

Liturgical *Libellus* with readings for Holy Saturday and Vigil of Pentecost (known as the Prayerbook of Elizabeth of York)

In Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment

England (London?), c. 1200-1230, with two fifteenth-century replacement leaves

ii (paper) + 21 + ii (paper) folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil top outer corner recto, formerly included a twelfth-century miniature, added into the volume by Barrois (removed in 1915 and now Berlin, Print Room Inv.929), first two leaves are fifteenth-century replacements (collation, i<sup>4</sup> [all single, 1 and 2, later additions] ii<sup>8</sup> iii<sup>4</sup> v<sup>5</sup> [5, probably single]), ruled lightly in brown crayon, with double vertical bounding lines, prickings top and bottom margins (justification, 138-133 x 97-93 mm.), written in eleven long lines in a formal upright early Gothic bookhand (ruling is visible on f. 13, and it appears to be written above the top ruled line), majuscules carefully touched with red, red rubrics, one- to two-line red initials, on ff. 8v, 18, extending into the margin with simple red pen decoration, f. 16, five-line "T" with pen decoration in black, f. 12v, four-line red arabesque initial, added leaf, f. 1, three-line black initial with pen decoration in the same style as the rest of the volume, first leaf loose at top, darkened and with small stains in lower margins throughout, mold spots lower margin on f. 5, but in good condition and legible throughout, added texts, lower margin f. 1, and f. 21v, treated by reagent and stained dark blue-green, modern repair to margin, f. 21. Bound in the nineteenth century by Thompson (binders' stamp inside front cover) in Paris for Jean-Baptiste Joseph Barrois in a handsome dark blue ornamental morocco binding, front and back covers with gilt scrolls a la Grolier, with center ornaments of inlaid red and white roses, spine with five raised bands, forming compartments with small gilt ornaments, and title, "Genesis Excerpta"; gilt edges, in excellent condition, covers very slightly bowed. Dimensions, 180 x 127 mm.

This short liturgical manuscript of biblical readings is of considerable intrinsic interest for its text, early date, and possible links with Westminster Abbey. Traditionally said to have been owned by Elizabeth Woodville and her daughter, Queen Elizabeth of York, wife of Henry VII, it also provides evidence of the reading of Latin texts of the Bible by the laity into the Reformation. The volume later figured in many eminent collections, including that of the famous "book thief" Jean-Baptiste Joseph Barrois (who had it bound in its present handsome binding).

## PROVENANCE

1. The evidence of the script and decorative initials suggests that this manuscript was written at the end of the twelfth century or the early part of the thirteenth century in England (possibly for use at Westminster Abbey, given its later provenance). The script is an upright early gothic book hand, that includes letter unions (e.g., "de," "do," and "pe"), but also a number of early features, including "et" abbreviated by the ampersand, use of both round and straight "d" and a lack of compression; the ruling is difficult to see, but it appears to be written above the top ruled line. The initials certainly have much in common with the decorative style found in later twelfth century manuscripts, and support the date suggested here. The size of the script, given the relatively small size of the written space, is noteworthy (although the outer margins were obviously and unevenly trimmed, prickings in the top and bottom margins indicate it is close to its original dimensions).

2. The manuscript was still used in the fifteenth century when the first two leaves were replaced, copying the text in a formal gothic, with script, layout and initial on f. 1 intended to mimic the thirteenth-century leaves, and the final prayer was added on f. 21v.
3. Possibly at Westminster Abbey in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century when "Westminster Abbaye," was written three times in a neat secretary script, top margin, f. 1, f. 11 (between the lines), and f. 21 (see below). The 1388 inventory of the vestry of Westminster Abbey includes seventeen books under the heading "De Missalibus et aliis libris" ("Of Missals and other books"); the sixteenth and seventeenth books in this list are described as "quaterni" – quires or gatherings -- containing the lessons for the Easter Vigil and the Vigil of Pentecost ("quaterni boni pro lectionibus legendis in vigilia paschae et pentecostes" (Pfaff, 2009, p. 229; and Legg, 1890, pp. 233-234), a perfect description of this manuscript, and support (although not definitive proof) that this manuscript may be one of these two books. Liturgical books from Westminster Abbey are extremely rare; Richard Pfaff's recent discussion of the Abbey's liturgy is based on only three surviving manuscripts (Pfaff, 2009, pp. 227-230).

Added notes from the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, in two hands, "Elizabeth dei gratia," copied on f. 1, in a more formal bookhand; the remaining in a more current secretary script (compare the promissory note from Anne Knyvet, August 12, 1525, in Preston and Yeandle, 1992, no. 9A): f. 1, top margin, "Westminster Abbaye," and lower margin, "Elizabeth dei gratias" and in another hand (?), "to my good frende <Mortimer>" – identified as Sir John Mortimer (1450-1504) of Kyre [last two words expunged and treated by a reagent]; f. 2, "Vrother and sister"; f. 4, "To the right worshyppfull Lord my especiall good ffriend,"; f. 12, "To the victorious and triumphant King Henry"; f. 20, "right and rong, bien et mal"; and f. 21, "Westminster Abbaye."

Based on these notes, it has traditionally been said that the manuscript belonged to Elizabeth of Woodville (c. 1437-1492), wife of King Edward IV, and then to her daughter, Elizabeth of York (1466-1503), wife of King Henry VII. Elizabeth Woodville was in sanctuary at Westminster Abbey twice; the first time in 1470 for the birth of her son (later one of the princes in the tower), and again in 1483 when the throne was seized by Richard III. She may have been presented with this manuscript then. Tudor-Craig, 1973, no. 156 accepted the tradition; Sutton and Fuchs, 1995, pp. 231-232, and notes 100-102, reject it and interpret the annotations as pen-trials that prove only a link with Westminster.

The question remains an open one. The observation by Sutton and Fuchs that none of the annotations are in Elizabeth Woodville's or Elizabeth of York's hand is important (see note 101), and their point that the prayer on f. 21v, traditionally thought to have been said by Elizabeth of York as she was dying in childbed after the birth of her fourth child, was a prayer pronounced by a priest, rather than a prayer for private devotion is correct (however, the words of the absolution, which mention excommunication were commonly included, and do not mean that this prayer was used only in the case of excommunication or other very grave sin). It is, however, hard to dismiss the annotations as mere pen-trials. To cite one parallel example, Books of Hours often have

added notes asking for prayers, or public assurances of affection, and Elizabeth of York herself was known to have given and exchanged Books of Hours (for example, see Duffy, 2006, p.52, and fig. 39, reproducing the page in the Book of Hours, British Library, Additional MS 17012, that includes annotations by Henry VII, Henry VIII, Elizabeth of York, and Katherine of Aragon; see also Backhouse, 1995, p. 181, discussing the implications of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century English signatures and inscriptions often found in manuscripts).

Regardless of whether this manuscript belonged, or was used by, these two Queens of England, the presence of these annotations does seem to support the idea that the manuscript may no longer have been used as a formal liturgical volume by the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, and may even have belonged to a lay household. This is particularly interesting because (despite its name), it is not in fact a prayer book, but rather a copy of biblical readings for the Mass from the Old Testament, and as such may be evidence of the lay use of the Bible in Latin. Given the large size of the script, it may not be too fanciful to suggest that it would have been a useful book to teach children to read.

4. Possibly belonged to Sir John Mortimer of Kyre (1450-1504), if the interpretation of the added note f. 1 (see above, now treated by reagent) is correct.
5. Belonged to Jean-Baptiste Joseph Barrois (1784-1855), French deputy and a famous (or indeed, infamous) book-collector (see Collingham, 1984), who added a twelfth-century miniature (removed in 1915 and now Berlin, Print Room Inv.929), and had the book bound with the roses of York and Lancaster. It may also be Barrois who added on the front flyleaf, f. ii verso, in red ink, "on lit de la main d'Elizabeth" followed by a list in pencil of the Elizabethan annotations, and on the back flyleaf, f. i, a note in red pen about Elizabeth followed by a transcription of the prayer on f. 21v.
6. The Barrois Collection was bought by Bertram 4th Lord of Ashburnham (1797-1878) in 1849. In their coverage of the sale the New York Times reported on June 29, 1901: "The Barrois collection was the result of the labors of a man who, in France, was as accomplished a book thief as Libri was in Italy—only he was satisfied with a few precious things. He was Deputy for Lille before the Revolution of 1848, and was a distinguished scholar and book lover. Originally the collection included 702 manuscripts, among them many fine old texts of French romances and poems. In 1848 it was offered to the British Museum for 6000 pounds but the transaction fell through, and Ashburnham bought it en bloc for 8000 pounds. Later Léopold Delisle proved that about one-tenth of the manuscripts had been stolen from French libraries, and thirteen years ago France reacquired them by purchase."
7. The remains of the Ashburnham-Barrois Collection were subsequently sold by Bertram, 5th Lord of Ashburnham (1840-1913) at auction at Sotheby's, London, 10-14 June 1901, this manuscript lot 328.
8. Changed hands often in the early decades of the twentieth century: Quaritch Cat. 1902, January 1, no. 175 (Schoenberg Database 50113); Quaritch Cat., June, 1910, no. 203

(Schoenberg Database 50258), London, Sotheby's, March 28, 1912, lot 379 (Schoenberg Database 7576) to Leighton; Leighton, Cat. 1912, no. 200 (Schoenberg Database 10423); Leighton Cat. 1915, no. 200 (Schoenberg Database 50348),

9. Belonged to James P. R. Lyell (1871-1948); his gilt bookplate inside front cover, "Jacobi P. R. Lyell," who bought it 18 January 1942 from Rosenthal; Lyell was a member of a London firm of solicitors. He bequeathed the residue of his estate to the University of Oxford for the foundation of a Lyell Readership in Bibliography. He left the choice of one hundred manuscripts, of medieval or later date, to the Bodleian Library out of the total of some 250 medieval manuscripts and a small number of post-medieval manuscripts then in his possession. The manuscripts not bequeathed to the Bodleian or to others were acquired by Quaritch.
10. Belonged to Harry Lawrence Bradfer-Lawrence (1887-1965), his MS 15 (Bradfer-Lawrence's collection discussed in Edwards, 2004, this manuscript listed p. 68). Bradfer-Lawrence was a businessman, who was also an enthusiastic antiquary, and a distinguished collector of manuscripts; he was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Antiquaries (1924), and a member of the Roxburghe Club (1954). Bradfer-Lawrence acquired this manuscript and at least twelve others from the Lyell manuscripts not bequeathed to either the Bodleian or elsewhere. After his death most of his collection was kept on deposit at the Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge until their acquisition by Quaritch.
11. London, Sotheby's, 6 December 1983, lot 65 to Joseph Pope.
12. Belonged to Joseph Pope (1921-2010) of Toronto, investor banker and prominent collector of medieval manuscripts, who acquired it from Sotheby's in 1983 (see above); Bergendal Collection MS 60 (described in Pope, 1999, and online, Bergendal Collection; brief description in Stoneman, 1997, pp. 189-190; see also Pope, 1997, p. 160).

## TEXT

ff. 1-21, Biblical readings for Mass on Holy Saturday (Genesis 1-2:2, Exodus 14:24-15:1, Isaiah 4, and Isaiah 54:17-55:11), ending on f. 12; f. 12v, readings for the Vigil of Pentecost (Genesis 22:1-19, Deuteronomy 31:22-30, Isaiah 4 [cue only], Baruch 3:9-38, concluding with a note that the readings are followed by a collect and the Litanies.

The first two leaves are fifteenth-century replacement leaves, with Genesis 1.1-1.12; the text on f. 3 begins with Genesis 1:12, repeating the first five lines from the previous page, which have been expunged.

f. 21v (fifteenth-century addition, now treated by reagent and stained dark blue-green), *Absolutio in extremis*, incipit, "Auctoritate dei beatorum petri et pauli apostolorum totius ordinis domini summi pontificis et totius celestis curie in hac parte mihi comissa se ista vice morieris te absolvo ab omnibus sententiis excommunicationis ...."

Prayer of Absolution at the end of life.

This manuscript includes biblical readings for the Mass for two liturgical feasts: Holy Saturday, or the Easter Vigil, and the Vigil of Pentecost, celebrated seven weeks after Easter. During the Middle Ages, most Masses included two biblical readings. The first reading was generally known as the Epistle, since on Sundays it was selected from the Pauline Epistles, and the second reading was always from the Gospels. The two feasts in this manuscript were, however, special liturgical occasions. Holy Saturday and the Vigil of Pentecost were the only feasts on which baptism was permitted in the early church, and they both are liturgically distinctive in including readings from the Old Testament (known as the Prophecies) in addition to the usual two Mass readings. The texts selected for these readings, and the number of texts read, varied depending on liturgical Use during the Middle Ages; the Roman Missal, for example, included twelve Prophecies on Holy Saturday (a practice followed today in the modern Church), but Missals following Sarum Use included four prophecies for both feasts (the same eight readings as found in this manuscript, with the exception of the last reading for the Easter Vigil, which following Sarum Use was from Deuteronomy instead of the text from Isaiah found here; Legg, 1916, pp. 119-20 and 158-9). The fourteenth-century Missal from Westminster Abbey edited by Legg (Legg, 1891-1897) includes five readings for each of these feasts (with a number of differences in the texts chosen compared with the manuscript described here; as Pfaff has observed, the text of this very luxurious volume may not always reflect the actual liturgical customs at Westminster).

The size of the script in this manuscript does suggest it was designed to be used for public reading during Mass; however, there is no evidence that suggests that these leaves were a fragment from a longer book such as a Mass Lectionary or a Missal. Note that when these texts were included in a Mass lectionary or in a Missal, the readings for Holy Saturday were naturally followed by those for Easter and the seven weeks of the liturgical season of Easter, and then with the readings for Pentecost and its Vigil. The two feasts did not follow each other immediately as they do in this manuscript. Moreover, the third reading for the Vigil of Pentecost, Isaiah chapter four, is here given with the opening words only, with a note stating that the complete reading is found at a previous point, since Isaiah chapter four is also the third reading for Holy Saturday – a strong indication that these texts were copied together as a small independent liturgical *libellus*, with just the readings for these two feasts.

As discussed above in the provenance section, it is striking that the 1388 inventory of the liturgical books in the Vestry of Westminster Abbey included two small *libelli* – the inventory uses the term “quaterni,” that is quires or gatherings, with readings for the Easter Vigil and the Vigil of Pentecost. The Cistercian Abbey of Meaux in Yorkshire also owned a “quaternus,” with these readings and other texts, listed in their catalogue of 1396-1399 (Pfaff, 2009, p. 260). How many of these *libelli* survive – and how many are listed in medieval inventories and catalogues – would be a fascinating question for further research (cf. Palazzon, 1990, especially pp. 29-30, discussing the rarity of *libelli* including readings for the Mass. Palazzo, who is primarily discussing earlier manuscripts, does not mention any examples of manuscripts including the readings for Holy Saturday and Pentecost).

Modern scholars of the liturgy have come to emphasize the importance of short liturgical manuscripts of this type, that include texts for a single liturgical purpose, used to supplement larger volumes, both for convenience, and to adapt to changing liturgical practice (Palazzo, 1998, pp. 37-8, and 1990). Liturgical *libelli* of this type were certainly less likely to survive than

formal liturgical volumes, making those that do survive particularly interesting to liturgical scholars.

## LITERATURE

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Tudor-Craig, P. *Richard III: Exhibition, National Portrait Gallery 1973*, second ed., Ipswich and Totowa, New Jersey, Boydell Press, 1977, pp. 64-65, cat. no. 156.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Bergendal Collection

<http://www3.sympatico.ca/bergendalcoll/ms68.htm>

Historical background to the readings for Holy Saturday and Vigil of Pentecost discussed by Shawn Tribe, "Compendium of the 1955 Holy Week Revisions of Pius XII: Part 7 - The Vigil of Pentecost and the Holy Week Readings" (April 15, 2009, New Liturgical Movement)

<http://www.newliturgicalmovement.org/2009/04/2009-compendium-of-1955-holy-week.html>

Book of Hours probably owned by Elizabeth of York, London, BL, Additional MS 50001

[http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add\\_MS\\_50001](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_50001)

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