

Reading a Manuscript Page

Extract from Latin Breviary with prayers and hymns; incomplete, c.1190-1210 (WLC/LM/1 f.23).



A single page can tell us much about a medieval book. The materials and decoration are evidence of its quality, commissioning and purpose; physical details provide clues about the stages in its production; and the use of colour, script, marginal notes and other features show how it was meant to be read.

A page from John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (far left) gives a handsome example of English book production in the early fifteenth century, with its large leaves, double columns, generous margins, running titles, colour and use of the distinctive English script *anglicana formata*. It is also clearly unfinished: blank spaces are left in key sentences for larger more ornate capitals, with small guide letters present to aid the illustrator.

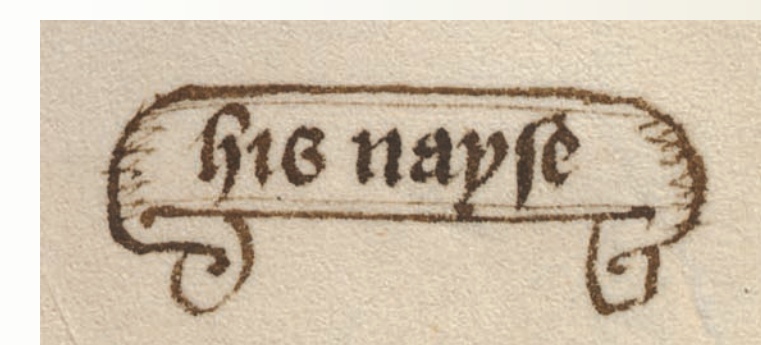
A closer look reveals other details of the page's composition. The scribe has a clearly defined space of two 46-line columns to write in, appropriate for the work's verse form. Occasionally the text in red which introduces a passage is compressed, evidence of its later

insertion. Tiny aligned holes on the edge of the parchment leaf show the 'pricking' that guided the ruling. In the bottom right corner the sign 't3' is present, to help the ordering of completed loose leaves for sewing. Had this been the last page in the quire or 'gathering' of leaves, a 'catch-word', anticipating the next gathering, would have further assisted accurate binding.

Other works show similar evidence of their production and intended use. Large initials and 'rubrics' (directions in red ink) guided the performers using manuscripts of liturgical music, such as the early 13th century Latin Breviary (above left). The staves were made in red using a special multi-nib rake or 'rastrum'. The scribe has worked around the defect of an early tear in the parchment, which was sewn before use. Some words have been added between the lines of text.



Section from another leaf, showing a hole in the parchment, with decoration concealing a further imperfection (WLC/LM/8 f.167v).

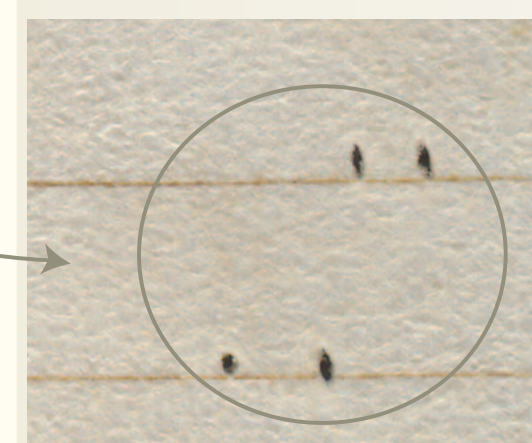


Catchwords 'his naysse' (nose) at the bottom of the page will be the first words on the next leaf (WLC/LM/8 f.168v).

albonen all ye remenant. **Secunda stella vocat' Almareth. cuius lapis iaspis. et herba plantago est.**
 he teute sterre is Almareth
 which vpon lif & vpon deeth
 porgh kinde of iupitre & marte
 he doy what longer to his parte
 his stone is iaspis & of planteyne
 he hay his herbe soleyne. **Vntenna stella vocat' Venenias cuius lapis Adamans et herba Cicorea est.**
 he sterre effluent is venenias
 pe whos nature is as it was
 take of venus & of pe mone
 in pinge which he hay for to done
 of Adamant is pat perrie
 in which he worchey his maistrise
 pilk herbe also which hi befallay
 Cicorea pe boke him calley. **Duodecima stella vocat' Alpgeta. cuius lapis Topazion & herba Rosa marina est.**
 Alpgeta in pe nombre sitt
 and is cleped pe twelf sterre zitt
 of Scorpio which is goined
 and takey his kinde as i am lerned
 and hay his vtu & i pe stou
 which clepyd is Topazion
 his herbe jpre is Rosinaryne
 which shapen is for his covyne.
Tertia decia stella vocat' Cor Scorpius. cuius lapis Sardis & herba Astro.
 f yise sterres which i mene logia e.
 Cor Scorpius is threttene
 pe whos nature marte & iove
 hay yoncu vn to his behoue
 his herbe is Astrologie
 which foloweth his Astronomie
 pe stone which pat pis sterre allowey
 is Sardis which vn to hi bowey
Quarta decia stella vocat' Botercadent. cuius lapis Crisolit' & herba Sa.
 he sterre which stant next p' laste.
Cruterea e.

Nature on him pe name caste
 and clepey him Botercadent
 which of his kinde obedient
 is to marte & to venus
 his stone is seide Crisolitus
 his herbe is cleped Saturie
 So as pe olde boke seie. **Quinta decia stella vocat' Cauda Scorpionis. cuius lapis Calcedonia & herba Maio.**
 ut now pe laste sterre of al. rana e.
 pe taile of Scorpio it call
 which to marte & to Satorne
 Be wepe of kinde mot retorne
 after pe preparation
 off due constellation
 pe Calcedoine vn to hi longer
 which for his stone he vndrefongey
 of maiorane his herbe is groundey
 p' haue i seide how pei be foundey
 of euyl sterre inspenall
 which hay his herbe & stone w' all
 as hermes i his boke olde
 wittenes bereth of p' i tolde
Pro hic de artibz illis q' ad Astronomie sciam p' cetis studiosius itudentes libros s' hoc distinctis noibz composuit.
 he science of Astronomie
 which principall is of clergie
 to deme be tiene wo & wele
 in pinges pat bene naturele
 pei had a grete trauaile on honde
 pat made it firste ben vndrestoude
 and pei also which ou more
 hir studie sett vpon p' lore
 pei weren gracionse & wise
 and worpi for to bere a prise
 and whom it likey for to wit
 of hem pat pis science writ
 on of pe firste which it wrote
 after Roe it was Rembrote
 to his discipule ychomithon
 and made a boke fory p' vpon

Guide letter 't' for 'the' shows that a decorative capital was intended.



Double pricking holes guide the end of column ruling.



't3' signature indicates the third leaf of the 20th quire labelled 't' (WLC/LM/8 f.155).