. 17–24)	<i>The Desert of Religion</i> (middle)
Quire 3 ^s (ff. 25–32)	<i>The Desert of Religion</i> (end)
Quire 4 ^b (ff. 4–9)	<i>The Abbey of the Holy Ghost</i>

In this arrangement the first leaf (f. 33) and the last page (f. 9v) were blank, which is entirely plausible.¹⁷

What, then, is the significance of these observations? First, all the evidence points to the fact that the full-page miniature of the Virgin and Child, with a kneeling nun on one side and a heraldic shield on the other, was originally the first page (not including flyleaves) in the volume. This makes it far more likely that the nun and the arms relate directly to the original patron and/or recipient of the volume, contrary to Francis Wormald's opinion that the arms are 'imaginary'.¹⁸ Another very strong and obvious reason to suppose that the heraldry is both 'real' and accurate is that the bright red pigment and the silver-coloured metal employed for the shield do not occur anywhere else in the manuscript – they are therefore doubtless very deliberate tinctures. Second, if the images on f. 32r and f. 32v originally preceded *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* text that begins on f. 4r, and were originally designed to do so, there are different juxtapositions to consider for the text-image

¹⁶ The inscriptions recording the gift of the manuscript from Gastrell to Greene, and from Greene to Astle, is now at the back of the volume at f. 33, but such inscriptions occur far more commonly on a front, not back, flyleaf.

¹⁷ It is not clear whether or not the flyleaf, now f. 3, is medieval, but patterns of mould suggest that it was formerly positioned at the very end of the volume, facing f. 9v.

¹⁸ This was Wormald's opinion according to A. I. Doyle, as reported to Scott (*Tradition and Innovation*, p. 165 n. 243). Scott, p. 164 n. 243, lists families who bore the arms, but apparently discounted the possibility of personal, rather than institutional, heraldry (see p. 61).

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Fig. 7. Stowe MS. 39, ff. 32v and 4r: reconstruction of their former appearance.



Fig. 8. Stowe MS. 39, ff. 33v and 10r: reconstruction of their former appearance.

relationships in the volume (e.g. see fig. 7). And third, if the double-page miniature following *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* (fig. 1) was originally at the very end of the volume, it increases the likelihood that this double-page miniature (painted in rather thin colours, it will be remembered) was an afterthought, intended to fill up two of the three available blank pages at the end of the volume, rather than part of a conscious premeditated design.¹⁹ the fact that no equivalent miniature exists in the other twenty-odd surviving copies of the text suggests that the artist may have simply been making a virtue of the blank leaves in this particular volume.²⁰

Patronage

If the image of a nun kneeling before the Virgin and Child — which can now be restored in the mind's eye to its original 'frontispiece' placement— was intended to represent the patron or first owner of the manuscript, it would be worth re-examining the evidence to ascertain what can be deduced about her. Some of what follows is speculation, but each piece of the hypothesis is based on probability and likelihood, and much of it already accepted in the published literature.

We can fairly safely propose that the manuscript was made for a nun.²¹ because of the prominent 'frontispiece' image of a nun kneeling before the Virgin Mary; because of the depiction of an abbey populated by nuns in the double-page miniature following *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*; and because this text is rather unusual in referring only to a female audience in its opening line ('My dere syster ...'), unlike most other copies of the text, which refer equally to men and women (Blake's edition begins 'My dere brether and syster ...').²²

It is very probable that the manuscript was made for this nun in Yorkshire. More precisely, the dialect of the text has been attributed to the West Riding of Yorkshire, and a west or north Yorkshire origin is supported by the evidence of the only two other surviving copies of *The Desert of Religion*. The dialect of BL, Cotton MS. Faustina B.vi, part II,²³ is 'northern' English,²⁴ and

¹⁹ Scott, *Tradition and Innovation*, observes that 'miniatures at the end of a text ... were, as a rule, not planned for that position' (p. 64).

²⁰ Boffey, 'The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost', demonstrates that in manuscripts *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost* usually follows immediately after *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*: it is therefore possible that the once-blank leaves following the *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* in Stowe MS. 39 were at one time intended to contain (the start of?) such a text.

²¹ It must be admitted that when originally composed in the fourteenth century, *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* was intended for a lay audience, but this does not preclude ownership of a copy by a nun.

²² Blake, op. cit., p. 89. The version in Harley MS. 2406 begins 'My dere brother and syster ...', while that in Egerton MS. 3245 (illustrated by Scott, *Tradition and Innovation*, fig. 57) begins 'My dere bryperin & systryn ...'. Scott, p. 167 n. 269, quotes three other similar incipits from manuscripts now in Cambridge. The text of the Stowe manuscript has been similarly altered in other places: at f. 7v the phrase 'A dere syster ...' occurs, while in Blake's edition (p. 100, line 304) this phrase is 'A dere brother and syster ...'.

²³ On which see Kathleen Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts 1390–1490*, 2 vols (London, 1996), no. 63. As has been mentioned above, the authorship of *The Desert of Religion* is attributed to a follower of Richard Rolle of Hampole, and images of Rolle appear in all three manuscripts, providing another link with Yorkshire. In his youth, Rolle's studies at Oxford were sponsored by Thomas Neville, archdeacon of Durham, one of the Nevilles of Raby.

²⁴ *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English*, [hereafter *LALME*] edited by Angus McIntosh and others, 4 vols (Aberdeen, 1986), vol. i, p. 116.

its miniatures include St Hilda (f. 21v), of Whitby in the far north of Yorkshire, a saint whose cult was not widespread.²⁵ The only other known copy of the text,²⁶ in the well-known anthology BL, Additional MS. 37049 is, like the Stowe manuscript, written in dialect attributed to the West Riding of Yorkshire.²⁷

The nun's costume in Stowe MS. 39, consisting of a buff-lined dark reddish-brown hooded cloak over a dark brown garment, does not accurately depict that of any normal religious order — this is perhaps unsurprising because the artist seems to have been working with a restricted palette primarily of green, blue, buff and reddish- or purplish-brown — but one can perhaps be reasonably confident that the artist was neither attempting to portray her in the white habit of a Cistercian, nor the black-and-white one of a Gilbertine; other orders, such as the Bridgettines, were not represented in Yorkshire.²⁸ The likelihood is therefore that she is intended to represent a Benedictine.²⁹

Devotion to the Virgin Mary was universal, but as no other saint is included in the frontispiece image,³⁰ it is perhaps probable that the nun belonged to a nunnery dedicated to her.³¹ Even if the visual evidence is equivocal, this is statistically likely in any case: of the twenty-six nunneries in early fifteenth-century Yorkshire, of all orders, at least twenty were dedicated to the Virgin,³² and of the ten or eleven Benedictine ones, six or seven were dedicated to her.³³ We can therefore tentatively hypothesize that the patron of the manuscript was a nun who belonged to a Benedictine abbey in Yorkshire dedicated to the Virgin Mary. As we have seen, evidence of the dialect and affiliations with other closely related manuscripts suggest that the abbey was in the West or North Riding.

²⁵ John B. Friedman, *Northern English Books, Owners, and Makers in the Late Middle Ages* (Syracuse, NY, 1995), p. 195, reporting the unpublished Ph.D. thesis of A. I. Doyle. The Cotton and Stowe manuscripts both include images of St Godric of Finchale (even further north, near Durham), at f. 16v and f. 24v, respectively.

²⁶ Additional MS. 37049 has been the subject of numerous detailed studies, most recently Brantley, *op. cit.*

²⁷ *LALME*, vol. i, p. 116. I am not aware of any evidence connecting any of the three copies with the East Riding, although it must be admitted that, according to *LALME*, there are at least two other hands in the Additional manuscript, one of which has a dialect of north-west Lincolnshire, the other of Nottinghamshire.

²⁸ Other ecclesiastical figures in the manuscript are apparently not painted with any attempt accurately to depict the correct colours of costume: they include green over grey-lined blue (f. 13v), buff-line blue (f. 15v), green with a blue veil (f. 17v), and blue lined with purple (f. 28v).

²⁹ This much has been proposed several times before, e.g. by Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, p. 193: 'B.L., Stowe 39, 1st to 2nd quarter of the fifteenth century, probably made for a Benedictine nunnery'. In fifteenth-century Yorkshire there were probably ten or eleven Benedictine nunneries (Arden, Marrick, Moxby, Nunburnholme, Nunkeeling, Nun Monkton, Thicket, Wilberfoss, Yedingham, York, and perhaps Fouckholme (but this may have died out at the Black Death); but only one Cluniac (Arthington) and one Gilbertine (Watton); the rest were Cistercian (Baysdale, Ellerton, Esholt, Kirklees, Hampole, Handale, Keldholme, Nun Appleton, Rosedale, Sinningsthaite, Swine, and Wykeham); see David Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses of England and Wales*, 2nd edition (London, 1971). The Gilbertine habit was a black ankle-length tunic, covered with a white cloak and hood.

³⁰ I am assuming that Christ is included in the image more as a symbol of Mary's motherhood than as a figure in his own right; I would expect Christ to be depicted as an adult if the artist had wanted to depict him as a individual, discrete from his mother.

³¹ This has been proposed before, e.g. by Scott, *Tradition and Innovation*, p. 61.

³² The following had other dedications: St Andrew's, Arden; St Stephen's, Fouckholme; Nunkeeling may have been dedicated to Mary Madgalene and Helen; four of the Cistercian houses had a double dedication: Sts Mary and Leonard, Esholt; Sts Mary and James, Kirklees; Sts Mary and John, Nun Appleton; and Sts Mary and Laurence, Rosedale.

³³ Marrick, Nunburnholme, Nun Monkton, Thicket, Wilberfoss, and Yedingham; Nunkeeling may have been dedicated to the Virgin Mary and St Helen, or to Mary Madgalene and Helen.

The arms, *argent* a saltire *gules*, prominently depicted at the same level as the nun, were borne by few families in England.³⁴ Most of the recorded individuals who bore these arms were members of the Neville of Hornby family.³⁵ Their primary seat was Hornby Castle in Lancashire, about ten miles north-east of Lancaster, within the diocese of York, and not far from the county boundary between Yorkshire and Lancashire.³⁶ There were no nunneries in Lancashire, and of the adjoining counties there were likewise none in Westmoreland and only two in Cumberland to the north; the only one in Shropshire to the south was Chester, about eighty miles away; the only one to the south-east in Derbyshire was Derby, about a hundred miles away; so geographically the closest nunneries to Hornby Castle were several in Yorkshire, including Marrick, Ellerton, Kirklees and Esholt, each about fifty miles to the east or north-east. Unsurprisingly, the Nevilles of Hornby owned various properties in Yorkshire,³⁷ and moreover Robert Neville of Hornby, who died in 1413, was MP for Yorkshire in 1377 and Sheriff of Yorkshire from 1378 to 1379.³⁸ If a member of the Neville of Hornby family became a nun, therefore, it would not be at all surprising if she joined a nunnery in Yorkshire. Indeed it might require explanation if she professed in a more distant county.³⁹

The only Benedictine nunnery dedicated to the Virgin in the West Riding was Nun Monkton, about five miles north-west of York,⁴⁰ and the only Benedictine nunnery dedicated to the Virgin in the North Riding of Yorkshire was Marrick,⁴¹ about forty-five miles north-west of York and, as has been mentioned, one of the geographically closest nunneries to the Neville of Hornby family seat at Hornby Castle.

³⁴ See J. W. Papworth and A. W. Morant, *An Alphabetical Dictionary of Coats of Arms Belonging to Families in Great Britain and Ireland ...* (London, 1874), p. 1057; Joseph Foster, *Some Feudal Coats of Arms* (London, 1902), re-printed as *Feudal Coats of Arms* (London, 1995), pp. 181–3.

³⁵ On the Nevilles of Hornby as possible patrons of an illuminated manuscript and for further bibliography, see Kathryn A. Smith, *Art, Identity, and Devotion in Fourteenth-Century England: Three Women and their Books of Hours* (London, 2003); for a discussion of their heraldry see p. 54 n. 99.

³⁶ Smith, op. cit., Map 5.

³⁷ Smith, op. cit., pp. 44, 45.

³⁸ The Alexander Neville who was Archbishop of York from 1374 to 1388, and the George Neville who was Archbishop of York from 1465 to 1476, were members of the Neville of Raby family, whose arms are the same as the Nevilles of Hornby but with the tinctures reversed.

³⁹ To fit the presumed date of the manuscript (the first to second quarter, or second quarter, of the fifteenth century according to Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, p. 193 and *Tradition and Innovation*, p. 61), the nun could have been a daughter or grand-daughter of Robert Neville de Hornby (d. 1413), mentioned above. He had six recorded sons: the eldest, also called Robert, married Margaret de la Pole, and they had three recorded children, including one son, Thomas, who had a daughter called Margaret (d. between 1413 and 1426); the offspring of the younger five sons are not recorded, but presumably there were one or more daughters, one of whom may have been the owner of Stowe MS. 39.

⁴⁰ Knowles and Hadcock, op. cit., pp. 254, 263; 'Houses of Benedictine nuns: Priory of Nun Monkton', *A History of the County of York*, vol. iii (London, 1974), pp. 122–3; although close to York, it was – like Marrick – in the archdeaconry of Richmond. The other nunneries in the West Riding were Esholt, Hampole, Kirklees, Nun Appleton, and Sinningthwaite (all Cistercian), and Arthington (Cluniac).

⁴¹ Knowles and Hadcock, op. cit., pp. 254, 261.

Further research may uncover a direct link between the Nevilles of Hornby and one or the other of these two nunneries at about the time that the Stowe manuscript was produced in the first half of the fifteenth century; but at present only uncertain clues have been found.⁴²

⁴² John Burton, *Monasticon Eboracense and the Ecclesiastical History of Yorkshire ...* (London, 1758), p. 87, records: 'Henry de Nevil, in a charter of his giving lands to Marton Priory, says, he gave to God and the Canons of Marton all his manors of Wood-houses, except two ox-gangs of land in Appletreewic, which he intends to give to the Nuns of Muncketon'; although he does not state which Henry de Nevil he is referring to, and he is likely to have been a twelfth-century member of the family. In 1376 the nuns of Nun Monkton elected one Isabella Neville as their prioress (see David M. Smith and Vera C. M. London, *The Heads of Religious Houses: England and Wales*, ii, 1216–1377 (Cambridge, 2001), p. 595), but she may have belonged to the Neville of Raby family. Some evidence for later fifteenth- or sixteenth-century provenance is provided by a five-line inscription, apparently a previously unnoticed list of names, which begins with 'Allan Wylson' and includes the names 'Thomas', and 'Wylson' a second time (f. 22r).