The Good Boy's Book of Hours: New College MS 160

I was drawn to examine New College, Oxford MS 160 by the indication in Coxe of 'notis musicalibus instructis'.[1] There are very few books of hours that include musical notation, and MS 160 is one of only a dozen such English late medieval books that I have located. Such volumes raise the question of why the creators of the manuscripts have chosen to include this notation. Who was using the volume and why was it important to go to the extra trouble of adding musical notation? However, I found this volume intriguing for several reasons in addition to the presence of musical notation—the very plain nature of the basic volume, the naming of one of the owners, and the extensive writing/scribbling on the fols. 1–4 and 127–130, immediately before and after the original manuscript. Included in those writings by Johannes Bryne are at least twenty-four copies of the line *Ego sum bonus puer quem deus amat*! So, who is this good boy and why did he need music in his book of hours?

MS 160 is a fifteenth-century Sarum book of hours (145 mm x 105 mm) with almost no decoration. Red and black are the only colours found in the volume—a 3-line initial 'D' in red opening the hours and red initials indicating the start of each psalm verse. The volume includes the Hours of the Virgin with the Hours of the Cross intercalated (fols. 5r–35r), the penitential psalms (fols. 35v–42v), the gradual psalms (fols. 42v-44v), the Litany (fols 44v–52r), the Office of the Dead (fols. 52r–108r), and the Commendation of the Soul (fols. 108v–126v). There is musical notation for the Office of the Dead. The volume lacks a calendar and includes none of the common extra-liturgical devotional material often found in *horae*.

The manuscript is not highly rubricated although it does include distinctions in the Hours of the Virgin for differences in Lent, prayers for various occasions in the Office of the Dead (e.g. if the body is present, on the anniversary, etc.), and basic indications of the genres of text. There are nineteen lines of script per page up to folio 48 where the format changes to only sixteen lines per page. The musical staves in this volume take up four ruling units for text and music, so that just four lines of music appear on each page. In contrast, most of the *horae* with music use a ratio of three ruling units for text and music together. The effect on the page is striking, rather like large print. On fol. 108r, a rubric and musical notation have been added in a different hand to indicate the tone for chanting 'Resquiescant in pace. Amen'.

The notation of the Office of the Dead includes one unusual feature. The scribe chose to include the termination tones for the previous reading before the first four responsory chants in Matins. This would appear to be a device that would allow the singer of the responsory to begin the chant in relationship to the pitch of the recited lesson. For example, on fol. 67r (below) we see the ending of the reading *non subsistam* as a lead in to the responsory chant *Credo quod redemptor meus*. Most notated versions of the Office of the Dead that appear in books of hours do not include such cues which may indicate that the volume was made for someone who was learning to chant this office.[2]

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[1] Henricus O. Coxe, *Catalogus Codicum MSS qui in collegiis aulisque oxoniensibus hodie adservantur* (Oxford, 1852), p. 60. To date the short description given here is the only published description of the manuscript although a new catalogue is in process. Coxe describes the contents as 'Horae B. M. Virginis, orationibus scilicet constans ad Virginem, et hymnis canticis sacris, psalmis septem poenitentialibus, litaniis, psalmisque aliis, notis musicalibus instructis'. I am indebted to the Librarian at New College for sharing with me the beginning description of the manuscript for a new catalogue being prepared by Dr James Willoughby when I visited in October 2014. The Library graciously allowed me to take some photos for my personal scholarly use. The description of the contents is my own.

[2] Another example of this is found in Winchester College MS 48 where the cue is given for the first responsory. For a discussion of the relationship of this cue to a contemporary priest's manual, see Jesse D. Mann and Anne Bagnall Yardley, 'The Prayer Life of a Fifteenth-Century English Priest: Winchester College MS 48', *Sacris Erudiri* 58 (2019), pp. 229–30.

New College Library, Oxford, MS 160, f. 67r

An initial look at the opening and closing folios of the manuscript gives the impression of chaos. The penmanship is variable, the size of the script changes frequently, and there are obviously texts in both Latin and English, pen trials, and doodles. A closer look at the material indicates that some text elements are quite repetitive, as if the scribe is practising writing the same text multiple times. The most frequently repeated text is the Marian hymn *Stella celi* often appearing with a prayer

beginning *Deus misericordiae, Deus pietatis, deus indulgentiae.* This hymn appears in either abbreviated or full form no fewer than seven times at both the beginning and end of the manuscript.[3] This hymn, which asks for protection against the plague, is a frequent component of later medieval books of hours.[4] Eamon Duffy offers one example where the reader was instructed to pray *Stella celi* at the elevation of the host.[5] While this hymn is often present in a book of hours, it is certainly unusual to have it repeated seven times!
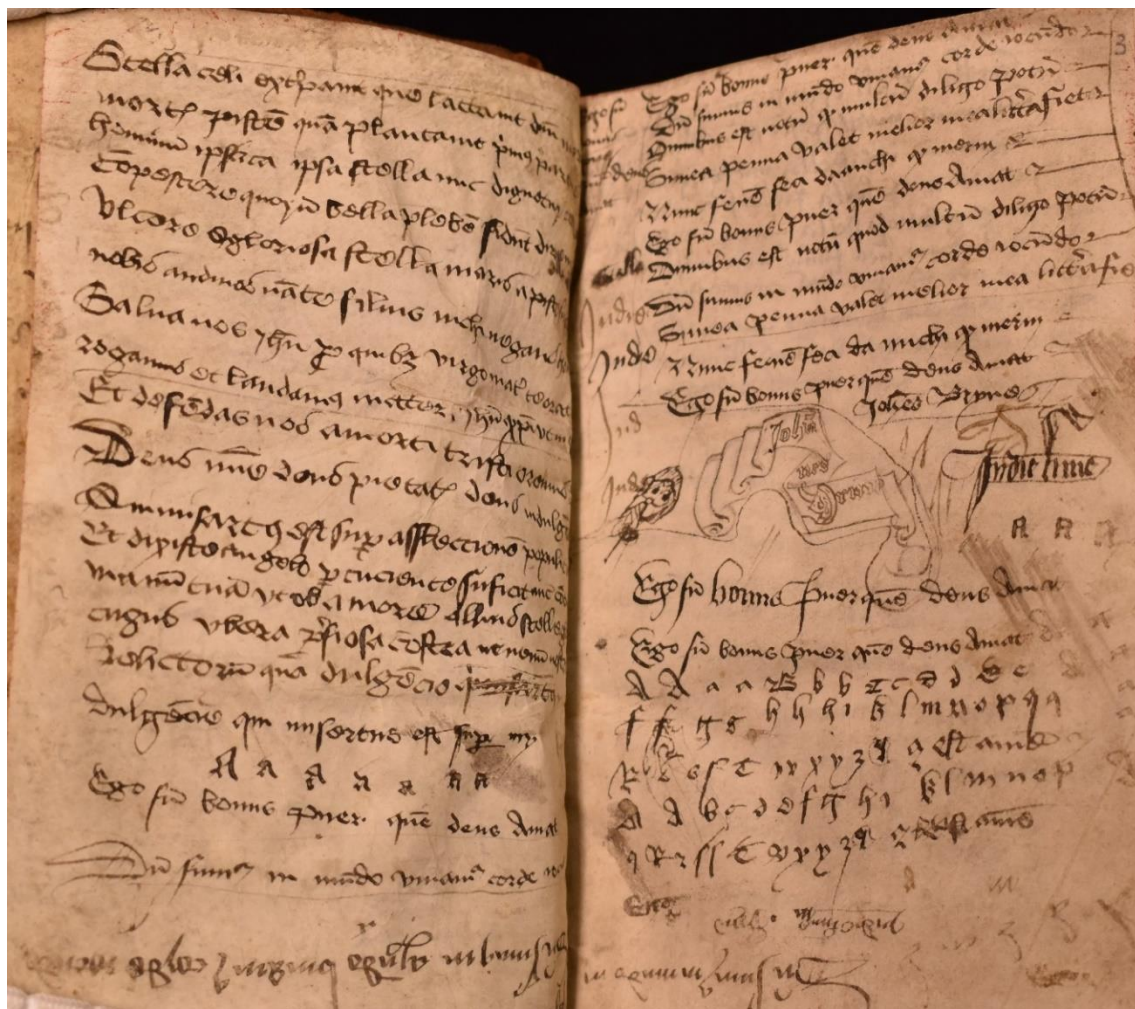
New College Library, Oxford, MS 160, ff. 2v–3r

On fol. 2v Johannes has written the full *Stella Celi* as well as a line of the letter A, and two lines of sayings—'Ego sum bonus puer quem deus amat' and 'Dum sumus in mundo, vivamus corde iocundo'. Finally, there is a line that is written upside down.

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[3] Fols. 1v, 2r, 3v, 4r, 127r, 127v, and 128v.

[4] For an article on the origins of this chant and its associated musical settings, see Christopher Macklin, 'Plague, Performance and the Elusive History of the *Stella Celi Extirpavit*', *Early Music History* 29 (2010), pp. 1–31. The prayer is found less frequently. The combination of *Stella celi*, the two lines beginning *Te rogamus*, and the prayer are found together in a late fifteenth-century volume that gives prayers intended to ward off disease: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A17340.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext>.

[5] Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and their Prayers 1240-1570* (New Haven, CT, 2006), pp. 88, 90.

On the facing page, there are a series of Latin sayings which are then repeated.[6] The name Johannes Bryne is nestled under the repetition and above the scribbles. The 'Ego sum bonus puer' line is then repeated a couple of times before the letters of the alphabet are written. Lines from 'ego sum' appear on several other folios, especially those at the end.

Another constant throughout the beginning and ending folios is the line *Iste liber constat Johannes Byrne.*
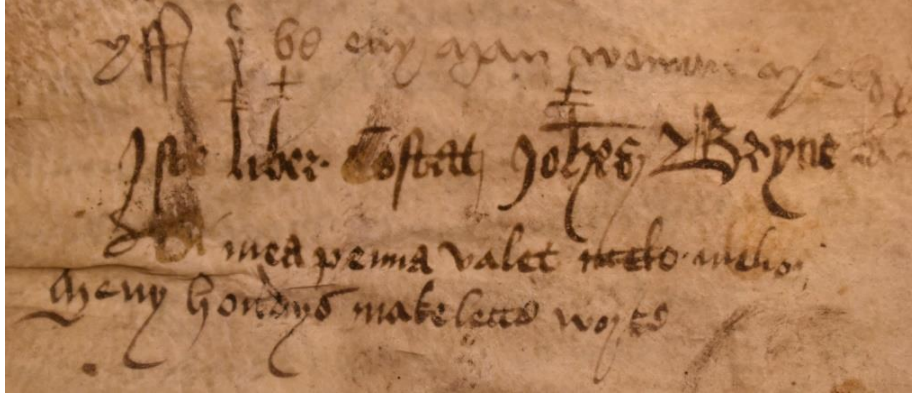
New College Library, Oxford, MS 160, f. 2r [detail]

Under the inscription for the book is one partial line from the list of sayings (*Si mea penna valet melior)* and the English saying 'many hondys make lette worke'.

The final added text of note is the prayer on fol. 4v. that calls upon the wounds of Christ. It begins *In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen. Per virtutem Dei sint medicina mei Jhesu pia crux et passio Christi Vulnera quinque sint medicina mei* and proceeds to call upon not only Mary but also Katherine and Cecilia. These texts which have been added give the book a unique flavour of a youth trying to learn his penmanship and note down familiar sayings and prayers.

The overall effect of this book of hours suggests that it is a student volume, used perhaps as a textbook. Several observations lead to this conclusion. The material on the opening and closing folios, and especially the frequent repetition of *Ego sum bonus puer*, certainly raises the suspicion that the volume was created for student use as does the repetition of material. Once the Office of the Virgin begins (fol. 5r), the opening *Venite*, rather than just cuing the antiphon *Ave Maria,* carefully intersperses it and spells out the complete text. The relatively large size of script, especially after the change from nineteen lines per page to sixteen at fol. 48 and the very spacious musical notation seem appropriate for a student volume as do the musical cues in the Office of the Dead.

When compared with other *horae* that have been suggested as teaching volumes, however, there are some things lacking in this manuscript that are found in some other English 'primer' volumes. In particular, there is no alphabet, creed, Pater noster, or Confiteor. There are no graces for

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[6] The following sentences/proverbs are listed together and re-copied together on fol. 3r:

'Ego sum bonus puer quem deus amat' (found commonly in student books)

'Dum sumus in mundo vivamus corde iocundo'—this is listed as a proverb in a thirteenth-century English Bible, Huntington Library EL9 H3 but does not have a number in Walther.

'Omnibus est notum . quia multum diligo potum'—Hans Walther, *Proverbia sententiaeque Latinitatis Medii Aevi; lateinische Sprichwörter und Sentenzen des Mittelalters in alphabetischer Anordnung*, Carmina medii aevi posterioris latina (Göttingen, 1963–1969), #20125. This is a common proverb.

'Si mea penna valet . melior mea littera fiet'—Walter #42537B. Only one source is listed in Walther.

'Nunc finem feci. da michi quod merui'—appears right before the name of the scribe in Cambridge University Library Ff 3.15 and in <http://www.joh.cam.ac.uk/musica-ecclesiastica-imitatio-christi>.

meals or prayers for going to church and to be said at certain times in church. All of these things are found at the beginning of many primers, for example, in New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M.487, a fifteenth-century English book of hours. As Wieck contends, children, like Chaucer's little child, learned basic literacy from books of hours.[7] John Bryne was perhaps a youth who would seem to have used the pages at the beginning and end of his manuscript to further his study of the basics and to focus on his penmanship.

Students learned to chant the psalms as part of the memorization of this important portion of virtually all medieval liturgy. As I have shown in my article on education of young girls in medieval England, children learned to chant the psalms and sing simple responses as part of their education.[8] The ability to read and to sing are frequently listed in tandem, as they were apparently often learned in tandem. Chaucer's memorable portrait of the 'litel clergeon' describes the curriculum of the medieval schoolhouse as offering precisely the sort of education that would enable a scholar to sing as well as read. The scholar learned 'to seyn, to syngen and to rede',[9] from a prymer, the middle English term for the book of hours, as an integral part of their studies.[10] It is possible that John Bryne attended a monastic school and learned to chant the Office of the Virgin and the Office of the Dead. Or was he being taught at home by a private tutor? These intriguing questions will not be answered conclusively, but in the diversity of uses for *horae,* this 'good boy' had music in his manuscript.

There is an intriguing reference to a Johannes Bryne in the records of the church in E. Odstock, Wilton where he is listed as becoming the priest in 1510 after the death of Rogeri Servynton and being succeeded after his death in 1525 by Thomas Benet.[11] This would not be an impossible timeline for MS 160 if Johannes Byrne owned it as a student in the mid to late fifteenth century in preparation for the priesthood and still served as a priest until 1525.

Books of hours came in all shapes and sizes. They were used not only by lay people but also by nuns, monks, and priests. Jesse Mann and I have argued elsewhere for the identification of a different book of hours as one that was created for a priest.[12] The relatively large script, the presence of musical notation with cues, the carefully added interpolations of the Ave Maria, and the extensive penmanship exercises at the beginning and end point to the possibility that New College MS 160 was intended for the use of a scholar who would one day become a priest.

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[7] Roger S. Wieck, 'The Book of Hours', in *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter (Kalamazoo, MI, 2001), pp. 476–77. Wieck specifically discusses this manuscript from the Morgan Library and includes in Figure 1 fol. 1r from the manuscript. See further Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven, CT, 2003), chapter 7.

[8] Anne Bagnall Yardley, 'The Musical Education of Young Girls in Medieval English Nunneries', in *Young Choristers 650– 1700*, ed. Susan Boynton and Eric Rice (Woodbridge, 2008), pp. 49–67.

[9] Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, line 500, 'to say, to sing and to read'.

[10] For a nuanced discussion of the prioress's depiction of the clergeon, see especially pp. 187–98 of Katherine Zieman, *Singing the New Song: Literacy and Liturgy in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2008). Zieman's careful discussion of the tale situates it within discourse on the medieval 'song school'. As she notes (p. 3), 'Locating the place of song does indeed require a reconsideration of the importance of both the liturgy and the skills required to produce it in late medieval culture, yet its position was demonstrably a part of, rather than an alternative to, education in letters'.

[11] *Institutiones Clericorum in Comitatu Wiltoniae ab anno 1297 ad annum 1810* (1825), pp. 188, 98.

[12] Mann and Yardley, 'The Prayer Life of a Fifteenth-Century English Priest'.