

FLORILEGIUM, MARTYROLOGIUM, TABLE READINGS: MEDIEVAL MANUSCRIPTS IN THE BRITISH LIBRARY (7TH–12TH CENTURY)

(Summary of Basic Research)

INTERNATIONAL CANON LAW HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER

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Szabolcs Anzelm SZUROMI, *Two manuscripts that had a significant impact on religious, theological, and canonical culture of the High Middle Ages (British Library, London)*

1 – Introduction

This time, the basic research, which was done between September 9th and 13th 2026, covered two holdings of the *British Library*: the *Harley* and the *Arundel Collection*.

The first manuscript examined can be found in the *Harley Collection* (also known as Harleian, Latin: *Bibliotheca Harleiana*). It is one of the main ‘closed’ collections of the *British Library* (a historical collection that is not expanded). It was compiled by Robert Harley (†1724) and Edward Harley (†1741). Then, it was purchased by the British Government in 1753 as one of the first collections to form the basic stock of the Library of the *British Museum*, which was then established. Its description was published in London in 1808 (i.e. *A Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts, in the British Museum*, III). The second manuscript belongs to the so-called *Arundel Collection*. The Arundel manuscripts named after Thomas Howard (†1646), Earl of Arundel, who developed his manuscript collection during the reigns of King James I (†1625) and Charles I (†1649). After the Great Fire of London in 1666, his grandson Henry Howard allowed the *Royal Society* to be convened at *Arundel House* and allowed members access to its library, then in 1669 he donated the entire stock to the *Royal Society*, with the condition that they remain at *Arundel House*. From 1678, some of them were transferred to the *Gresham College*, and the volumes owned by the *Royal Society* were purchased by the *British Museum* in 1831. Their description was published in London in 1834 (i.e. *Catalogue of Manuscripts in the British Museum. New Series*, I: *The Arundel Manuscripts*).

1 – The First Manuscript

The catalogue published by Robert Nares, Henry Ellis and Thomas Hartwell Horn in 1808 provides relatively little data on the codex under study, dividing its content into five thematic sections (not to mention the *florilegium* genre, which constitutes the largest unit), of which the fifth is the biography of St. Fursey (“incipit transitus Fursei”), the description does not refer to the concluding additions at all. Despite the fact that the 2010 – 2012 collaboration between the *British Library* and the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* paid attention to the textual witness I analyzed, that research apparently focused on the biography of St. Fursey and the additions attached to it, so it did not place significant emphasis on the content and comparative textual critical examination of the *florilegium collection*, nor on the exact dating and localization of the manuscript. About the person of St. Fursey (c. †649) I would only like to record here that he was an Irish

monk who was baptized by St. Brendan (†577). As an ascetic person, he proselytized in East Anglo-Saxon and Pictish areas, and many of his visions are known. He founded the monastery of Cnobheresburg (c. 630), then from 644 he proselytized in Frankish territory (Neustria), where he also founded an abbey in Lagny, in 644.

The manuscript, which consists of 100 folios (236 mm x 135 mm), contains three significant units, which are clearly separated both from the point of view of paleography and content, and they were subsequently joined together (i.e. *colligatum*). Contrary to the description that can be read as a result of the above-mentioned international research, the first unit is not the patristic florilegium collection (based on the division made in 2012: foll. 1r-78v), but a short «Tractatus Theologicus» (foll. 1r-8r) that precedes it. Thus, the *florilegium collection* is correctly – subsequently – extended from the last two lines of fol. 8r to fol. 78v. This is followed by the above-mentioned biography of St. Fursey, which is considered to be the oldest detailed narrative of the saint (foll. 79r-98v; i.e. Levison: MGH SS VII, 1920, 609). At the very end of the manuscript there are short, fragmentary prayers and songs (foll. 98v-99r), and the last three pages are blank (foll. 99v-100v). With regard to its origin, critically analyzing the internal, paleographic and codicological evidences, it can be concluded that the first unit was certainly copied in the court of King Chlotar III, as its unique characteristics can be identified, not only in terms of the style of writing, but also in terms of the way the parchment was developed. Thus, this quire can be dated between 657 and 673, in Frankish territory, to Soissons, which was the most important administrative center of Neustria, during the time of the young ruler, with the associated *scritorium*. The origin of the second unit – based on similar internal arguments – can be dated between 673 and 790 (most likely by the end of the 670s), namely in the Abbey of Corbie, founded by the king and his mother, Queen Balthild in 659/661. The characteristic script form of the third unit (*Vita sancti Fursei*) is much later and is a section subsequently added to the earlier sheet booklets, which was very probably written between 711 and 714. On this basis, the codex was classified as part of the 8th-century stock. Its place of origin, given the form of writing and the quality of the parchment, as well as the fact that the veneration of St. Fursey was decisive in the newly founded Abbey of Corbie (i.e. ‘the miracle that happened in the forest of Corbie’), is therefore certainly also Corbie.

A From the point of view of the patristic material of medieval canon law collections, the second unit of the examined manuscript is certainly of unique importance. The voluminous florilegium collection is not included among the sources of research on patristic florilegia in the last decades of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century (1906–1914) [i.e. *Florilegium Patristicum*, Bonn 1914]. The actual patristic material in fact ends by fol. 74v. From this we can distinguish between the work entitled *De ortu et obitu patriarchum* (The Birth

and Death of the Patriarchs), erroneously considered to be the work of St. Isidore of Seville (†636) [foll. 75r-v], and the Preface of the Letter to the Romans (foll. 76r-78v). The texts of the florilegiums survive in the textual witness under the names of St. Jerome (†420) and St. Augustine (†430). Of the two, I would like to draw attention to the passages attributed to St. Augustine. Their significance becomes especially striking if we compare their text with the text of the canons in the *Decretum Gratiani* (c. 1140), which are considered to be of Augustinian origin. This material makes up 493 [498] canons in the critical edition of the *Decretum Gratiani* (i.e. Szuromi: February 3rd 2026). Of these, 48 were certainly included in the collection through the *Collectio Canonum Anselmi Lucensis*, since it follows exactly the omissions contained in it (in detail i.e. Szuromi: 2006). 199 canons most likely directly and fairly accurately cite the works of St. Augustine; finally, 246 [251] canons can be traced back to a collection of florilegium (i.e. Szuromi: 2022). Comparing the latter unit with the florilegium list of the manuscript examined in the *British Library*, the complete 246 material attributed to St. Augustine out of the 246 canons can be found in the textual witness, which also shows complete textual correspondence.



3 – The Second Manuscript

The codex, as I have already referred to above, is in the *Arundel Collection*. According to the description of 1834, which explains the contents of the manuscript in four and a half columns, it is a textual witness from the 12th century, which lists the lives of saints, miracles and martyrdoms. The extensive list begins with a description of the Passion of the Apostle Matthew (not to be confused with the description of the story of Jesus' passion in the Gospel of Matthew!) and ends with eight readings written in honor of the birth of St. Nicholas. This gives the manuscript a complete, well-articulated content, from fol. 2r to fol. 229v. The description of the summary of the contents of the volume can be read on fol. 1v (i.e. *Tabula contentorum*). The international project carried out in 2010 – 2012 complements all this description by the fact that the main part of the manuscript contains stories of passions and a collection of the lives of saints for the liturgical year; furthermore, it indicates that the readings on St. Nicholas (foll. 227r-229v) are a later addition, which contains an excerpt from the *Vita Sancti Nicolai* (translated from Greek into Latin by Deacon John of Naples [†after 910]), and which, according to the opinion of the researchers of the project, was added to the volume shortly after the manuscript was compiled. With regard to the place of its origin, neither the 19th century nor the 21st century research undertakes a more precise determination, apart from the fact that the textual witness is a "Western manuscript".

It can be stated that the work in the codex belongs to the genre of *martyrologium*, which has existed since Christian antiquity. In these *martyrologiums*, not only the lives of martyrs and saints were included, in the calendar order of their feasts, but they were also supplemented with biographical descriptions of local bishops, abbots, and Christian personalities who lived memorable exemplary lives. The knowledge of their life and work had an educational effect on the members of both the clergy (i.e. members of the cathedral chapter) and the religious communities. These local lists were gradually enriched with names associated with neighboring dioceses or religious houses.

The specificities of *martyrologium* facilitate both the dating and the localization of a manuscript. In the analyzed textual-witness there are not only descriptions of the lives of many famous people (e.g., the martyrs St. Cosmas and St. Damian [†287/303], St. Jerome [†420], St. Fulbertus [†1028], St. Ricarius [†645], St. Severinus [†482], St. Willibrordus [†739], etc.), but also the names of St. Norbert (†1134) and Stephanus de Bar, bishop of Metz (†1163). Stephanus was bishop and cardinal of Metz from 1120 (although he was unable to take his bishop sea for years due to the emperor's hostility). Stephanus played an important role in the settlement of the Norbertines (Premonstratensians) in Metz.

Returning to the manuscript – which contains 229 folios (242 x 138 mm) – after a thorough examination of it, I do not consider the claim that the extract of the *Vita Sancti Nicolai* was added afterwards to be well-founded. This is not

justified either by the unchanged handwriting style or by the same characteristics of the elaboration of the parchment. There can be no temporal reason either, since the Latin text itself dates from the beginning of the 10th century, while the examined textual witness is uniformly from the 12th century. However, in the closer determination of the place and time of the manuscript, the listed saints and memorable people provide a clear base. For this reason, I compared the present codex from a codicological and paleographic point of view with the manuscripts identified on November 24th – 29th 2025 at *Gonville and Caius College* (Cambridge, UK) and on April 22nd – 25th April 2026 at the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* (Paris). On this basis, it can be reasonably stated that the analyzed manuscript, which currently belongs to the *Arundel Collection* of the *British Library*, was used in the Abbey of Metz (*Abbaye Sainte-Croix et Saint-Éloi de Metz*). The Norbertine Order took over this community, together with the church and building complex, in 1135. The text refers to Bishop Stephanus de Bar as having died at that time, so the date of the writing of the textual witness must be placed shortly after 1163. The codex – due to its specific genre and its place in the agenda of the Norbertine community – certainly played the role of a table-reading within the Abbey of Metz (this is also supported by the clear, clean, uncontaminated and easily legible condition of the manuscript).



4 – Conclusion

Both manuscripts described and identified above, based on their unique characteristics, had a significant impact on the religious, theological and canonical culture of the High Middle Ages. The first codex is not only an outstanding source of patristic theological and disciplinary reasoning within the monastic community following the Benedictine Rule, but it was very likely that it could have had a direct influence on the composition of the text of the *Decretum Gratiani*. The second codex mediated within the everyday life of the Norbertine Order the life-example of saints and those who practiced an outstanding Christian virtue, thus educating those who belonged to the canons-regular community. The same manuscript is also significant because it is now the third identified codex that formed the basis of the contemporary literature culture of the Norbertine Abbey of Metz and preserved it for posterity.



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