

University Library, Special Collections & Archives
Highlight for August 2007 by Harmony Lam



Feast of the Crown of Thorns
Dominican Antiphonal, c.1320-1340
Classmark: Liverpool University Library MS.F.4.13

Various commentators have proposed that this Antiphonal originally was produced for the church of Santa Maria della Spina in Pisa, which was given that name in 1333 after receiving a relic of the Crown of Thorns; the inside front cover of the volume contains the inscription "Pisa Sept. 1837".

Liverpool University Library MS.F.4.13, fol.5

The historiated initial G shown left belongs to the first antiphon of the Feast of the Crown of Thorns, which begins *Gaude felix mater ecclesia* "(Rejoice in your good fortune, mother church)". It depicts the mocking of Christ, described in *Matthew 27.29*, where Jesus is crowned with thorns and scornfully proclaimed by his taunters as "King of the Jews". The subtle and detailed drawing of the figures in the illumination, and the portrait of the Evangelist in the corner of the leaf, suggest that this was the work of a highly skilled artist.

Liverpool University Library MS.F.4.13, fol.5

The second image (right) from a section of the chant "Kyrie leyson", provides an example of the alternating red and blue ornamentation of capital letters in the volume, while the unfinished initial O (St Matthew with the Human Angel, below) demonstrates the process of creating an illumination.

Liverpool University Library MS.F.4.13, fol.5





Liverpool University Library MS.F.4.13, fol.

The historiated initial O (Christ in Glory) shown left is the second and only other illuminated letter in the manuscript.

Throughout the volume, the first letters of hymns, antiphons and anthems are elaborately decorated, occasionally with gilding, and accompanied by colourful borders on the same leaf. Clearly no expense was spared in its creation. Different artists must have contributed to the manuscript, since some of the initials on the later leaves are in the style of 15th Century Florentine works. The Antiphonal would have been used by priests in the chanting of mass, and its musical notation provides a valuable window onto the celebration of mass during the High to Late Middle Ages.

Provenance

The manuscript was for a time in the possession of C.W. Reynell, and sold in the 1895 Sotheby's sale to Henry Young, a bookseller in Liverpool. It then came to the University of Liverpool in 1950 as a gift from the conductor Sir Adrian Boult, whose father Cedric Boult had acquired it. Adrian Boult's connection with Liverpool began in the First World War when he was conductor for the Liverpool Philharmonic Society, and in 1947 he received an honorary degree from the University of Liverpool. Photographs of the degree ceremony can be found in the [University Archives](#) (P1003/39-44).

References:

Judy Blezzard

Medieval Manuscripts on Merseyside [catalogue of an exhibition] University Art Gallery, Liverpool and Courtauld Institute Galleries, London. The University of Liverpool, 1993.

Medieval and early Renaissance treasures in the North West [catalogue of an exhibition] Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester. Manchester, 1976.

Ker, Neil Ripley *Medieval manuscripts in British libraries*. Oxford, 1983. Vol.3: Lampeter-Oxford includes detailed descriptions of manuscripts in Liverpool; edited after the author's death by Andrew G. Watson.

This item is part of the Medieval and Renaissance manuscripts collection and is available for reading in Special Collections & Archives, by prior appointment.

<http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/index.html>