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The Rugby-De Brailes Bible

In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment

England (Oxford), c. 1230-1250 (perhaps 1230s)

iii + 275 + ii folios on parchment, foliated in modern pencil 1-275, incomplete, at least one quire missing at the beginning with Genesis and Exodus 1:1-35:34 before f. 1, one leaf after f. 9 with Numbers 4:9-7:13, as many as eleven leaves after f. 144 with Isaiah 9:17 to Jeremiah 3:7, and two leaves after f. 243 with 1 Timothy to Hebrews 2:17, i. e. lacking 1-2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon and the beginning of Hebrews, (collation, i¹²[-10, missing one leaf after f. 9, with loss of text] ii-xii¹² xiii¹ [f. 144, perhaps one leaf remaining of a quire with 12 leaves, with loss of text] xiv-xxi¹² xxii¹² [-4 and 5, missing two leaves after f. 243, with loss of text, and -12, blank after f. 249] xxiii¹⁴ xxiv¹²), ruled in lead or brown crayon with the top two and bottom two rules full across, with an extra rule in the top margin for the running titles, full-length double vertical bounding lines (justification 188-183 x 126-122 mm.), written below the top line in an upright early gothic bookhand in 52 lines, guide letters and chapter numbers in lead point sometimes visible, red rubrics, red and blue running titles, chapters begin with 1-line alternately red and blue initials, or occasionally red paragraph marks, numbered in the margins with red and blue roman numerals, each psalm and a few chapters in other biblical books begin with 2-line initials alternately red or blue with contrasting penwork, large foliate initials (most 8- to 2-line with some extending full-length of the text) at the beginning of biblical books, prologues, and main divisions of the Psalms, some including animals and many including dragons and grotesques (discussed below), ff. 258-275, (Interpretation of Hebrew Names) added in the later thirteenth century, (justification 184 x 150 mm.), ruled in brown crayon, written below the top line in a gothic bookhand in three columns of 52 lines, 2-line blue initials with red pen decoration, 4-line parted red and blue puzzle initial with red pen flourishes continuing with red and blue penwork border in the top and inner margins ending with penwork drolleries, in the lower margin, of a man with axe and shield, initials clumsily excised with some loss of text, from ff. 107, 109 (excising part of the entire column b), 112, 120v, 133, 143, 174 (2 initials), 179 (no initial, but the excision for the following page cut a hole in this page), 180v, 190v, and 240, outer and lower margin of f. 1 torn and repaired, margin of f. 2 torn, ff. 1-4, stains, f. 101 with stain and small hole outer margin, ff. 42-44 and 145-146 stained and cockled, ff. 266 to end, stains lower margin, upper margin of f. 173 slit, and with occasional other marginal stains, nonetheless, overall in very good condition. Nineteenth-century polished brown calf binding, the covers framed by quadruple blind fillets, re-backed, the spine with a black gilt leather title-piece lettered in capitals, "Biblia / Sacra / MS," edges dyed red, marbled endpapers and pastedowns, hinges reinforced with red tape, the edges and corners scuffed, but in very good condition. Dimensions 260 x 175 mm.

A very attractive illuminated Bible from Oxford; the style of the numerous foliate initials leaves no doubt that this can be added to the small group of manuscripts attributed to William de Brailes or his workshop, active in Oxford c. 1230-1260. De Brailes is one of only two English illuminators from the thirteenth century known by name. Larger than a pocket Bible, but still a handy, compact size, this is copied in a skillful early gothic script, tiny but very legible. The initials are crisply executed, with evocative dragons and other animals. Annotations and later notes add to its interest.

PROVENANCE

1. The style of the painted initials and early annotations in English hands provide evidence that this was written and illuminated in Oxford in the second quarter of the

thirteenth century, very likely by William de Brailes or another illuminator working in his circle (see Illustration, below). Details of the text and format suggest a date in the earlier range of oeuvre of De Brailes, likely in the 1230s.

The *Interpretation of Hebrew Names* added after the biblical text in the second half of the thirteenth century is decorated with blue initials with red pen decoration; the use of only blue initials in a thirteenth-century manuscript is a feature found only in manuscripts copied in England.

2. Marginal annotations in Proverbs and the Apocalypse and occasionally in other biblical books by a 13th- or early 14th-century English reader; in the Psalms marginal drypoint notes indicate the appropriate canticles in liturgical use, e.g. on the page facing Psalm 36 is "Canticum Confitebor. Ysaiah xii capitulo."
3. Still in England in the sixteenth century: scribbles, pen-trials and inscriptions in a number of English hands in Latin and in English: "Wyllya[m] [Church?]" on f. 51; "John Shurley"[?] on f. 150v; notes including a passage from 2 Timothy 2:16-17 added at the end of the Apocalypse on f. 249; "Rollaunde Sinibesse[?]" on f. 249v; and "Yevane Fairburn of maudale[?]" on f. 275v; note with the date "anno domini 1556" but no name on f. 166; see also see also ff. 114, 150v, 209, and 225. Additional notes throughout, some of which are now illegible (erased or treated by a reagent?), see ff. 14v, 15, 30, 31v-32, 72, 78, 96v, 160, 173v, 187, 197.
4. Perhaps owned in the late 18th or early 19th century by a James: "Jacobus///" (the rest excised) in the lower margin of f. 1, alongside John Bowen's name.
5. John Bowen (1756-1832), painter, genealogist, and antiquarian of Shrewsbury, who is said to have been skilled in deciphering and copying ancient manuscripts; apparently acquired in 1826; note in ink, lower margin, f. 1, "Johannes Bowen / Anno Ætat 70. / Annoque Domini 1826."
6. Belonged to Matthew Holbeche Bloxam (1805-1888), of Rugby (about 75 miles south-east of Shrewsbury), antiquary and amateur archaeologist, author of a popular guide to Gothic architecture, and donor of medieval manuscripts to Rugby School; f. 1, "Matt: H: Bloxam 1865"; front flyleaf, f. iii, note in ink recording his donation of the book to the school on his 78th birthday, May 12, 1883.
7. Belonged to the Rugby School, Warwickshire: their MS Bloxham 1005, with their armorial bookplate inside front cover (bookplate with arms, initials "L S" and date "1567" [i.e. Lawrence Sheriffe, d. 1567, founder of the School], and legend "Schol: Rugbiens: Biblioth:"), annotated in pencil "19230"; and oval ink-stamps "Arnold Library Rugby," front flyleaf, f. iii and f. 275.
8. Deaccessioned in 2018, and sold, London, Christie's, December 8, 2018, lot 146.

TEXT

ff. 1-249v, Latin Bible, with prologues as follows: f. 1, Exodus, beginning imperfectly at 35:34; f. 2, Leviticus; f. 9, Numbers; f. 17v, Deuteronomy; f. 26, [prologue to Joshua] Tandem finito [Stegmüller 311]; f. 26, Joshua; f. 32, Judges; f. 38, Ruth; f. 39, [prologue to Kings] Viginti et duas [Stegmüller 323], f. 39v, 1 Kings; f. 47v, 2 Kings; f. 54, 3 Kings; f. 62v, 4 Kings; f. 70v, [prologue to Chronicles] Si septuaginta [Stegmüller 328]; f. 70v, 1 Chronicles; f. 77, 2 Chronicles; f. 87v, [prologue to Ezra] Utrum difficilium [Stegmüller 330]; f. 88, 1 Ezra; f. 88, Nehemiah; f. 91v, [prologue to Esther] Librum hester; Rursum in libro [Stegmüller 341 and 343, copied as one prologue]; f. 91v, Esther; f. 94v, [prologue to Judith] Apud hebreos [Stegmüller 335]; f. 94v, Judith; f. 97v, [prologue to Tobit] Cromatio et heliodoro ..., Mirari non desino [Stegmüller 332]; f. 98, Tobit; f. 100, [prologue to Job] Cogor per singulos [Stegmüller 344]; f. 100v, [prologue to Job] In terra quidem [Stegmüller 349]; f. 100v, Job; f. 108, [prologue to Job, copied after Job, concluding rubric, *Sunt hec ieronimus de iob*] Iob exemplar patientie [Stegmüller 350]; f. 108, Psalms; f. 122v, [prologue to Proverbs] Iungat epistola [Stegmüller 457]; f. 122v, Proverbs; f. 127v, Ecclesiastes; f. 129, Song of Songs; f. 130, [prologue to Wisdom] Liber sapientie [Stegmüller 468]; f. 130, Wisdom; f. 133, [biblical introduction to Ecclesiasticus, copied as a prologue] Multorum nobis; f. 133v, Ecclesiasticus, with the Prayer of Solomon; f. 143, [prologue to Isaiah] Nemo cum prophetas [Stegmüller 482]; f. 143, Isaiah, ending imperfectly in ch. 9:16; f. 145, Jeremiah, beginning imperfectly in ch. 3:7; f. 155v, Lamentations; f. 156v, [prologue to Baruch] Liber iste [Stegmüller 491]; f. 156v, Baruch; f. 158, [prologue to Ezechiel] Ezechiel propheta [Stegmüller 492]; f. 158, Ezechiel; f. 169v, [prologue to Daniel] Daniele propheta [Stegmüller 494]; f. 170, Daniel; f. 174v, [prologue to Minor prophets] Non idem ordo est [Stegmüller 500, initial and part of text cut out, now beginning imperfectly]; f. 174v, [prologue to Hosea] Duplex est apud [Stegmüller 504, now beginning imperfectly]; f. 174v, Hosea; f. 176, Joel; f. 177, Amos; f. 178, Obadiah; f. 178, Jonah; f. 178v, Micah; f. 179v, Nahum; f. 180, Habakkuk; f. 180v, Zephaniah; f. 181, Haggai; f. 181v, Zechariah; f. 183, Malachi; f. 186v, [prologue] Machabeorum librum duo [Stegmüller 551]; f. 186v, 1 Maccabees; f. 190v, 2 Maccabees, initial excised with some loss of text; f. 196, [prologue to Matthew] Matheus ex iudea [Stegmüller 590]; f. 196, Matthew; f. 203v, [prologue to Mark] Marcus evangelista [Stegmüller 607]; f. 203v, Mark; f. 208, [prologue to Luke] Lucas syrus natione [Stegmüller 620]; f. 208, Quoniam quidem [Luke 1:1-4 treated as a prologue]; f. 208v, Luke; f. 216, [prologue to John] Hic est Iohannes [Stegmüller 624]; f. 216, John; f. 221v, [prologue to Acts] Lucas anthiocenses natione syrus [Stegmüller 640]; f. 221v, Acts; f. 228v, [prologue to Catholic Epistles] Non ita est ordo [Stegmüller 809]; f. 228v, James; f. 229v, 1 Peter; f. 230v, 2 Peter; f. 231, 1 John; f. 231v, 2 John; f. 231v, 3 John; f. 231v, Jude; f. 232, [prologue to Romans] Romani qui in urbe roma in ihesum christum ... ab athenis [Stegmüller 675]; f. 232, Romans; f. 235, [prologue to 1 Corinthians] Chorinthii sunt achaici [Stegmüller 685]; f. 235, 1 Corinthians; f. 237v, [prologue to 2 Corinthians] Post actam [Stegmüller 699]; f. 237v, 2 Corinthians; f. 239v, [prologue to Galatians] Galathe sunt greci [Stegmüller 707]; f. 239v, Galatians; f. 240v, [prologue to Ephesians, initial and part of prologue cut out] Ephesii sunt asyani [Stegmüller 715]; f. 240v, Ephesians; f. 241v, [prologue to Philippians] Philippenses sunt macedones [Stegmüller 728]; f. 241v, Philippians; f. 242, [prologue to Colossians] Colosenses et hii [Stegmüller 736]; f. 242, Colossians; f. 243, [prologue to 1 Thessalonians] Thessalonicenses sunt macedones [Stegmüller 747]; f. 243, 1 Thessalonians; f. 243v, [prologue to 2 Thessalonians] Ad thessalonicenses [Stegmüller 752]; f. 243v, 2 Thessalonians; [two leaves missing with 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon and beginning of Hebrews]; f. 244, Hebrews [beginning imperfectly]; f. 245v, [prologue to Apocalypse]

Iohannes apostolus et evangelista [Stegmüller 835]; f. 245v, Apocalypse, ending f. 249; [f. 449v, blank].

[Later addition], ff. 250-275, *Incipit interpretaciones nominum hebreorum per ordinem alphabeti digeste. A ante a*, incipit, "Aaz aprehendens uel apprehensio; Aad testficans uel testimonium; Zuzim consilantes eos uel consilantores eorum"; [f. 275v, blank with later notes].

This is the version of the *Interpretations of Hebrew Names* commonly found in Bibles dating after c. 1230; Stegmüller, 1950-1980, no. 7709; printed numerous times in the fifteenth century, and in the seventeenth century, when it was included among the works of Bede, Cologne, 1612; there is no modern edition, despite its great importance for the history of the Bible, exegesis and preaching in the High Middle Ages (see Murano, 2010, citing earlier studies).

ILLUSTRATION

The painted decoration in this Bible is delightful. Prologues, books of the Bible, and major divisions of the Psalms begin with carefully crisply painted foliate initials in blue, dusky pink, and, notably, bright orange, patterned in white and with the leaves outlined in plentiful white dots, often ending in spirals of leaves set on blocky geometric grounds. Many initials in our Bible end with a long-necked dragons holding leaves in its mouth and include a small mask at the top of the initial; orange and blue dragons with long wavy ears are also found often. The initials vary in size, most ranging from 2- to 8-lines, but with some as large as half- to full-length of the text column: f. 32 (Judges); f. 38 (Ruth); f. 39v (1 Kings); f. 61v (4 Kings); f. 86 (Ezra); f. 91v (Esther); f. 181 (Haggai); f. 200v (Luke); f. 216 (John). Some initials include animals: f. 155v (Lamentations) two fish; f. 158 (prologue Ezekiel), a rooster and dog; f. 177 (Amos), 2 birds; f. 178v (2 facing birds).

The parallels to decorative motifs found in other manuscripts from De Brailes and his workshop are too numerous to list completely here and scattered examples must suffice. See for example the initial to 1 Kings, terminating in a very long-eared dragon on f. 39v (other examples, ff. 62v, 85v), and compare the dragons and block terminals in York, Cathedral Library, MS XVI. N. 6 (Johnston, 2014, p. 203), and the initial in Philadelphia, Free Library, MS Lewis E 29 with a similar dragon on f. 65v and a mask at the top (Online Resources; see also f. 95). The 'L' positioned horizontally across top margin on f. 144 of this Philadelphia Bible may be compared with the initial in our Bible on f. 221v. The rooster in the initial in our Bible on f. 158 is a motif found in other De Brailes Bibles (see British Library, Harley 2813, Kidd, 2007, figs. 7 and 8; and British Library, Additional MS 49999, Kidd, 2007, fig. 10). The initial terminating with a crowned dragon on f. 200v in our Bible may be compared British Library, Additional MS 49999 (Kidd, 2007, fig. 5). The initial with two paired birds on f. 177 in our Bible, may be compared with the two birds in BL, Additional MS 4999, f. 62v (Online Resources, similar but not identical to the birds in our Bible). Finally, the triangle terminal used in the initial on f. 181 in our Bible, is also seen in Oxford, New College MS 322 (Johnston, 2014, p. 181) and Oxford, Merton College, MS 7 (Johnston, 2014, p. 201).

William de Brailes, the Oxford illuminator, active c. 1230-1260, is famous for signing his work and depicting himself (for example in the Book of Hours, British Library, Additional MS 49999, Online Resources). Documentary evidence even tells us that he lived and worked on Catte Street in Oxford. One of only two named manuscript illuminators known in England in the

thirteenth century, his work and career have fascinated scholars and collectors since 1930 (Cockerell, 1930). As many as 16 manuscripts (including those surviving only as leaves) have been attributed to De Brailes and his workshop including ten Bibles (Morgan, 2012, pp. 91-08; Johnston, 2014, pp. 176-177 for a convenient summary). With the addition of this Bible, the list grows to 17 manuscripts, 11 of which are Bibles.

The thirteenth century was a pivotal moment in the history of the Bible, that saw the creation of a Bible that is the direct ancestor to our modern Bibles in terms of its format and layout. A remarkable number of thirteenth century Bibles with the complete Old and New Testament in one volume survive. Many of these Bibles were copied in Paris, and many are very small "pocket" Bibles, a format which appears for the first-time c. 1230. The Bible described here, however, is an example of a less common type of thirteenth-century Bible, notable for its origin in Oxford, where it was illuminated by William de Brailes or artists from his circle, and its date in the second quarter of the thirteenth century, very likely in the 1230s. Its size and details of its text link it to Bibles copied c. 1200-1230.

Centralized production in Paris resulted in numerous Bibles that share the same text (the text modern scholars call the Paris Bible). As one would expect in an English Bible, this belongs to a different textual tradition. The text of our Bible is arranged in an order that is slightly different than the Paris Bible (differences shown by italics): [Genesis, now lacking], Exodus-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah [*lacks 3 Ezra*], *Esther, Judith, Tobit*, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel, Minor Prophets, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Gospels, *Acts, Catholic Epistles*, Pauline Epistles, and Apocalypse. The prologues also differ, and notably none of the six new prologues characteristic of the Paris Bible are present (listed in Light, 2012, p. 385), and the Prayer of Manasses is not found at the end of 2 Chronicles. An examination of selected passages of the text also shows no relationship with the text of the Paris Bible. The text of our Bible, with a few exceptions, is divided into the modern, numbered chapters found in manuscripts of the Paris Bible (and still used in modern Bibles), but Exodus-4 Kings also include initials marking older unnumbered chapter divisions. The format followed here, with chapters numbered in the margin and initials placed within the line of text, is also a link to earlier manuscripts of the Bible.

If our Bible is not a Paris Bible in terms of its text, one anomalous feature of its text links it directly to Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS lat. bib. e. 7, a small portable Bible for Dominican use illuminated by De Brailes (Online Resources). In both our Bible and the Bodleian Bible, Job is followed by the prologue, "Iob quoque exemplum patientie" (Stegmüller, 350). It is very unusual for a prologue to follow rather than precede a biblical book, and this textual link between these two Bibles is very significant and underlines the importance of this manuscript for the study of Bibles copied in Oxford in the thirteenth century, in particular those illuminated by De Brailes and his workshop.

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

British Library, Additional MS 49999 ("De Brailes Hours")

<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=6430>

https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_49999

Philadelphia, Free Library, MS Lewis E 29 (Oxford, 1230-1240)

<https://bibliophilly.library.upenn.edu/viewer.php?id=Lewis%20E%2029#page/316/mode/2up>

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS bib. lat. e. 7

[MS. Lat. bib. e. 7 - Medieval Manuscripts \(ox.ac.uk\)](https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/f667786c-b5b4-4d25-b2c9-b70488a79be2/surfaces/1d35187b-b019-4a52-ab63-fec7a187ed0e/)

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