

The Gorleston Psaltar

In our search for dresses with dots and lines we go through The Gorleston Psaltar, 1310-1324, Add MS 49622.

It is a manuscript with extremely clear handwriting, easy to read. As always there are a lot of abbreviations, but with the latin bible Versio Vulgata on the screen you can read very well. If being uncertain of the meaning you can always check the Psaltar in swedish. A text well known as this is a delight to read, unlike other, secular manuscripts.

Talking about handwriting, the later additions, from fol 226v onwards, are made by another and later hand, fast writing but not careful. The difference in style can be seen mostly in the letters a and d.

After browsing all the pages I wanted to read the Shepards Psalm "The Lord is my Shepard", but to my suprise it is not to be found in the manuscript! Fol 31v cuts the "Maundy Thursday" Psalm just in the middle of verse 28 and ends with "Dnominum univarsi fines terrae". Fol 32r begins "Domini est terra". The whole Shepards Psalm is omitted!

But the focus in on the illuminations, although so many other things in the manuscript are interesting to go deeper into. All these vignettes, initials with people in, figures in the margin – who are wearing the dresses with dots and stripes?

The first picture is found in the bottom margin on fol 11v and is a dominating large illumination. It shows a man with a halo – he is a saint – on a X-shaped cross. Thus it is the apostle S Andrew. Two kneeling monks are venerating him.



There are a lot of pictures of apostles in the manuscript, but all the rest of them are inscribed in that kind of 2-row initials when a new Psalm begins. The most of the apostles have a speech band with the name on, to be easier to identify. But I will show the picture of one with a speech band where can be read "In principio erat", the first words in the gospel of S John. Thus it is the apostle/evangelist S John. Also there is seen an eagle, his symbol, to underline the identity.



But back to S Andrew. His dress is cross patterned with three groups of one wavy line, two straight lines and one dotted line. In the middle of each sleeve there is a double straight line and a dotted one. Each sleeve has a dotted ending. His dress has much more decorations than mostly of the persons in the manuscript. Browsing through it you will notice that the persons with more simple decorations on the dresses are anonymus figures, and the few with more developed decoration are identified and important.

S Andrew is here painted first of all in the apostle row, and all the others are inscribed in an initial. He is allowed to spread out over the page without the limitation of an initial. This in a manuscript of english origin. It has to be done with a purpose. According to John 1:40 Andrew is the first disciple of Jesus, and in that time the Gorleston Psaltar was made he had for centuries been particularly venerated on the British islands. The place and configuration of this picture has a certain significance.

Unlike the picture of S Andrew the rest of the margin illuminations are made as a general decoration. It is in the pictures in all the initials you must find the meaning and the purpose. Just to find out what!

Now we will look on some decorative elements in the manuscript. They are figures of different kind. All have dots and stripes on their dresses. Fol 14v, 64v och 56r.



Some pictures with masses occur in the margin (fol 13r) and in an initial (fol 94v). The mass servant (?) and the congregation (?) have dotted-lined dresses.



The Psalter contain 150 psalms. Each psalm begin with a 2-row initial with some kind of illumination. Each verse begin with a simple 1-row initial. The Psaltar is divided in parts and each part begin with a 6-row initial. As an example of this we take fol 86r. The profet Jona is thrown into the sea and later saved. This is the beginning of psalm 68 "Salvum me fac Deus" (Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul.) It must been made intentionally that this psalm got this illustration.



In a 2-row initial D to psalm 97 "Dominus regnavit", fol 125r, a signing Christ is seen enthroned on the rainbow with an earth globe in his hand. Being on the last row on the page the bottom margin could be incorporated in the initial. Here as a knight, lifting his hand in worship or he just holds and support the initial. The gesture of the knight is open for interpretations. Note the dotted line on the knight's surcote.



As the last picture from the Gorleston Psalter I will take the one from fol 205v. The initial N is the first letter in "Nunc dimittis", Symeon's praise (Luk 2:21ss), one of the cantica from the New Testament, also used in the evening prayer of the Church. S Mary carry forward the child Jesus to Symeon, Joseph carry a basket with doves, "according to that which is said in the law" Note that all three of them have dresses with variuos decoration of dots and lines.



But I could not let this margin figure on fol 103v being unseen.

