

AN EARLY MEDIEVAL TEXTUAL SOURCE ON THE EVERYDAY ECCLESIASTICAL CULTURE OF ANGLO- SAXON ABBEYS

(Summary of Basic Research)

INTERNATIONAL CANON LAW HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER

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Szabolcs Anzelm SZUROMI, *A Medieval Manuscript Summarizing the Theological and Disciplinary Foundations of Religious Life, and its characteristics, in the British Library's Manuscript Collection*

I – A Unique *Colligatum*

a. It is well known that the earlier book collections that form the British Library's holdings date back much further than the 1753 parliamentary act that established the *British Museum* and its *Library*. The most important roots lie in the *Old Royal Collections*, which trace the earliest compilation of the book collection back to the 15th century, all the way to the library of King Edward IV (†1483). The classic description of the Old Royal and Kings Collections is found in the *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the King's Library* (London 1734), edited by David Casley and dating from the period preceding the establishment of the British Library, followed by the *Old Royal and Kings Collections catalogue* published by George F. Warner and Julius P. Gilson (London 1921). Even the older catalog, published in 1734, listed among the earliest manuscripts a collection consisting of eight volumes, which it did not classify by genre but nevertheless accurately summarized the works found in the manuscript, along with their authors and, in some cases, the *incipit*. The 1921 publication, which provided a much more detailed paleographic, codicological, and content-based description of the *Old Royal Collection's* codex holdings (including the consistent citation of diplomatic and critical editions of the works contained in the manuscripts), retained the aforementioned manuscript's division into eight parts, providing the most detailed description of the codex to date. However, the codex under examination was already included in the theological section of the *Old Royal and Kings Collections*. The classification—in accordance with the customary practice of the time—was based on the content of the first work in the volume, thereby facilitating the classification but at the same time “concealing” the parts of the material that were not purely theological in nature from thematic research.

b. Taking all this into account, the manuscript contains the following works: 1) the fragmentary *Tractatus Theologicus*, whose author is unknown, but which is certainly incomplete in its present form (foll. 1r–15v); 2) *Testimoniale sancti Cipriani episcopi* (currently known in international patristic literature as *Testimonia*, III) [foll. 16r–51v]; 3) *De sinodali libro*—that is, the Synodal Book—which is a unique work compiling ecclesiastical disciplinary provisions from various sources, including canons cited from the Synod of St. Patrick (c. 459; e.g., Szuromi, 2026). Upon examining the compiled disciplinary material, it can be concluded that, despite a few overlaps in content, it cannot be regarded as a textual version or excerpt of the collection known as the *Collectio Hibernensis*. It can be observed that the work consistently quotes only moral, customary, and synodal rules pertaining to members of religious communities, so it is certain that it was intended for religious use (foll. 52r–68v); 4) A shorter

version (omitting the final section of current editions) of Bede the Venerable's (†735) work *De remediis peccatorum*. Current scholarly opinion is divided on whether the work is by Bede or by Egbert, Archbishop of York, who compiled it from Bede's (or pseudo-Bede's) more extensive penitential treatise written around 730 (i.e. *Paenitentiale Bedae*; see Reinhold Haggenmüller's research: Frankfurt am Main 1991), as Bede's student. Egbert (Ecgbert; †766) was the first Archbishop of York (735–766), who not only organized the Archdiocese of York but, through his brother Eadberht, who became King of Northumbria in 737 (†758), exerted a lasting influence on early medieval English Christianity. Egbert's relationship—he possessed an excellent knowledge of canon law (the work *De iure sacerdotali* is attributed to him)—with Bede the Venerable and St. Boniface (i.e. Archbishop of Mainz, †754) is well known to scholarly research (foll. 69r-78v); 5) *Edictio Bonifacii arcii epscopi* [*archiepscopi Moguntini, De poenitentia*], which is in fact nothing other than the material from the *Excarpsus Cummeani*. Although this was likely not written by Boniface—it was most likely compiled at the Abbey of Corbie in the first half of the 8th century—its dissemination across the European continent, aimed at renewing penitential discipline, can be linked to him and his circle (for details, see Rob Meens, Cambridge 2020). The same hand appended two supplementary chapters to the end of this collection, consisting of the text of the last two canons of the Council of Compiègne (757) [on the council: Wilfried Hartmann, 2017] (foll. 79r-79v); 6) *Extr. Liber Henoch* (the section on the story of Noah's birth). The Book of Enoch (also known as 1 Enoch) is an ancient Jewish apocalyptic religious work that contains unique material on the origin of demons, explains why the Flood described in the Book of Genesis was necessary, and discusses the Messiah's millennial reign. Modern research dates the composition of the text, originally written in Hebrew (no extant textual evidence is known to date), to between 300 and 100 BC; however, certain parts of the book were likely not composed simultaneously. The earliest known version of certain sections of the book survives in Aramaic among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The section in the manuscript under examination contains an abridged form of Chapter 106 of the Book of Enoch (Enoch 106:1–18), which is the only known Latin translation of this passage. The passage in question belongs to the fifth—and final—section of the Book of Enoch, namely Enoch's Letter (Enoch 91–108), within which Enoch 106–107 (the so-called First Appendix) describes the birth of Noah. The text of this specific Latin fragment was published by Montague Rhodes James (Cambridge 1893). Taking into account the results of contemporary biblical apocryphal research (e.g., Patrick P. O'Neill 1997; Martin McNamara, Leiden 2022; most recently on this: Szuromi, *FThC* 2025), it appears that the Latin passage 106:1–18 in abridged form most likely originates from a *florilegium collection* (this plays an important role in determining the place and date of origin of the present manuscript) [foll. 79v–80r]; 7) *De vindictis magnis magnorum peccatorum*, which is a brief argument based on the Old Testament arguing that the origin of all sin is human pride (the examples cited are Adam, Cain, Lamech, the plagues of Egypt, the story of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem, and the fall of the northern kingdom [Samaria]). This brief biblical argument on sin fits into the early medieval Anglo-Saxon–Irish disciplinary literary tradition, in which arguments drawing on Old Testament texts played a dominant role. No other known examples of this specific work exist to date

(foll. 80r–81v); 8) A fragmentary text of the Gospel of Nicodemus (also known as the Acts of Pilate), lacking a title and preface; however, the quoted chapters correspond to the text of the work known as the Gospel of Nicodemus (an apocryphal text from the 4th–5th centuries AC) (the concluding 27th chapter is incomplete). The work has survived in numerous languages, of which Greek is most likely the original. Interestingly, a complete Old English version (c. 450–1100) also exists (the full text has been preserved in two early 11th-century manuscripts; for details, see Zbigniew S. Izydorczyk, Tempe, AZ 1997) [foll. 82v-100v].



II – Location and Dating of the Manuscript

a. The manuscript under examination consists of 100 folios, each measuring 235x139 mm, and was created by the subsequent compilation of several works under a single intention (i.e. *colligatum*). This may originally have comprised six separate units, the contents of which—as I have shown above—comprise a total of eight works. The 9th century, cited as the date of origin in the 1921 catalog, is not supported by any internal evidence, as the script clearly reflects the 8th century (though it was undoubtedly also in use in the 9th century). The works in the codex were written between 730 and 740,

so this represents the lower limit of the possible dating. The quality of the parchment is decisive. Although there are instances where Italian (Turin, Milan) parchment was used for a manuscript in the British Isles in the 8th century (e.g., Lindisfarne). However, in this case, it is certain that the preparation of the parchment used, the copying of the work, and finally its assembly took place in the same location, which, based on clear internal evidence, is undoubtedly Jarrow (the monastery named after St. Paul [later an abbey] began operating in 681/682 as a sister monastery to the monastery named after St. Peter at Monkwearmouth).

b. The very first section of the codex under examination, titled *Tractatus theologicus*, is particularly significant; the 1921 catalog listed this work as the anonymous work of an unknown author. However, if we examine the text that begins with the words “In the name of the Holy Trinity” (*In nomine sanctae trinitatis*) and pay attention to the “educational” or “educational program” that the “anonymous” author conveys with the phrase “the canon in Hebrew, the rules in Greek, and justice in Latin,” we can uncover the author’s identity and even gain insight into the origins of the manuscript’s compilation. The author calls himself a “praeceptor” who, “after long teaching,” “explaining the Holy Scriptures,” and “having completed his historical summary,” wishes to provide guidance for a virtuous life and penance within the religious community. The author also indicates which topics he will address to this end, listing the works found in the examined manuscript. A particularly interesting aspect of this “theological” introduction is that, third in this list, he refers to his “brief summary on penance.” The clues in the introduction paint a picture of a person who is most likely Bede the Venerable himself. Moreover, they also help determine the date of the manuscript’s compilation: according to our current knowledge, the only historical work produced at Jarrow, the famous *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum*, which Bede completed in 731. Bede resided in Jarrow from 681/682; he was ordained a priest in 703, after which he taught at the abbey (i.e. *praeceptor*), but he had already been engaged in writing since 701. Bede died on May 26, 735; his literary work is traditionally dated between 701 and 734. If it is indeed Bede the Venerable who writes in the introduction about the purpose and compilation of the *colligatum*, then the body of the codex was likely written between 731 and 734.



Conclusion

This manuscript, part of the British Library's collection, was specifically intended to provide guidance on virtuous living and penance within the monastic community; it enriches our understanding of life and culture in early medieval Anglo-Saxon monasteries in numerous significant ways. In manuscript research, one must exercise caution when attempting to identify the specific person who transcribed the text. Keeping this principle in mind, we can establish the following: 1) From the section known as the *Tractatus Theologicus*, we can reconstruct a figure who, in terms of both place and time, as well as monastic duties and creative activity, points to Bede the Venerable. We can identify seven different script styles in the manuscript (of the eight units, only units 6 and 7 were copied by the same hand). The introduction, however, clearly refers to every section of the *colligatum*, so it must have been prepared for the compilation of the *colligatum*; 2) the work titled *De remediis peccatorum* was thus written in Jarrow, so it cannot be the work of Egbert, which confirms—as has been debated recently—the authorship of Bede the Venerable; 3) Based on his other known works, we know that Bede the Venerable was familiar with and used the Latin passage—taken from a *florilegium* and quoting 1 Enoch 106:1–18 in abridged form. The textual evidence before us is therefore of outstanding significance in terms of research on Bede the Venerable, the authorship of the *Paenitentiales*, and the exploration of the role played by Jarrow Abbey in the first half of the 8th century.



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