



1. A corpse in a landscape in a Book of Hours (MS 5, fol. 161v), 15th century, Paris, scribe unknown, illuminator in the circle of the Rohan Master, inks, tempera pigments and gold on parchment, c. 16.5 x 11.5cm. Coughton Court, Warwickshire

Illuminating the Past

A little-known group of medieval manuscripts at Coughton Court in Warwickshire reveals the extent of exchange between England and mainland Europe

By Peter Kidd



2. Petrus Lombardus, *Magna Glossatoria* (MS 2, fols. 2v-3r), early 13th century, Paris (?), scribe and decorator unknown, inks on parchment, c. 31.5 x 21 cm (each page). Coughton Court, Warwickshire

A small number of National Trust properties have medieval manuscripts on public display. A few other medieval manuscripts at Trust houses are known thanks to scholarly articles and major exhibitions: examples are the copy of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* at Petworth House, West Sussex, and a leaf from the 7th- or 8th-century Caesirid Bible and a miniature by Simon Bening, both owned by Kingston Lacy, Dorset. But these are the exceptions, and anyone interested in medieval manuscripts might be surprised to learn what other treasures are preserved at the Trust's properties. The purpose of this article is to bring to wider attention an interesting group of seven manuscripts that have remained unpublished since they were acquired by the Trust for Coughton Court, seat of the Throckmorton family, near Redditch in Warwickshire nearly 30 years ago.¹

The Throckmorton library can be traced back as far as Sir Robert Throckmorton (1662-1721), third Baronet, whose manor house at Weston Underwood, Buckinghamshire, evidently had a library by the late 17th century. Four of the medieval manuscripts have his ownership inscription. One of these also includes a date: 'Ex libris

Ro: Thro. Bart. 1684 / Bibl. Weston.' These four, and one other, have the armorial bookplate of his son, Sir Robert Throckmorton (c. 1701-91), fourth Baronet. The other two medieval manuscripts now at Coughton presumably entered the collection much later: they each have the bookplate of Sir Robert George Throckmorton (1800-62), eighth Baronet, with the Throckmorton arms combined with those of his wife, Elizabeth (née Acton), whom he married in 1829. Sir Robert's son and heir, Sir Nicholas, sold the Weston estate in 1898, by which time the library had been divided between two other properties: Coughton Court and Buckland House, near Faringdon on the Berkshire-Oxfordshire border. Buckland House was sold in 1908, and the books were subsequently reunited at Coughton Court, where the present group has remained ever since, the house being acquired by the National Trust in 1946, and the medieval manuscripts in 1991.²

Produced in the Middle Ages, when travel by road was slow and uncomfortable, and the English Channel was less a divider than a connector between England and the Continent, the five medieval illuminated

manuscripts at Coughton Court nicely exemplify cross-Channel trade and the free movement of books during this period. Only one was made in England; one was made in France, but found its way to these shores within about a century; two others, produced in the southern Netherlands, were demonstrably made for sale to English customers.

The earliest of the manuscripts is a copy of Peter Lombard's commentary on the Psalms, the *Magna Glossatura* ('Great Gloss'), probably produced in Paris in the early 13th century (Fig. 2). At this date, so close was the interchange between English and French scribes and artists that English and French books can be very difficult to tell apart: the name of a particular type of late 12th- and early 13th-century illumination, 'Channel Style', testifies to this. Peter 'the Lombard' (he was from northern Italy) studied at Reims and Paris, becoming Bishop of Paris before his death in 1160. One of his major scholarly achievements was to revise the standard commentaries on the Pauline Epistles and the Psalms. These commentaries were written with a revolutionary new page layout.

Medieval biblical glosses can be compared to footnotes in a modern printed book: they serve to elucidate

the main text, often referring to some external authority; they appear on the same page as the part of the main text to which they refer, even though they can be of wildly differing lengths and appear with varying frequency, some pages having only a few short glosses, and other pages having many long ones. Peter's page layout represents an exceptionally elegant solution to such requirements and challenges. The page is ruled for up to 48 lines of commentary written in small script, but the main biblical text is written on alternate lines, in short passages of much larger script. Each piece of commentary is linked to the relevant passage in the individual psalm by the underlining of a few quoted words in red. In the outer margins of each page, abbreviated names in red indicate the authority from whom the commentary is derived, in this case mainly 'Augustine' and 'Calssiodorus'.

The only English manuscript in the Coughton group is of a type known as a Manual (Fig. 3), which consisted mainly of texts for the 'occasional offices' of baptism, marriage, visitation of the sick, burial of the dead and churching of women (blessing after childbirth). To this core were often added texts that it would be useful for the priest to have 'to hand', such as the Canon of the

3. The Crucifixion and Canon of the Mass in a Sarum Manual (MS 6, fols. 83v-84r), mid 15th century, England, scribe and decorator unknown, inks, tempera pigments and gold on parchment, c. 24 x 15.5 cm (each page), Coughton Court, Warwickshire



Mass, along with various other masses and blessings. Although the text is in Latin, the marriage service here includes the words that the bridegroom and bride would say in English, with 'N.' indicating where each person should insert their own name: 'Ich N. take þe N. for my weddud wyf from this day forward, for fayrer for fowler, for better for wors...'; 'Ich. N. take the N. to my weddud hosebonde ... for rycher for powver in seknesse & in helth to be boner and boxum in bedde & in borde tyl deth us departye.' (In other manuscripts, the words 'boner and boxum', which seem strange to modern readers, are spelled 'bonair and buxom', or 'bonny and buxom'. In whatever form, they mean good and obedient, or loving and compliant.)

The primary importance of this manuscript lies in the fact that it has a full-page painting of the Crucifixion placed, as usual, opposite the Canon of the Mass. Christ is shown, already dead, flanked by the Virgin and John the Evangelist, and in the background by the crucified Good Thief and Bad Thief, with their souls emerging

'References to popes and Thomas Becket were erased'

from their mouths: the former's soul is depicted as a small naked figure, the latter's as a demon. In the border at the foot of the page is an osculatory cross: during mass, the priest was required to kiss an image of the Cross; in order to prevent damage to the main picture it was common to provide a secondary cross for this purpose. About two-thirds of the way down the first column of text facing the Crucifixion image is the phrase '*cum famulo tuo papa nostro*' ('with your servant, our pope'), in which the last two words have been deliberately smudged: this is normal for books that were in England at the Reformation, when it was decreed that references to popes and to Thomas Becket must be effaced. The calendar of saints' days at the very beginning of the volume has similar crossings-out.

The calendar also provides valuable clues to the date at which the book was made, making it an important guide to the development of style in the 15th century. The Feast of the Translation of the Relics of

St Edward the Confessor, instituted in 1445, is present, while the Feast of St Osmund (canonised in 1457) is absent, so the book was probably written between these years.

From the outside, the first of three Books of Hours at Coughton looks English – it is in an Oxford blind-stamped binding of about 1550 – but on opening it, it reveals itself to be French, dating from about the 1420s (Fig. 1). It is liturgically for the 'Use of Paris', and is illuminated in the style of one of the most distinctive and inventive French artists of the 15th century, the Rohan Master.³ While the Office of the Dead in Books of Hours is often illustrated with a busy scene, such as the Last Judgement, a requiem mass being performed in a church, or a burial taking place in a graveyard, here we see a lone cadaver in an empty landscape. Similar to a memento mori, it dramatically conveys the frailty of the human body and the bleak isolation from all worldly matters that death brings.

Within the volume is a section added in the second half of the century, with radically different script and decoration. One of the rubrics informs us in French that it is liturgically '*selon usage romain*' ('according to the Use of Rome'). A second addition, still later in the century, betrays by its use of feminine Latin forms in a prayer – '*Et mihi famula tua...*' ('And to me, your maidservant...') – that it was intended to be read by a woman. By the mid 16th century, the book had found its way to Oxford, where it was rebound.

The next volume was produced in the southern Netherlands, but it was clearly made for the English market, as shown by its adoption of the Use of Sarum (Salisbury), which was used across most of England, except in the northern counties in the Province of York; by the English saints in the calendar; and especially by the fact that the scribe copied from an exemplar that includes passages of Middle English. For example, a series of prayers has a rubric that reads 'These prayers folowynge ought to be saide er ye departe oute of youre chamber at youre first uprysing' (Fig. 4). Interestingly, the style of the borders is typical of Bruges, and some of the compositions are also distinctly Flemish, but the style of the pictures suggests that the artist trained further south, perhaps in Hainaut or even Cambrai in northern France.⁴ After the book arrived in England, a scribe added numerous prayers in Middle English, the first beginning 'O glorious Jesu, o mekest iesu, o most swetest iesu, I pray that I may have true confession'. These additions were perhaps commissioned by 'James Sutton, knight', who wrote his name in several places. The book was certainly still in England at the Reformation, when references to popes and Thomas Becket were erased.

In the second half of the 15th century, Bruges was the main Flemish centre for the production of Books of Hours. Many of these were made specifically for the English market (as in the case of the previous example), but they were typically not tailored to specific owners, so it is often impossible to trace their provenance.



4. The Trinity, illustrating a Latin prayer with an English rubric, in a Book of Hours (MS 3, fol. 20r), second half of 15th century, Bruges. Inks, tempera pigments and gold on parchment, c. 19 x 12.5cm (each page). Coughton Court, Warwickshire



5. The Crucifixion, illustrating the hour of Nones in the Hours of the Cross, in a Book of Hours (MS 4, fol. 78r), second half of 15th century, Bruges, scribe unknown, illuminated by a follower or associate of Willem Vrelant (d. 1481), inks, tempera pigments and gold on parchment, c. 11 x 8cm, Coughton Court, Warwickshire

1. Descriptions of a few of them appear in the Historical Manuscripts Commission's *Tenth Report, Appendix, Part IV: The Manuscripts of the Earl of Westmorland, Captain Stewart, Lord Stafford, Lord Muncaster, and Others*, London, 1885, pp. 169–71, and in the catalogue of an auction from which they were withdrawn before the sale, Christie's, London, *Valuable*

Printed Books, Illuminated Manuscripts, Music and Autograph Letters, 20 December 1972, lots 204, 206–211.

2. Among other medieval illuminated manuscripts containing the bookplate of Sir Robert Throckmorton, fourth Baronet, are: a copy of *The Mirror of St Edmund* and other Middle English texts (Lambeth Palace Library, MS

3597), 'The Buckland Missal' (Bodleian Library, MS Don. b. 5), and a Book of Hours (sold at Christie's, London, on 12 June 2013, lot 23, but subsequently broken up). 3. This anonymous illuminator (whose conventional name derives from the French Rohan family, owners of one of his masterpieces), seems to have trained in the Champagne

The present example, however, exhibits clear links to someone with Augustinian connections in the diocese of Rochester. Three feast days associated with St Augustine of Hippo are marked (27 February, 28 August and 11 October), as are the feast days of three successive Anglo-Saxon bishops of Rochester – Romanus (30 March), Paulinus (10 October), and Ithamar (19 June) – the latter two written in red (literally 'red-letter days'). These and other features connect the calendar to a series of other Flemish Books of Hours made for English patrons, mostly produced during or soon after the years when Rochester had its only Augustinian bishop, John Lowe (bishop from 1444 to 1467).⁵ The likelihood is that a Flemish bookseller got hold of an Augustinian calendar from the diocese of Rochester and lent it to scribes to use as a textual exemplar for a period of a few decades.

The illumination is in the style of Willem Vrelant,⁶ a very well documented illuminator who worked for Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, and other nobles (Fig. 5). Willem is known to have trained a number of apprentices (probably including his daughter, and perhaps also his wife), which goes some way to explaining the existence of a very large number of manuscripts more-or-less in the style of his documented works.

While this short article has concentrated on the five illuminated volumes at Coughton, it should be noted that there are two further medieval manuscripts there, potentially of great interest but with only modest decoration. One is a small Italian miscellany of hymns and a treatise attributed to St Bonaventure, extracted from a much more extensive volume (as shown by the late medieval foliation). The other, textually the most interesting and complex volume in the entire collection, contains a variety of texts, including Petrus Riga's *Aurora* (a summary of the Bible in verse), sermons, and other material. It retains most of its original 13th-century binding – the oldest bookbinding in any National Trust library. ❀

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region, moved to Paris (where he apparently trained a number of assistants), and ended his career working for members of the Angevin court at Angers.

4. I am grateful to Dominique Vanwijnsberghe for confirming my opinion on this point. 5. Mary P. Richards, 'Some Fifteenth-century Calendars for Rochester Diocese',

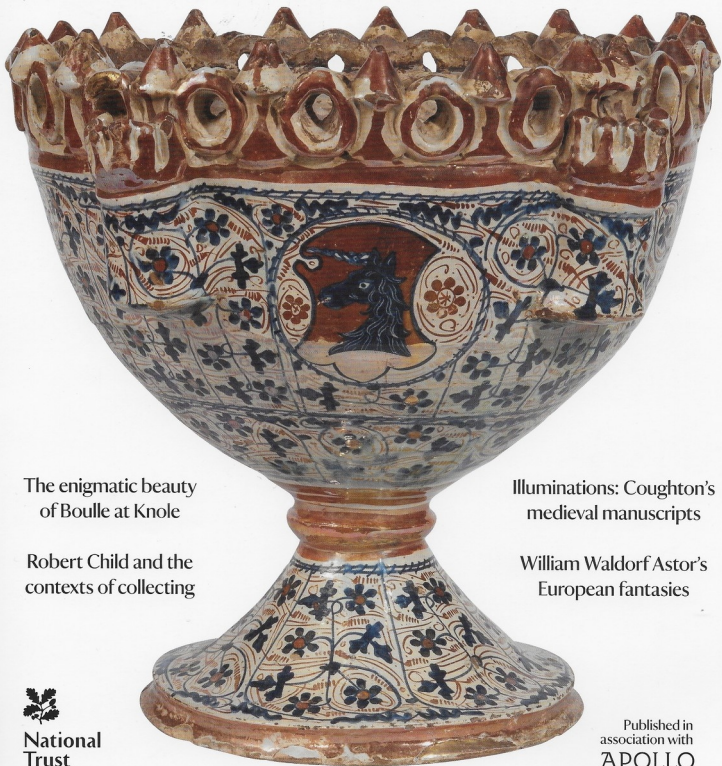
Archaeologia Cantiana, vol. 102 (1985), pp. 71–85.

6. For a recent summary of Vrelant's career and style, see Thomas Kren & Scott McKendrick (eds.), *Illuminating the Renaissance: The Triumph of Flemish Manuscript Painting in Europe*, London, 2003, pp. 117–19.

TASTE, TRADE AND EUROPE

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The enigmatic beauty
of Boule at Knole

Robert Child and the
contexts of collecting

Illuminations: Coughton's
medieval manuscripts

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