

De Brailes or Not De Brailes? A 13th-Century Illuminated Bible at New College

New College, Oxford, MS 7 is one of three large 13th-century pandect Bibles currently held in the library's special collections.¹ With its impressive folio size of 350 × 250 mm it is larger than both MS 1 and MS 2 (300 × 210 mm), but with 301 folios actually shorter than either of these with their 407 and 340 folios respectively.

The pages have very generous, wide margins; the written space only measures 210 × 120 mm. That the scribe still managed to fit the entire text of both Old and New Testament on the 300 folios is due to the size of the script itself: there are no less than 60 lines in each of the two columns per page, which means that the space between rulings is only 3.5 mm in height; each minim measures a mere 1.5 mm.

In line with the script, the copious exquisitely illuminated initials are also of a truly miniature size—the six- or seven-line historiated initials found at the beginning of almost every single book of the Bible measure only 20 mm, roughly the size of a penny. Even the nine-line



MS 7, f. 247r: initial **I** from the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, depicting the evangelist writing; ruler with centimetre markings for scale.

initials are not larger than a two-pound coin, and the faces of the hundreds of tiny figures inhabiting the initials are each about as small as a lentil, and each delicately drawn eye or red cheek no bigger than the head of a pin. Despite their miniature size, however, the quality and quantity of the illuminated initials is such that they even merit mention by Coxe, who in his catalogue hardly ever comments on decoration; MS 7, however, is described as 'binis columnis nitidissime exaratus, et quoad literas initiales deauratus' ('very neatly written in two columns, and gilded as far as the initial letters are concerned').²

The tiny, but stunning illuminated initials of MS 7 are the subject of this note.³

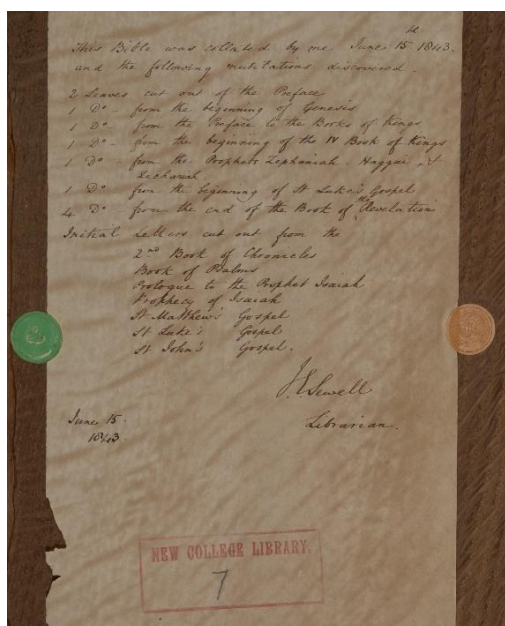
A FIRST HINT OF DE BRAILES

Over the centuries, MS 7 has been subject to some brutal mutilations. Already Coxe describes it as 'mutilatus' ('mutilated'); and a decade before he printed his catalogue, in a note dated 15 June 1843 and now pasted on the inside of the wooden front board of the codex, the New College librarian carefully listed the mutilations he observed during collation.

¹ For a detailed description of the MS see Appendix 1. All images from this and other MSS from the collection © Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford.

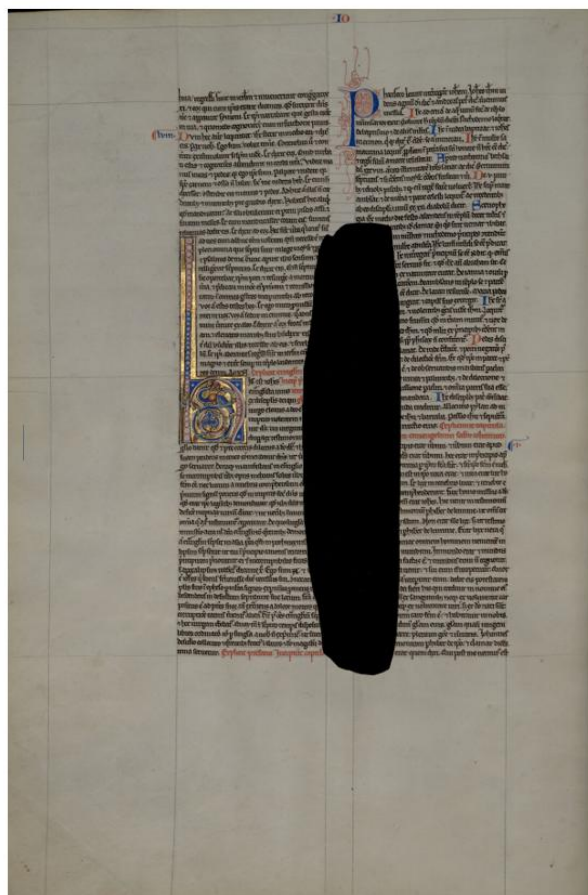
² H. O. Coxe, *Catalogus Codicum Mss. Qui in Collegiis Aulisque Oxoniensibus Hodie Adservantur* (Oxonii: E typographeo Academico, 1852), p. 2.

³ For a full list see the section on *Decoration* in the manuscript's description in Appendix 1.



MS 7, front board interior: Warden Sewell's note on missing leaves and initials

The librarian at the time was James Edwards Sewell (1810–1903), who was warden of New College from 1860 until his death, and whose memorial stone can still be found on the floor of the college's cloisters, right next to the door of the bell tower where MS 7 is currently kept. As Sewell's list shows, the majority of what must have been the greatest initials are missing, including the *Beatus*-initial of the Psalms, and the large initials which marked the beginnings of the gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John. There are, however, still a remarkable 117 illuminated initials remaining in the manuscript, 90 of which are historiated, and 13 of which can be described as 'major' initials of considerable size, extending over 20, 30, or even 40 lines of text. Thanks to the very targeted, relatively neatly executed excisions, some of the seven-line initials marking the prologues to the gospels have also survived, even when parts of the same folio fell victim to a knife.



MS 7, f. 239r and f. 258v: initials **M** and **H** from the prologues to Matthew and John; full page showing the mutilation of f. 258v caused by robbing the major initial **I** at the beginning of John

Coxe describes the MS as ‘deauratus’, ‘gilded’; an adjective he only uses one other time in his entire catalogue to characterise a New College MS, namely in the description of MS 322, the de Brailes Psalter (**O-NC**).⁴ This is potentially not entirely a coincidence. In his discussion of offsets of musical notations from former pastedowns in MS 7, Andrew Wathey tantalisingly describes the MS as ‘richly illuminated in the style of the assistants of William de Brailes’.⁵ There is, however, no indication of any source for this claim in the printed piece—in a personal communication Wathey speculates:

I may have got the information on Brailes from a 1979 catalogue of an exhibition dedicated to Richard Hunt, or in correspondence with Bruce Barker-Benfield . . . I don’t think it would have been from my own observation in the early 80s.⁶

While the exhibition catalogue unfortunately does not make any mention of MS 7,⁷ a search through the archived papers of Richard Hunt (1908–1979) is rather more successful. Hunt was keeper of Western manuscripts at the Bodleian Library from 1945 to 1975, at which time the New College MSS were stored there for safekeeping: they were transferred to the Bodleian in 1907, and only repatriated in 2006. Hunt’s interest in the New College MSS resulted in a great deal of research and plans for the publication of a monograph on the history of the college’s library and its special collections, both manuscripts and archival material; but by the time of his death in 1979 the work sadly remained unfinished, and the only part of it which was ever printed was the chapter on ‘The Medieval Library’ in *New College, Oxford, 1379–1979*, the history of the college published in commemoration of its sixth centenary.⁸ Hunt’s papers were collated in the years after his death by Bruce Barker-Benfield, and among Hunt’s papers and draft typescripts of the planned monograph are pages from a likewise unpublished piece on the illuminated MSS of New College by Elżbieta Temple (under her anglicised name of Elisabeth Temple), who went on to become co-author of the definitive catalogue of illuminated MSS in Oxford College Libraries.⁹ ‘Ms Temple’s piece’, as Hunt and Barker-Benfield refer to it, seems to have started life before 1977 as an article for publication in an academic journal, but was soon intended by Hunt to form the final chapter of his planned book on New College Library.¹⁰ The later of the two typewritten drafts that exist (undated, but initialled by Barker-Benfield on the 23rd of June, 1980) devotes nearly an entire page to MS 7, and this seems to be the original source of its connection with the name of William de Brailes:

MS.7, a beautifully illuminated ~~and even better produced~~ Bible, datable to c. 1220, can be attributed to England on the grounds of its iconography and style, the latter recalling the work of some of William de Brailes’ assistants.

The chapter draft with this sentence had clearly been read by both Hunt and Barker-Benfield, and extensively marked up by the latter, and neither disagreed with Temple’s assessment

⁴ Coxe, p. 115. Abbreviations used throughout refer to the list of MSS associated with William de Brailes in Appendix 2.

⁵ Roger Bowers and Andrew Wathey, ‘New Sources of English Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Polyphony’, *Early Music History* 4 (1984), 297–336, at p. 330 n. 51.

⁶ Andrew Wathey, personal email communication, 28 January 2026.

⁷ cf. *Manuscripts at Oxford: An Exhibition in Memory of Richard William Hunt (1908–1979), Keeper of Western Manuscripts at the Bodleian Library Oxford, 1945–1975, on themes selected and described by some of his friends*, ed. Albinia C. de la Mare and Bruce C. Barker-Benfield (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1980).

⁸ *New College, Oxford, 1379–1979*, ed. John Buxton and Penry Williams (Oxford: Warden and Fellows of New College, Oxford, 1979), pp. 317–245.

⁹ J. J. G. Alexander and Elżbieta Temple, *Illuminated Manuscripts in Oxford College Libraries, the University Archives and the Taylor Institution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). New College MS 7 is no. 173 in the catalogue.

¹⁰ Elisabeth Temple, ‘Illuminated Manuscripts in New College Library’, unpubl. chapter draft, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. 21026/75.

of the possible artistic provenance. In her later 1985 catalogue, published together with J. J. Alexander, however, there is no more mention of any stylistic affinity with de Brailes or his assistants. Here only three MSS have the name of William de Brailes attached: **O-MC**,¹¹ **O-NC**,¹² and **O-CC**.¹³ New College MS 7, though credited with '[f]ine historiated and other initials',¹⁴ is here not associated with the name anymore, and neither does it feature in any of the several lists of works stemming from or related to the Oxford workshop compiled by critics, even though most of these lists tend to include MSS not directly attributable to de Brailes or his workshop, but related in style. In her monograph on one of the illuminator's great works, the de Brailes Hours (**L-BL**),¹⁵ Donovan explains the idea of the de Brailes 'house-style':

Trained in similar style, the artists worked together to design, decorate and illustrate, each artist to a different degree contributing miniatures, historiated initials, line endings and decorations . . . Plainly, it was a professional group of craftsmen that made such high quality luxury volumes . . . Yet these manuscripts too have a 'house-style', just as do those from the monastic scriptoria. It is this house-style that ties these manuscripts in a group, through all aspects of their design and style, from the layout of the page to the detail of the figure style.¹⁶

Her appended 'Handlist of Illuminated Manuscripts made in Oxford: 1200–1270' features 43 items, and includes only six MSS deemed to contain work attributable to the hand of William de Brailes himself (nos. 16–21), but nine more which are 'linked through artists shared with de Brailes group' (no. 11), have '[l]inks with the style of de Brailes group' (no. 12), are '[l]inked to de Brailes through shared artists' (no. 13), show 'collaboration with at least one Oxford artist, William de Brailes' (no. 15), contain 'ornaments linked to de Brailes patterns' (no. 27), are 'evidently derived from the Oxford workshop, with iconographic and stylistic links' (no. 31), or feature '[d]ecoration related to the de Brailes workshop' (no. 42).¹⁷ Even in this truly extensive and comprehensive list, however, there is no mention of New College MS 7.

The intriguing question remains—are we able to link MS 7 with the workshop, associates, or even just the 'house-style' of William de Brailes, or not?

THE BASICS: DATE, LOCATION, AND SIZE

In terms of dates, William de Brailes's name appears in documents connected to Oxford and to other illuminators from 1230 to 1252, either as a witness or as receiving money.¹⁸ Morgan identifies the illumination in **O-BL7**, which he dates to *c.* 1234–40, as belonging to an 'early stage of de Brailes work', and considers **O-NC**, dated *c.* 1240–1250, 'the final product of de Brailes and his workshop'.¹⁹ Temple puts de Brailes's artistic period as some years longer than this, dating **O-CC**, with a '[f]ine historiated initial by William de Brailes', to *c.* 1230–1260.²⁰ Timothy Graham in the *ONDB*, Colum P. Hourihane in *The Grove Encyclopedia of Medieval Art and Architecture*, and Donovan

¹¹ Alexander and Temple, no. 190: 'By two hands, the first close to William de Brailes'.

¹² Alexander and Temple, no. 199: 'By William de Brailes and his workshop'. For some of the principal images from this MS see <www.bridgemanimages.com/en/brailes>.

¹³ Alexander and Temple, no. 200: 'Fine historiated initial by William de Brailes'.

¹⁴ Alexander and Temple, no. 173.

¹⁵ Claire Donovan, *The de Brailes Hours: Shaping the Book of Hours in Thirteenth-Century Oxford* (London: British Library, 1991).

¹⁶ Donovan, pp. 10 and 12.

¹⁷ Donovan, Appendix 4, pp. 201–205.

¹⁸ Graham Pollard, 'William De Brailles,' *The Bodleian Library Record* 5:4 (1955), 202–209, at pp. 205–207.

¹⁹ Nigel J. Morgan, *Early Gothic Manuscripts*, 2 vols. (London: Harvey Miller, 1982–1988), I, 115 (no. 69) and 123 (no. 74).

²⁰ Alexander and Temple, 22 (no. 200).

in both her book and her entry in *Grove Art Online* similarly all put the *floruit* dates of de Brailes at 1230–1260.²¹ However, Donovan and Morgan both consider at least one MS dated as early as c. 1220 (**NY-M791**), to possess ‘stylistic links with . . . the early de Brailes style’;²² Henderson even suggests that William de Brailes may have actually known this particular MS.²³

As for New College MS 7, Coxe dates it to the end of the 13th century (*‘sec. xiii. exeuntis’*),²⁴ and Alexander in his 1992 publication *Medieval Illuminators and their Methods of Work* also puts the date post-1250 (*‘[t]hird quarter thirteenth century’*).²⁵ Most other cataloguers and critics, however, disagree with this assessment, and suggest a rather earlier date. Wathey, presumably on the authority of Barker-Benfield, has ‘first half of the thirteenth century’;²⁶ while Temple in both her unpublished ‘piece’ and in Alexander and Temple specifies ‘c. 1220’.²⁷ In her monograph on illustrations of the Pauline epistles in 13th-century French and English Bibles, Luba Eleen agrees with this; though in her unpublished PhD thesis which forms the basis of her later book, she suggests an even earlier date of 1210–1220.²⁸

Some basic clues from the layout and contents of the MS do seem to support a dating to c. 1220–1230. The writing ‘above the top line’ suggests a date before probably 1230 and quite certainly before 1250,²⁹ and de Hamel considers the inclusion of the alphabetical list of proper nouns known as the *Interpretation of Hebrew Names*, lacking in MS 7, a standard feature of Bibles after 1230—though as the text in MS 7 does end abruptly on f. 293v with Rev. 19:20 and three folios are missing from that quire (and the canon tables on f. 294 begin on a new quire), this is admittedly a dubious piece of evidence.³⁰ The lack of breaks between chapters, with the blue and red chapter numbers placed in the margins next to the new chapter’s opening verse also indicates the earlier decades of the 13th century—de Hamel suggests that these are very much an expected feature still in 1230, but that unnecessary *capitula* lists and canon tables (which are both very much present in MS 7) disappeared by 1240.³¹ The chapter numbers in blue and red are certainly still the old enumeration; the revised chapter numbers have been carefully added in the margins throughout, and the chapter break marked with a thin double line in the text, even when there are no changes.

²¹ Timothy Graham, ‘Brailes, William de (fl. c. 1230–1260)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (23 September 2004) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/38130>> (Accessed: 15 April 2026); Colum P. Hourihane, ‘William de Brailes’, in *The Grove Encyclopedia of Medieval Art and Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). <www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195395365.001.0001/acref-9780195395365-e-2448> (Accessed: 15 April 2026); Claire Donovan, ‘William de Brailes’, *Grove Art Online* (2003), <<https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T091664>> (Accessed: 15 April 2026).

²² Morgan I, 81 (no. 32): ‘links in style and iconography with the later Oxford workshop of William de Brailes’; Donovan, 202 (no. 9): ‘stylistic links with . . . the early de Brailes style’.

²³ George Henderson, ‘Studies in English Manuscript Illumination: Part II: The English Apocalypse: I’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 30 (1967) 104–137, at p. 128 n. 65.

²⁴ Coxe, p. 2.

²⁵ J. J. G. Alexander, *Medieval Illuminators and Their Methods of Work* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 185 (no. 35).

²⁶ Coxe, p. 2; Wathey and Bowers, 330.

²⁷ Bodleian MS. 21026/72, p. 200 of Temple’s typescript draft; and Alexander and Temple, 19 (no. 173).

²⁸ Luba Eleen, *The Illustration of the Pauline Epistles in French and English Bibles of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 63; Luba Esther Eleen (PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1972), p. 132.

²⁹ Ker claims that he knows of no books ‘dateable either in the last decades of the twelfth or in the first three decades of the thirteenth century’ (other than glossed Bibles) written ‘below top line’ and suggests that ‘above top line’ was the standard for professional scribes ‘before and in the middle of the thirteenth century’: N. R. Ker, ‘From “Above Top Line” to “Below Top Line”: A Change in Scribal Practice’, *Celtica* 5 (1960), 13–16, at p. 14.

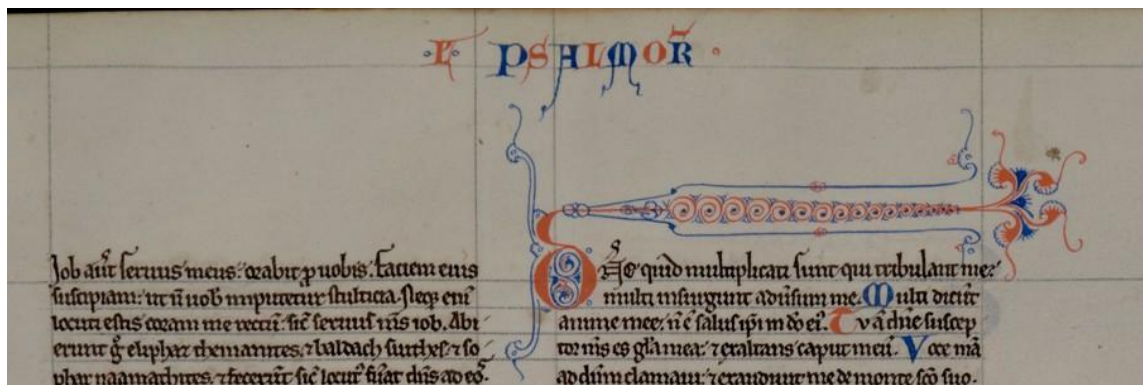
³⁰ Christopher de Hamel, *The Book: A History of the Bible* (London: Phaidon, 2001), p. 123. For the collation of MS 7 see the full description in Appendix 1.

³¹ De Hamel, p. 123. See also Laura Light, ‘French Bibles c. 1200–30: A New Look at the Origin of the Paris Bible’, in *The Early Medieval Bible: Its Production, Decoration and Use*, ed. Richard Gameson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 155–76, at p. 156.



MS 7, f. 113r: old and new chapter enumeration for Ezra 2

As for the geographical origin, there generally seems to be little doubt that the MS is, in fact, English rather than French.³² Despite being very close to a ‘standard Bible’ in terms of book order and prologues,³³ MS 7 is certainly not a classic ‘Paris Bible’—de Hamel lists for example a lack of running-titles along the top of the pages of the Psalms as a principal characteristic,³⁴ but MS 7 does have a running-title of ‘L(iber) Psalm(orum)’ throughout the Psalms on ff. 137–152.



MS 7, f. 137r: running title in the Psalms

While discussing the marginal notes found next to some initials in MS 7, Alexander does call the MS ‘a French thirteenth-century Bible’,³⁵ but since he later unambiguously lists MS 7 among a group of seven English illuminated MSS with preliminary marginal drawings, it may be that the Anglo-French of the notes in MS 7 prompted the misattribution.³⁶

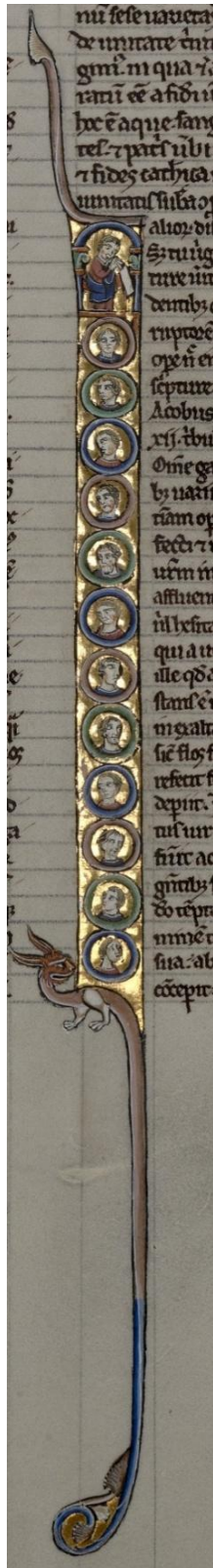
³² Though the difference is of course not always very clear; see, for example, the rather varied list of locations and dates proposed by different authorities for the individual dispersed leaves of the Bible attributed to the workshop of de Brailes and sold by Sotheby’s in 1993: Peter Kidd, *The McCarthy Collection: Spanish, English, Flemish and Central European miniatures* (London: Ad Ilissum, 2019), no. 11.

³³ On the ‘standard Bible’ see N. R. Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries: 1. London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 96–7.

³⁴ De Hamel, p. 128.

³⁵ Alexander, *Medieval Illuminators*, p. 59.

³⁶ Alexander, *Medieval Illuminators*, p. 85. See below for a discussion of the marginal notes and preliminary drawings.



MS 7, f. 288r: initial I for James.

In her unpublished chapter on the illuminated MSS of New College, Temple firmly attributes the MS to England ‘on the grounds of its iconography and style’:

Several pictures contain unusual subjects which can, however, be paralleled in contemporary English illumination or in that of the previous century. The initial for 2 Pet. (f. 289v), for instance, has an Anglo-Saxon flavour: it shows the Lord casting out the sinful angels, chasing them in swift movement through the curves of the letter ‘S’; while the opening for James (f. 288) shows a file of Christ’s ancestors in roundels on the shaft of the letter ‘J’, a subject traceable to Anglo-Saxon illumination.³⁷



MS 7, f. 289v, initial S for 2 Peter

According to Temple it is, however, the iconography of the psalter’s division which is ‘most revealing for the purpose of attribution’, and one which is mirrored in the de Brailes Psalter (**O-NC**). The initial for Psalm 80 showing Christ in Majesty with the musicians below (f. 145v) is paralleled in some English psalters; the subject of Jonah in the initial for Psalm 68 (f. 143v) is ‘another essentially English psalm-illustration’; and the Annunciation of the Shepherds as a subject of the initial for Psalm 97 (f. 147r) is limited to English psalters of the late 12th and the 13th centuries (and also mirrored in **O-NC**, f. 97r).³⁸

³⁷ Temple, Bodleian Libraries, MS. 21026/75, 201.

³⁸ Temple, 201; see also Günther Haseloff, *Die Psalterillustration im 13. Jahrhundert: Studien zur Geschichte der Buchmalerei in England, Frankreich und den Niederlanden* (Kiel, 1938).



MS 7, ff. 145v and 143v: initials for Psalms 80 (E) and 68 (S)



O-NC, f. 97v and MS 7, f. 147r: initial C for Psalm 97

A final word on both date and origin of MS 7 might be spoken by its size. With its leaves of 350×250 mm and its 300 folios, MS 7 is unwieldy to say the least, and in a format which, far from that of the popular ‘pocket Bibles’ of the 13th century, seems to hark back to the fashion of the previous century. Donovan comments on the ‘particularly dramatic’ change in format of the Bible at the turn of that century:

[T]he thirteenth-century bible is frequently pocket-sized and written on very thin parchment in a compressed script. Many tiny decorative or historiated initials divide up the text and, bound into a single volume, these bibles would have been easy to handle and carry about, to satisfy the needs of both the laity and the mendicant friars for personal books. By the time of William de Brailes and his fellows in the second quarter of the century, this had become the characteristic format for bibles.³⁹

She adds in a note that ‘[i]ndeed all the surviving volumes of the de Brailes group are of this format’.⁴⁰ There are certainly a number of Bibles with illumination either by de Brailes or attributed to his workshop which are very much on the smaller side: **L-BLH2** measures 180×130 mm, **C-GC** only 160×110 mm, and **PE-CL** is a tiny volume of 130×90 mm. At

³⁹ Donovan, p. 17.

⁴⁰ Donovan, p. 158 n. 29.

350 × 250 mm, **O-NC**, the de Brailes Psalter, is judged to be ‘unusually large’.⁴¹ There are, however, also much larger Bible MSS linked to de Brailes. **O-CC** measures 300 × 210 mm; **C-UL** comes close to MS 7 at 330 × 210 mm, and **NY-M791**, the early ‘Lothian Bible’ with stylistic links to de Brailes, even dwarfs it with its impressive 470 × 320 mm.

THE MANY MANUSCRIPTS OF WILLIAM DE BRAILES

In the basics of date, place and size of MS 7, then, there is unfortunately nothing much to definitely link the MS to the de Brailes workshop—but also nothing which would definitely and completely exclude the possibility. The most likely date of c. 1220 or even 1220–30 is a decade too early to fall into the acknowledged *floruit* dates of the Oxford workshop, but despite its early date of c. 1220 the massive Lothian Bible **NY-M791** is considered by both Morgan and Donovan to be linked stylistically to the illuminator.⁴²

The notion of ‘discovering’ a new, previously unknown de Brailes MS is not all that far-fetched. Ever since Sir Sydney Cockerell first drew attention to the named artist in 1908,⁴³ a number of lists of MSS with illumination attributed to either William de Brailes himself, his associates, or his workshop, have been published, but these do not always agree. There is nothing resembling a definitive list of these works, which has been added to extensively since Cockerell’s first publication.⁴⁴ The following will try to give a brief overview of existing MSS which have had the name of de Brailes attached to them by a variety of scholars over the last century and more—with no claims at all to being complete, Appendix 2 presents only the latest attempt of compiling from this a list of MSS which have been identified as entirely or partially illuminated by William de Brailes himself, his associates or by artists connected to him, or in the style of his workshop.⁴⁵

In 1930, in the first full-length treatise on de Brailes, Cockerell describes only five MSS he attributes to the artist:⁴⁶ **O-NC** (the de Brailes Psalter), **S-NM** (a second psalter, at that time in his own possession),⁴⁷ **C-FW** (six loose leaves from a third psalter), **L-BL** (the de Brailes Hours, at the time belonging to Dyson Perrins), and **O-BL7** (the de Brailes Bible, at the time also belonging to Dyson Perrins). Over two decades later, in 1955, in a note in the *Bodleian Library Record*, Graham Pollard then increases the number of known de Brailes MSS to seven: ‘three psalters, one book of hours, two bibles, and one book of bible pictures’,⁴⁸ adding **PS-MAG** (a Bible with a single historiated initial), and **B-WAG/P-MM** (a group of 31 Bible pictures from a single MS, already at the time split between collections in Baltimore and Paris).⁴⁹ Adelaide Louise Bennett’s unpublished 1973 PhD thesis on the Garrett Bible (Princeton University Library MS Garrett 28) then almost doubles the known count of de Brailes works by adding six more Bibles to the list

⁴¹ J. J. G. Alexander and Paul Binski, *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England, 1200–1400* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1987), p. 330 (no. 314).

⁴² Morgan I, 81 (no. 32); Donovan, 202 (no. 9).

⁴³ Burlington Fine Arts Club, *Exhibition of Illuminated Manuscripts* (London, 1908), 27–28, nos. 58 (**L-BL**) and 59 (**O-NC**). See also Graham Pollard, ‘William De Brailles,’ *The Bodleian Library Record* 5:4 (1955), 202–209, at p. 203.

⁴⁴ The most recent list can be found in Nigel J. Morgan, *Leaves from a Psalter by William de Brailes: Commentary* (London: The Folio Society, 2012), Appendix II, 86–105. However, Morgan here includes work of the related ‘Stockholm artist’, and does not include several MSS other critics associate with de Brailes.

⁴⁵ On this see also Noel, *Bibelbilder*, 39–41.

⁴⁶ Sydney Carlyle Cockerell, *The Work of William de Brailes: an English Illuminator of the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Roxburghe Club, 1930).

⁴⁷ On this see *Catalogue of the celebrated library of Major J. R. Abbey . . . the seventh portion . . . which will be sold by auction by Sotheby & Co. . . . Tuesday, 1st December, 1970 . . .* (London, Sotheby & Co, 1970), 23–25; and Patrik Reuterswärd, ‘En handskrift av William de Brailes och hans verkstad i Oxford,’ *Kontakt med Nationalmuseum* 12 (1971), 7–15.

⁴⁸ Pollard, 205.

⁴⁹ These were first identified as the work of de Brailes by Hanns Swarzenski in 1938: ‘Unknown Bible Pictures by W. de Brailes and Some Notes on Early English Bible Illustration,’ *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 1 (1938), 54–69. William Noel considers the images of **B-WAG** and **P-MM** part of the psalter which today is **S-NM**: *Die Oxford Bibelbilder* (Luzern: Faksimile Verlag, 2004), 15–38 and 43.

(**PH-FL**, **Y-ML**, **O-BL13**, **L-GI**, **C-GC**, and **O-MC**),⁵⁰ though these are not included in the lists then published by three different significant authorities on de Brailes over the last two decades of the last century.

In his *Early Gothic Manuscripts* (1982–1988), Nigel J. Morgan reduces the number of de Brailes MSS back down to six,⁵¹ excluding **S-NM**,⁵² but on the other hand including a number of Bibles ‘with illumination partly by de Brailes himself’ (**L-GI**, **O-BL13**, **O-MC**, **PS-MAG**, **P-FL** and for the first time **O-CC**),⁵³ and two more with stylistic links to the artist, **L-LI**⁵⁴ and the early example of **NY-M791**, dated by Morgan to 1220.⁵⁵ Morgan also notes that ‘[s]ome of the Oxford artists . . . use stylistic and ornamental tradition of the De Brailes workshop’, and includes in his second volume a list of five post-1250 MSS as part of that group,⁵⁶ including **L-BLH3**⁵⁷ and **O-BL114**.⁵⁸ A set of three volumes containing Aristotle’s *Libri Naturales* and the commentary by Averroes, c. 1250–60 (**P-BNLA**, **P-BNL**, and **B-DSB**), is credited to Oxford artists who ‘use stylistic and ornamental traditions of the De Brailes workshop’.⁵⁹

Donovan’s extensive list in her 1991 monograph attributes the same six MSS as Morgan directly to William de Brailes, but includes a large number of others with stylistic ties to the artist and his workshop, including **L-BLA6**, and **L-BLA4**⁶⁰ as well as a Bible ‘evidently derived from the Oxford workshop’ (**O-AS**), and a bestiary and lapidary decorated by ‘artists shared with the de Brailes group’ (**L-BLR12**).⁶¹ But more pieces of work identified as by the hand of de Brailes (or his associates or workshop) have surfaced after the publication of Donovan’s monograph and extensive list. A single leaf from a Bible (**M**), now untraceable, was advertised at the price of £900 and sold by Maggs Bros. in one of their catalogues in 1992:

[i]lluminated leaf on vellum from a Latin Bible. England(?Oxford), c. 1230–1240 . . .
Probably written in Oxford in the 1230’s, perhaps by William de Brailes or his

⁵⁰ Adelaide Louise Bennett, *The Place of Garrett 28 in Thirteenth-Century English Illumination*, (PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1973), p. 58 and Appendix I, A.

⁵¹ Nos. 69 (**O-B7**), 70 (**C-GC**), 71 (**B-WAG/P-MM**), 72a (**C-FW**), 72 (**NY-M791**), 73 (**L-BLA**), and 74 (**O-NC**): Nigel J. Morgan, *Early Gothic Manuscripts*, 2 vols. (London: Harvey Miller, 1982–1988), I, pp.114–123. He credits Bennett with the discovery of **C-GC**: ‘This fine bible was first recognised by Adelaide Bennet as the work of William de Brailes’, p. 116.

⁵² Attributed instead to a ‘London-based group of artists’ which were, ‘in a minor way...assisted by a visitor from Oxford, William de Brailes’, Morgan I, 114 (no. 68).

⁵³ Morgan, I, 115. On **O-CC** see also Alexander/Temple, 22 (no. 200): ‘fine historiated initial by William de Brailes’.

⁵⁴ ‘[M]any analogies with that of William de Brailes and his assistants’, ‘probably has some links with [the de Brailes] workshop’, Morgan, I, 109 (no. 62).

⁵⁵ ‘[L]inks in style and iconography with the later Oxford workshop of William de Brailes’, Morgan, I, 81 (no.32).

⁵⁶ Morgan, II, 22.

⁵⁷ ‘[A] development from work of the mid century in the de Brailes workshop’, Morgan, II, 130 (no. 145). Michael Camille disagrees with the attribution, and ascribes **L-BLH3** to the same artist as two other Aristotle MSS now in Cambridge (Pembroke College MS 193) and Oxford (Merton College MS 269): ‘Illustrations in Harley MS 3487 and the perception of Aristotle’s *Libri naturales* in thirteenth-century England’, in *England in the Thirteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1984 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. W. M. Ormrod (Grantham: Harlaxton College, 1995), pp. 31–44, at pp. 32–3.

⁵⁸ Features of the single historiated 13th-century initial are characterised as ‘survivals from the workshop of William de Brailes’, Morgan, II, 149 (no. 157); the entry on *Medieval Manuscripts in Oxford Libraries* calls the decoration ‘in the tradition of the Oxford illuminator William de Brailes’, see <https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/manuscript_7578> (Accessed: 1 June 2026).

⁵⁹ Morgan, II, 148 (nos. 156(a), (b), and (c)).

⁶⁰ Ascribed to artists ‘shared with the de Brailes group’ and ‘linked with the de Brailes group’, Donovan pp. 203 and 205 (nos. 24 and 42).

⁶¹ Donovan, p. 204 (no. 31) and p. 202 (no. 11). Morgan only concedes that ‘the artist both originated and worked in the South-East of England’, Morgan I, 111 (no. 64).

workshop, on the basis of a comparison with another Latin Bible (Bodleian MS lat. Bibl. E.7) which has been attributed to William de Brailes.⁶²

Similarly sold at auction, and for the most part now untraceable, is another Bible of 402 folios, containing 55 large painted initials for the prologues and 78 historiated initials for the books of the Bible; it was last identifiable as London, Sotheby's, 21–22 June 1993, Lot 6 (**L-SBY**),⁶³ before it was broken up by the buyer and the individual leaves dispersed across the globe. A leaf available at auction as recently as 2025 (at an estimate of \$2,500–\$3,500) is described by the seller as 'circle of William de Brailes': 'Although the illumination is not in exactly the same style as William de Brailes's signed works, the decorative repertoire is sufficiently close to his that we can safely suggest that it was painted in Oxford by a contemporary'.⁶⁴ The Cleveland Museum of Art identified another single leaf as belonging to the 'circle or workshop of William de Brailes' in 1999.⁶⁵ Two more entire codices, both still intact, have been identified in libraries in Rome and London by Michael Camille and Peter Kidd respectively: **R-BAV**⁶⁶ and **L-BLH2**.⁶⁷

The most recent, and most complete list to date can be found in Morgan's 2012 commentary on the Bible-pictures of **C-FW** and **NY-M913**; the carefully titled 'Summary list of manuscripts probably made in Oxford illuminated by William de Brailes and by his predecessors, collaborators and followers, c. 1190–c. 1270' contains altogether 54 items, of which 17 classed as '[p]redecessors of figure style, iconography, and ornament'; 16 as 'containing illumination by de Brailes and close associates', 14 as 'by artists working with similar figure style and ornament' from the period of c. 1230–c. 1250, and seven as 'by followers of de Brailes'.⁶⁸

'W. DE BRIL' QUI ME DEPAINT'

Strictly speaking, of course, out of Morgan's final list of 16 MSS containing the hand of de Brailes and his associates, only two can be attributed to the illuminator with absolute certainty, and by means other than a judgement of his style: the two MSS which contain 'self-portraits' labelled with the name of the artist, **C-FW** and **L-BLA**.⁶⁹

The de Brailes Hours, **L-BLA**, contain William de Brailes's portrait accompanied by an Anglo-French marginal annotation: 'w. de brail' qui me depaint'.⁷⁰ The often extensive captions in this MS, held 'in a tiny red script completely unlike the book-hand of the text itself', in many instances clearly exceed a function as instructions to illuminators, and have been developed into commentary and interpretation; to Donovan 'it seems certain that they were written by William de

⁶² Maggs Bros., 'Illuminated Manuscripts, Miniatures and Single Leaves', *Catalogue* 1137/*European Bulletin* 17 (1992), no. 24. Maggs were unfortunately unable to provide either any images of the leaf nor any information about its current whereabouts.

⁶³ *Fine Books and Manuscripts from the Library of the Late Alan G. Thomas, London, 22 June 1993* (London: Sotheby's, 1993), lot 6. For a list of the historiated initials contained in this volume, and plates with examples, see there and in Kidd, *McCarthy Collection*, no. 11.

⁶⁴ Still marked as unsold as of July 2026: Freeman's, Chicago, Sale 6388 – Western Manuscripts and Miniatures, Lot 8: <<https://freemansauction.com/auctions/6388-western-manuscripts-and-miniatures/lot/8>> (Accessed: 14 July 2026). Another leaf from this codex is currently for sale on AbeBooks for £5,786.77: <<https://www.abebooks.co.uk/paper-collectibles/Illuminated-Bible-leaf-Paul-England-Oxford/32279555634/bd>> (Accessed: 14 July 2026).

⁶⁵ Stephen N. Fliegel, *The Jeanne Miles Blackburn Collection of Manuscript Illuminations* (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1999), no. 4.

⁶⁶ '[D]ecorated with three hitherto unnoticed historiated initials by William de Brailes': Michael Camille, 'An Oxford University Textbook Illuminated by William de Brailes', *The Burlington Magazine* 137, no. 1106 (May 1995), 292–99, at p. 292.

⁶⁷ '[A] previously unpublished Bible illuminated in the de Brailes style': Peter Kidd, 'A Franciscan Bible Illuminated in the Style of William de Brailes', *Electronic British Library Journal* 2007, no. 8 <<https://doi.org/10.23636/934>> 1.

⁶⁸ Morgan, *Leaves from a Psalter*, Appendix II, pp. 86–105.

⁶⁹ cf. **C-FW** leaf 3 and **L-BLA** f. 43r.

⁷⁰ **L-BLA** f. 43r.

Brailes himself, in the same hand as the two instances of his ‘signature’ accompanying his self-portraits’.⁷¹

Intriguingly, New College MS 7 contains a number of just such marginal annotations in Anglo-French, which remain visible in the untrimmed margins. Alexander identifies these as instructions to the illuminator rather than descriptions by a later hand, and comments in particular on the initial **A** for 1 Chronicles (f. 97v), which depicts Adam delving and Eve spinning, exactly according to the accompanying marginal note reading ‘Adam qui labore et Eve qui file’: ‘Whoever wrote this had done no more than read the first word of Chapter I, which starts with a genealogy . . . And he could have done the same all through the Bible’.⁷²



MS 7, f. 97v: initial with Adam and Eve, and marginal note

This assessment of the illuminator or his instructor, however, does not seem quite fair. For one, since the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles contain nothing but genealogies, even reading on further in the book would have left the writer of the instruction hard pressed to find inspiration for a different design—in fact, Adam (whether in the moment of his creation or together with his descendants) is a common image to be found in the **A** initial at the start of Paralipomenon I.⁷³

For another, there is ample evidence that the illuminator clearly did not stop reading after the first word in a number of historiated initials which display detailed knowledge of the narratives of entire books of the Bible. The initial **E** at the beginning of the book of Joshua, for example (f. 54r) shows God speaking to Joshua in the upper aperture (with a note reading ‘com nostre sire parole a iosue.’), exactly according to the narrative in Joshua 1. The lower aperture, however, shows a battle scene, either the Battle of Jericho or a more general scene of the conquest of Canaan, with the note reading ‘com li iuf combatant contre les sarracins.’ (‘how the Jews fight against the Saracens’, with the term *sarracins* used as *pars pro toto* for any enemies of God’s people). These scenes, however, only appear later in the text, in Joshua 2 and 6 respectively.

⁷¹ Donovan, p. 38.

⁷² J. J. G. Alexander, *Medieval Illuminators and Their Methods of Work* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 1992), p. 59. See also Morgan, I, 115 on these marginal notes.

⁷³ See, e.g., the examples in Morgan Library MS G.42, f. 117r (‘England, perhaps Oxford, c. 1265’) and MS G.31, f. 115r (‘France, Paris, c. 1250’): <https://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/14/76959> and <https://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/14/76944>.



MS 7, f. 54r: marginal notes on the scenes depicted in the initial **E** of Joshua



MS 7, f. 115r: initial **I** for the Book of Esther

A particularly striking example which contradicts the notion that the illuminator only read the first words of the text is the large **I** which begins the book of Esther on f. 127v. The initial extends over 42 lines, and consists of four rectangular compartments separated by multi-coloured volutes formed by the snake-like bodies of beasts biting the compartment frames. The compartments contain key scenes from the book's narrative: King Ahasuerus disowning his queen; Esther being crowned; Mordecai on the king's horse being honoured; and Haman being hanged (see left).

As Alexander and Temple observe, these written marginal instructive/descriptive notes, where not trimmed away, only appear in the first third of the codex on ff. 1–97;⁷⁴ on the later leaves a number of initials are accompanied by faint sketches in plummet, which are without a doubt preliminary drawings rather than subsequent renderings of the finished piece.⁷⁵



MS 7, f. 124v, initial **A**:

Judith beheading Holofernes, with pencil sketch in the margin

To embark on a small digression tangential to this: while there are clearly some similarities to the de Brailes Hours in the instructive annotations in the margins, similarly in Anglo-French and in a tiny hand unlike the book-hand of the main text, MS 7 does of course not have anything to compare to the author portrait found in **L-BLA**—or does it?

The initial **P** at the beginning of 2 Thessalonians (f. 276r) depicts the apostle Paul delivering a letter. This is a scene which is repeated in a number of the **P**-initials at the beginning of Pauline Epistles, though the treatment here is particularly creative, with Paul writing or handing over letters in a variety of situations (from prison, from Rome, accompanied by Timothy/Silvanus/Sothenes) and to a variety of different people (to messengers, to a listening congregation, to Jews in distinctive hats). Eleen calls MS 7 'independent in [its] iconography', and characterises the imagery as 'dependent principally on the texts of the Epistles

⁷⁴ Alexander and Temple 19 (no. 173). Full or partial instructions can be found on ff. 18r, 28r, 35r, 45r, 54r, 60v, 67v, 76r, 83r, and 97r.

⁷⁵ Preliminary sketches exist e.g. on ff. 124v, 222v, 272v, 276v, 277v, and 289v.

themselves', in particular the opening passages of each Epistle, but with some influence of the prologues.⁷⁶

In the particular instance of 2 Thessalonians, a figure who is very recognisably Paul delivers his letter to two tonsured men dressed in collared tunics worn over floor-length albs, one of whom is holding an unidentifiable object, a pointed tool (or weapon, or a scribe's knife, or a pen) (f. 276r, see below, right). Unlike the remainder of the Pauline initials, where the scenes depicted derive from a close reading of the text, this one diverges from the information in both prologue and letter: the text clearly specifies that the letter, just like 1 Thessalonians, comes from Paul, Timothy and Silvanus together, not Paul alone—and indeed for the **P** of 1 Thessalonians the illuminator chooses 'an ingenious, if clumsy, method of depicting the joint sending of a letter' (f. 275v, see below, left).⁷⁷



MS 7, **P**-initials on f. 275v (1 Thessalonians) and f. 276r (2 Thessalonians)



L-BLA, f. 43r
William de Brailes's self-portrait

Eleen describes the two figures receiving Paul's letter in 2 Thessalonians as 'tonsured deacons' and excitingly suggests that '[t]he scene is probably a joint author portrait'.⁷⁸ Without refining too much on this, it may be worth noting that famously the self-portrait of William de Brailes in **LBL-A** depicts the illuminator similarly tonsured, and in clerical dress.

THE DE BRAILES 'HOUSE-STYLE'

While these similarities to the de Brailes Hours are undeniably interesting and intriguing, any actual, definite connection to the Oxford workshop must come, as in the case of the remaining, unsigned MSS, from a judgement of artistic style and iconography. Commenting on his list of MSS, however, Morgan notes that defining what exactly in any given MS is in the hand of de Brailes himself, and what in the hands of the numerous other artists associated with him and his workshop, poses 'an

⁷⁶ Eleen, p. 60 n. 70, and p. 63. See pp. 63–5 for detailed descriptions of the scenes and their relation to the biblical text.

⁷⁷ Eleen, p. 64.

⁷⁸ Eleen, p. 64.

enormously complicated question involving figure style and ornament both in illumination and penwork flourishing'.⁷⁹

Discussing the basic idea of what constitutes a style of illumination (specifically in Paris, but with a footnote commenting on the similar situation in Oxford and specifically with regards to William de Brailes), Robert Branner suggests that 'a style of painting constituted the tradition of an atelier'.⁸⁰ Kidd, however, points out the problems with the way Banner equates 'style' with 'atelier', since while apprentices in a specific workshop would most likely have been taught to paint in a style similar to that of their teachers, this does not necessarily mean that they remained part of an actual, physical workshop or atelier, rather than move on to continue using the same style in a different place of work.⁸¹ Here the term 'house-style' is used with this in mind, to denote distinctive, identifiable features in the work of a group of artists trained in a similar style and therefore most likely with ties of some sort to the same teacher(s) or workshop (whether as current or former apprentices, resident associates, visiting collaborators, or external imitators), but certainly not necessarily part of a single 'atelier'.

Precisely pinpointing the crucial elements and defining features of a thus defined de Brailes 'house-style' does, however, not seem entirely straightforward: attempts at description are often characterised by subjectivity, emotive language, or a preoccupation with small, relatively uncommon details. Donovan speaks of a 'distinctive accomplished and tightly controlled decorative style which makes use of rich pigments and plenty of gold leaf, like highly wrought metalwork laid out on the page'.⁸² Cockerell considers the style to be characterised chiefly by the (rather subjective) qualities of 'marked originality, lively invention, and a strong dramatic sense',⁸³ and for MS 7 Temple speaks of an 'adventurous series of historiated initials' populated by 'tiny figures with expressive gestures and telling glances' who move 'with great freedom' against the gold of the background.⁸⁴

Cockerell lists 12 traits which he considers characteristic for de Brailes, covering more general stylistic elements (page layout, letter forms, common ornamental components, choice of pigment) as well as the design of the initials themselves (backgrounds, arrangement of figures) and minute details in the images within initials (the depiction of faces, hands, and clothing);⁸⁵ but since Cockerell is working from a rather small pool of examples, these are by no means definitive. Even works by the hand of de Brailes himself may display only some of these traits; others do appear almost universally throughout the corpus but are also a characteristic of MSS which are definitely not of Oxford origin; and even others strike as too specific to be of any real use in trying to identify any traces of the de Brailes 'house-style' in New College MS 7.

Despite these obvious difficulties in articulating what characterises the style, and acknowledging the real problems in distinguishing work 'in the style of', 'by the assistants of' or 'from the workshop of' William de Brailes from examples of his own hand, on the main there is no denying that the de Brailes style is so distinctive, and so readily recognisable, that more often than not a single look will suffice to definitely identify a given MS or illumination as part of the output from the Oxford workshop or artists associated with it during its active phase of c. 1230–1250.

If the earlier date of c. 1220 did not already preclude any possibility of MS 7 as part of the workshop's output, at just such a single look it does become very clear that the illuminated initials of MS 7 do not really conform to the later, mature house-style of the workshop, and that the MS lacks some of the more recognisable elements used by its artists. Having said this, however, there

⁷⁹ Mogan, *Leaves from a Psalter*, p. 16.

⁸⁰ Robert Branner, *Manuscript Painting in Paris During the Reign of St. Louis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 11, and p. 11 n. 47.

⁸¹ Peter Kidd, *The McCarthy Collection: French Miniatures* (London: Ad Ilissum, 2021), pp. 9–13.

⁸² Donovan, p. 12.

⁸³ Cockerell, p. 5.

⁸⁴ Temple, 201.

⁸⁵ Cockerell, p. 5.

are a number of features in the illuminations which are relatable to those listed as part of the unique de Brailes style, and it is worth looking at some of the more general stylistic elements, as well as both the overall design and specific details of the historiated initials, to see whether MS 7 might not potentially be added to Morgan's list of 'predecessors of figure style, iconography, and ornament' of de Brailes.

STYLE AND ORNAMENTS

At the top of Cockerell's list of characteristic features of de Brailes MSS are '[c]ircular, segmental, and elliptical compartments, suggestive of the framework of coloured windows of the period'.⁸⁶ As a type of design this is of course not at all unique to the workshop, or even to Oxford, or to England (see e.g. the contemporary French-made New College MS 1, pictured below) but the similarities between the large **I**-initials for Genesis in some of the surviving de Brailes Bibles are certainly striking, and the style unmistakable despite an obvious development of individual elements over time (see image below).⁸⁷ A direct comparison with the Genesis-initial in MS 7 is sadly not possible, since it is one of the large initials which were robbed prior to the 19th century; but a number of other large **I** initials with just such compartments, reaching at times over 40 or more lines, do remain in the MS (e.g. on f. 113r, f. 127r, and f. 288r; see the images above). In their shape some of these are actually closer to the Romanesque arches or even Gothic stained glass windows which Cockerell uses as a comparison than the ellipses or (later?) incut rectangles which predominate in the Bibles from the de Brailes workshop.



Genesis **I**-initials (in roughly chronological order left to right): New College MS 1, f. 3v; MS 7, f. 247r; **O-BL7**, f. 3r; **PS-MAG**, f. 3r; **O-BL13**, f. 5r; **O-MC**, f. 3r; **O-CC**, f. 4r; **O-AS**, f. 3r

Looking at the remaining items on Cockerell's list, some of the ornamental components may be rather too specific to be of use as a touchstone, such as the presence of marginal ornaments with 'two eagles affronted, sometimes with heads turned away', or 'a fret in a border or half-way down the stem of some large initials'.⁸⁸ Though while not necessarily with frets, there is an observable tendency to break up longer initial stems (if they are not filled with historiated

⁸⁶ Cockerell, p. 5.

⁸⁷ Images from the Bodleian Libraries used under Creative Commons Licence CC-BY-NC 4.0. Images of **O-BL7** from <<https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/f667786c-b5b4-4d25-b2c9-b70488a79be2/>>. Image from **PS-MAG** copyright and courtesy of the Perth Museum (Culture Perth & Kinross), photography Mark A. Hall. Images from **O-CC** © The Governing Body of Christ Church, Oxford. Images of **O-MC** with kind permission from The Warden and Fellows of Merton College, Oxford. Images from **O-AS** courtesy of The Warden and Fellows of All Souls College, Oxford.

⁸⁸ Cockerell, p. 5.

compartments as above) by including a figurative or ornamental element: this may be a dragon head or spiralled tail-end, or even just a change in colour (see image below).⁸⁹



MS 7, f. 234r; P-BNFLA, f. 1r; O-BL7, f. 2r; O-AS, f. 294v; O-MC, f. 16v; MS 7, f. 258r

Cockerell lists 'a capital T with seriffs falling to the ground' as a distinctive letter shape observable in the MS he surveys. This does not seem to be something found in either the de Brailes Hours (L-BLA) or the de Brailes Bible (O-BL7), though they appear in O-CC in versals, the running title, and initials throughout. The feature is, however, not useful for a comparison with MS 7, since here all **T** initials are of an uncial form.⁹⁰



Initial **T** in MS 7, f. 122r; O-BL7, f. 199v; O-CC f. 146v

A characteristic colour scheme mentioned by Cockerell, the 'use of a good deal of light blue pigment with vermillion', has also been observed elsewhere: in B-DSB, P-BNL, and P-BNLA Morgan observes a 'predominance of pink and blue colours', and dragon border extensions

⁸⁹ Images from P-BNFLA from <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52516903g>>, used under Creative Commons Licence.

⁹⁰ Cockerell, p. 5. See e.g. L-BLA f. 11r in Donovan, p. 50.

with blocks of foliage, which to him ‘suggest a direct derivation from the workshop of William de Brailes’.⁹¹ As a colour combination which can also be found in a number of contemporary MSS not only from England but also from France and Flanders,⁹² its value as a piece of evidence is, again, dubious; but there is no denying that blue and a light pink are the main colours of almost all the initials in MS 7, used extensively and in combination for the letters themselves, their frames, and the figures that inhabit them (see e.g. f. 122r, pictured above, and f. 143r and f. 223v, pictured below).

It is similarly with the ‘winged dragons’ which according to Cockerell are regularly associated with the initials: Camille observes that the artist ‘often terminates the lush lower stem of initials with a dragon’, though he also mentions ‘heavy decorated initials terminating in thick padded vine-scrolls with hairy white-tipped ends’.⁹³ For later MSS Morgan identifies ornaments extending from an initial consisting of ‘a dragon, ornamental foliage in an angular block, and a quatrefoil on the bar’ as features which are ‘survivals from the workshop of William de Brailes’.⁹⁴

In the de Brailes Psalter (**O-NC**), the overwhelming majority of initials are either decorated with or even formed by the long, sinuous bodies of dragons, and the same is true for several of the initials in, for example, **O-AS**, as well as MS 7. They are depicted sometimes with and sometimes without wings; sometimes with and sometimes without feet; often terminating in a square or rectangular block filled with their spiralled tail; but almost invariably with a round or oval head and visible mouth with which they bite the bowl of a **Q** or **D**, the strokes of an **A**, or the bar of a **T** to form the letter.



Letters formed by dragon bodies in **NY-M791** f. 136r; **MS 7** f. 214r; **O-AS**, f. 356r, and **O-NC** f. 29r

Two additional ornamental features merit mention before moving on to the scene and figure design inside the initials. For one, occasionally rather chunky ‘angular blocks’ on the terminals of letters are undoubtedly one of the most recognisable features of the de Brailes house-style.

⁹¹ Morgan II, 148.

⁹² e.g. in New College MS 372, a late-13th-century Flemish psalter.

⁹³ Camille, 295.

⁹⁴ Morgan II, p. 149. Strictly (and heraldically) speaking most of the mythological beasts in the illuminated initials of de Brailes, which the critics here speak of as ‘dragons’, are wyverns, possessing only two rather than four legs. As the beasts in these MSS and in MS 7 are variously dragons (wings, four legs), wyverns (wings, two legs), amphitheres (wings, no legs) or even lindworms (no wings, no legs), for simplicity’s sake I will follow their example and use the umbrella term ‘dragon’ to denote all serpentine mythological creatures in these illuminations.



MS 7 f. 143r and f. 223v, initial **Q** with dragons

While those in MS 7 tend to be square (see image above), fitting themselves around the spiral of a dragon's tail, many of those found in MSS attributable to the de Brailes workshop, while also often fitted around dragon tails, tend to encapsulate not just one but several spirals of different sizes, and are therefore often triangle-shaped (see below, and also the image of **O-NC** f. 97v above).



Triangular blocks in **PH-FL**, f. 90v; **Y-ML**, f. 164r; **L-GI**, f. 290r; **O-MC** f. 154v; **P-BNL**, f. 153r

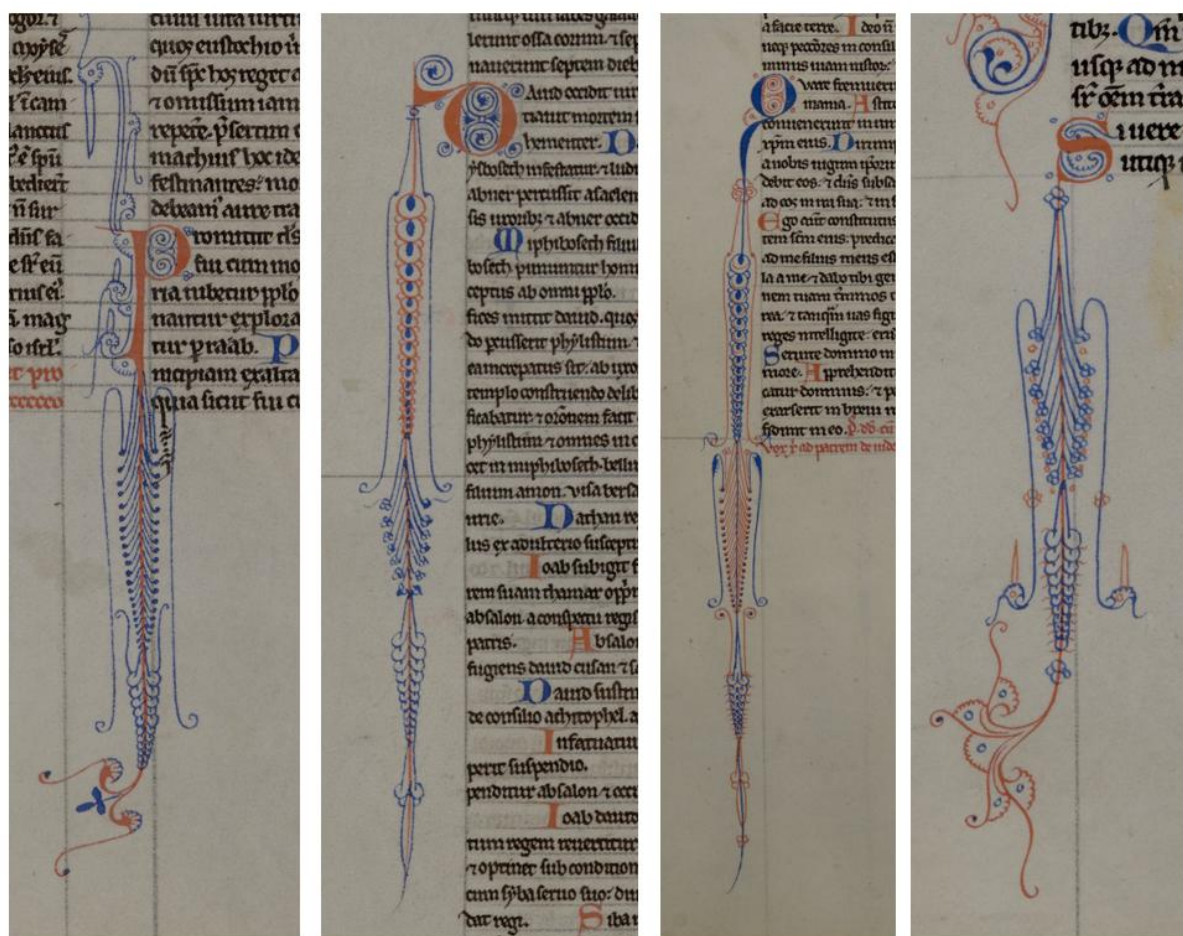
A final ornamental feature which merits mention is the presence of pen flourishes with 'feathering', distinctive in that, unlike the usual pen flourishes found in MSS which extend alongside the text, the flourishing here is almost completely symmetrical in appearance, which gives rise to the comparison with feathers.

This feature has been remarked upon by several critics, though there is dissent as to its function on the page. For **L-BLA**, Donovan interpreted these as part of the page organisation and as ‘acting as a pointer to an important section’.⁹⁵ Shelley Morwenna Williams, however, sees a tripartite function in **O-NC**: as mnemonic aids, visualisations of sound, and symbolic of actual feathers with relevance to the exegesis of the psalms. But this kind of ‘feathering’ in the margins is a characteristic ornamental feature of numerous de Brailes Bibles and the de Brailes Hours **L-BLA** as well as the de Brailes Psalter **O-NC**, and neither of her theories seems to be particularly applicable to texts other than the psalms. In MS 7, feathered pen flourishes are admittedly rather more numerous in the psalms, but this stems from the rather larger number of pen-flourished (rather than illuminated or historiated) initials in this section of the text.



‘Feathering’ in (clockwise from top left)
O-CC f. 165r; **L-BLA** f. 1r; **O-BL13** f. 173v; **O-AS** f. 185r; **O-NC** f. 11r; **PS-MAG** f. 1r

⁹⁵ Donovan, 30.



‘Feathered’ pen-flourishes in MS 7: f. 53 v, f. 76r, f. 137r, and f. 142v

SCENES AND FIGURES

Keeping in mind that even nine-, ten-, or eleven-line initials in MS 7 measure less than 35mm, the absence of larger miniatures rather limits the space in which the illuminator can realise his artistic vision when it comes to the design of the scenes depicted. But even for the much larger full-page miniatures of **B-WAG/P-MM** Noel notes that de Brailes treated these ‘the only way he knew how, as giant historiated initials’, in which ‘there is little by way of stage-setting’: ‘[s]cenes take place on plain grounds, and the initials themselves provide the architecture...[t]he figures act out their parts on golden grounds’.⁹⁶

In MS 7 there is certainly no space for the ‘wave-like treatment of the solid earth’ Cockerell observes in the half-page miniatures of **O-NC**—just as Noel observed, in MS 7 the biblical characters tend to use the strokes, bowls, and bars of the letters, or the frames of compartments as surfaces on which to stand. Where there is a depiction of the ground (e.g. in Jeremiah’s garden, or in the field Adam digs over, see below), the area covered is so small that there is neither space nor really a need for additional structure.

⁹⁶ Noel, *Bibelbilder*, 87.



MS 7, depiction of the earth on f. 186v and f. 97r

There are also not many examples of ‘scrolls and inscriptions in Latin or French’ which Cockerell observes as a dominant feature, though there would have been plenty of opportunity had the initials been larger: almost all of the many **P** initials for the Pauline Epistles (and quite a few of the initials for the Catholic Epistles) feature an image of a letter in the historiated scene, either as a simple white square (see the initials on f. 290r and f. 275r, pictured below) or as a long unrolled scroll (see the **P**-initials on f. 275v and f. 276r, pictured above). The only example of an actual inscription appears in the **Q** for 1 John, which depicts St John reading to a group of listeners from a book on whose pages the words ‘verbo vite’ (‘the word of life’) are clearly readable (see image below).

What can be seen in these initials for the Epistles, however, is the ‘bold handling of crowds’ listed by Cockerell as another distinctive trait of the ‘house-style’; Camille, too, considers ‘the design and disposition of the figures within the initial’ important.⁹⁷ Again, the size of the initials in MS 7 is restrictive for the depiction of larger crowds, but the illuminator makes creative use of perspective to achieve his ends. In several of the initials for the Pauline Epistles Paul addresses what are clearly whole congregations, represented by one or two figures depicted in full and a number of others of which only the heads or tops of heads are visible.



The depiction of letters and crowds in MS 7: f. 281r, f. 290r, and f. 275r

⁹⁷ Camille, 292.



Rectangular crowns in **O-NC**, f. 122r and in MS 7, f. 160v; a kilted devil in MS 7, f. 290v

The figures themselves, both in terms of facial features and clothing, are a particular point of interest in the attempts to pin down the de Brailes 'house-style'. As before, some of Cockerell's observations seem rather specific, though in the initials in MS 7 there are in fact examples of both the crowns which are 'rectangular, like polo caps' and devils 'with fringed waist-bands or kilts' that appear on his list.⁹⁸

In the depiction of humans, Camille observes 'long rubbery arms with tubular folds of tight cloth winding around the limbs below the elbows and up to the wrists', and 'hands with elongated pointing fingers thickly outlined in black'.⁹⁹ Kidd similarly list 'unnaturally large hands' and 'close-fitting cuffs' as 'de Brailes-like features' in the way figures are painted.¹⁰⁰ Facial features are a particular focus: Cockerell describes the figures as having '[t]ightly drawn faces': '[n]ose long, eyes wide open, straight mouth, short upper lip', while Camille mentions 'typically expressive facial types with shaded flesh-tones, nose sharply upturned when in profile and starkly delineated eyes which are often filled with white pigment'.¹⁰¹

The image below shows a range of examples of figure depiction in MS 7 (bottom row), as well as three initials from **O-NC** (top row) for comparison; two of these initials from the de Brailes Psalter are taken from f. 122, the second half of the bifolium in which Cockerell and Donovan detected the '[h]and of de Brailes' himself.¹⁰² The limits and dangers of assuming listed characteristics to be ubiquitous and defining quickly become clear: clothing worn features both close-fitting cuffs and wide sleeves; the arms, hands and fingers are sometimes oversized, sometimes not;¹⁰³ the heads are sometimes bowed rather than depicted with 'the chin slightly pushed forward'; the eyebrows sometimes straight rather than 'sharply bowed'.

⁹⁸ Cockerell, p. 5.

⁹⁹ Camille, 294.

¹⁰⁰ Kidd, 'Franciscan Bible', 2.

¹⁰¹ Camille, 294.

¹⁰² Cockerell, 5, Donovan, 203.

¹⁰³ The noticeably 'rubbery' arm and large hand in the initial **M** in **O-NC** f. 122r seems oversized mainly because of the composition of the scene, but also functions well in the context of Psalm 118:73: 'Manus tuae fecerunt me' ('Your hands have made me').



Depiction of figures: **O-NC** f. 51v, f. 122r, and f. 122v; **MS 7** f. 28r, f. 142r, f. 139r

But there is no doubting the vivacity and ‘strong dramatic sense’ already detected by Cockerell. This is more difficult to pinpoint or analyse in terms of a set of characteristics, but Noel makes a creditable attempt:

The dual keys to de Brailes’ success in conveying stories in small initials are his use of facial expressions and of clear, overt gestures for the principal actors. If his figures have eyes, these eyes are always directing the viewer’s gaze to the heart of the matter, and by their gestures they are always making their sentiment, as well as their actions, clear... his figures express states of mind and intent as much as they do action.¹⁰⁴

This rather echoes Temple’s description of the ‘tiny figures with expressive gestures and telling glances’ in the initials of **MS 7**.¹⁰⁵ Indeed the examples given in the set of images above (and throughout this discussion) all illustrate what Noel observes: in the **V** for Leviticus (f. 28r), God instructs Moses on the laws for sacrifice, a scene easily recognisable and clearly signposted by God’s finger pointing at the sheep in the foreground and the scroll in his hand. God’s gaze is directed at the animal, but Moses, though his head is bowed in deference, is looking towards the scroll, his raised, cupped hands signifying the grateful and attentive reception of the instructions.

The scene in the **D** for Psalm 26 (f. 139r) uses simple but effective means to convey some of the psalm’s content: the columns, arches and roofed structures above are a clear reference to verse 5, ‘abscondit me in tabernaculo suo’, ‘he has hidden me in his tabernacle’; while the traditional gesture of David pointing towards his eyes simultaneously illustrates the first words of the psalm, ‘Dominus illuminatio mea’, ‘the Lord is my light’. The scene and situation in the initial **P** at the beginning of Acts (f. 281r, see the discussion of the depiction of crowds above) is particularly

¹⁰⁴ Noel, *Bibelbilder*, 88–9.

¹⁰⁵ Temple, 201.

expressive: it references the apocryphal Acts of Andrew and Bartholomew, depicting the dog-headed St Christopher at a lectern, speaking to (presumably) St Andrew and a crowd of other listeners; the cynocephalus seems happy with his lot, the slightly upturned corners of his mouth showing a smile on his face, while St Andrew's facial expression with a possibly half-open mouth and his hands opened in a shrug convey doubt and confusion; the frowns and downturned mouths of the bystanders, their eyes raised to the lectern, suggest a lingering fear of the monstrous convert, and a general uneasiness with the situation.

A final feature which seems remarkable about the figures in MS 7, particularly for initials on as small a scale as they are here, is the general consistency in depiction which borders on portraiture: recurring figures like Moses, David, Solomon, and especially the apostle Paul are readily recognisable in the scenes in which they appear, since they present the same appearance (see images below): the same character is always either bearded or clean-shaven, balding or with a head-covering, and dressed in clothes of the same colour; a phenomenon Noel observes also in the miniatures of **B-WAG/P-MM**.¹⁰⁶



Paul the Apostle in MS 7 f. 271r, f. 275r, f. 278v, and f. 279r

DE BRAILES OR NOT DE BRAILES?

The bottom line and answer to the question which led me to my in-depth, detailed look at New College MS 7 here is, sadly, 'almost certainly not de Brailes'. Already the dating of MS 7, if it is accurate, precludes a production in his Oxford workshop, which flourished later, and the overall appearance of the illuminated initials and decoration do not really conform to the very recognisable later, mature form of the 'house-style' of de Brailes.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the range of similarities with this style, and the number of features in MS 7 which are also present in a large number of MSS from the de Brailes workshop, is not insignificant. True, most of these are by no means unique to the decades or location in question, never mind the actual workshop, and can be found in other MSS of the period. Taken together, however, the abundance of parallels in the small details might just suggest at least some sort of relationship between MS 7 and the Oxford illuminator. In terms of ornamentation there are the colour scheme of blue initials with pink frames and pink initials in blue frames; the white foliate patterns and their shading the thick stems of the letters; the delicate patterning of larger unicoloured cloth with white in clothes and furnishings; the apertures filled with gold leaf in the thick sides of letter bowls; the dragons which are attached to or even form a large number of the initials; the way the letters encroach on the margins above and below; and the compartmentalisation of the larger initials to create spaces for scenes which encompass the narrative of whole biblical books. Likewise, the scenes and figures within the initials, even if they are not entirely similar in style, and paralleled in contemporary MSS of different origin, do show resemblances in the positioning of the figures before shiny gold backgrounds; the creative scene-setting with small architectural details; the targeted references to the narrative or situations in the surrounding text; the creative variation which means no two initials are exactly the same even if

¹⁰⁶ Noel, *Bibelbilder*, p. 88.

they use the same letter and similar scenes; and, above all, the way the illuminator employs minute details of scene-setting, gestures, and even facial expression to bring the static narrative of the historiation to life. If nothing else, this note will at least serve to make some of these stunning illuminations accessible to a larger audience, and bring the MS some of the attention it most certainly deserves.

Even though it is dated too early, in a similar way to the large Lothian Bible **NY-M791**, MS 7 can certainly be said to display ‘links in style and iconography with the later Oxford workshop of William de Brailes’. There is nothing to connect the MS as closely to the work of de Brailes as the Lothian Bible, which de Brailes actually seems to have known and taken as inspiration,¹⁰⁷ but the MS does seem to have been in Oxford since relatively shortly after its manufacture: there is a fragmentary ex libris in a 14th-century hand on f. 301r, with the name erased (reading only ‘Biblia ista [. . .] socij’), which suggests an early collegiate owner; and on f. 300r we find a purchase note with the name of John Grene, fellow of New College 1401–1416.¹⁰⁸ It has of course certainly been in Oxford, at New College, ever since it was donated by William Westbury (c. 1416–11 March 1477), Provost of Eton, sometime after 1456.¹⁰⁹

While the MS thus does not by any means merit a place among Morgan’s MSS ‘containing illumination by de Brailes and close associates’, it potentially can be said to belong among the MSS dated 1190–1230 which are ‘[p]redecessors of figure style, iconography and ornament of de Brailes’. I personally have convinced myself of this to a point where I have hesitated only slightly before adding Oxford, New College MS 7 with the abbreviation **O-NC7** to the list of manuscripts associated with the workshop of William de Brailes which can be found in Appendix 2 below.

Antje G. Frotscher
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¹⁰⁷ Cf. Henderson.

¹⁰⁸ See under Appendix 1, *History*.

¹⁰⁹ See under Appendix 1, *History*.

APPENDIX 1: MS 7, A DESCRIPTION

7

England, Oxford (?), c. 1220

Biblia Sacra

f. 1v. *Hic sunt libri qui continentur in canone et sunt in isto vollumine...lxxvi Apocalipsis habet cap[itula] xxii.* Table of contents in two columns in brown ink with red highlighting in an early 14th-century hand.

f. 2r. *Cum fuit in magna magni patrisfamilias... tantum rationabilibus propinquantes.* Paulus Orosius, *Historiae adversum paganos*, Liber Primus, Prologue 3–4. In brown ink, in one column in a 15th-century hand at the bottom of the page.

ff. 2v–3r blank.

f. 3v blank except for note (see under *Annotations*).

f. 4r. *Libri biblie per hunc modo legantur...psalteribus aut extraordinarie legitur.* Proprium de Tempore, in a 15th-century hand, in one column.

ff. 4r–4v. *Ferii II ad matutin invitatorum... ut salvetur universum semen in ea.* Prayers and antiphons to be said each week in church (Liturgia Horarum) in a late-13th/early-14th-century hand, in three columns.

f. 4v. *Libri content in ista biblia...Audite celi Deut[ero]nomi 32.* Full list of biblical books in the volume with a short list of canticles, in black ink in a 13th-century hand. Donation note below (see under *History*).

1 (ff. 5r–293v) Genesis to Apocalypse, with Jerome’s prefaces

(*inc. text*, Jerome, *Epistle 53*) de petra deserti ad montem filie syon . Samuel in he|ly mortuo et in occisione Saul ueterem legem abolitam . |Porro in sadoc atque dauid . noui sacerdotii nouique impe-|rii sacramenta testatur.

(*expl. text*, Rev. 19:20) et adprehensa est bestia et cum illo pseudopropheta . et qui fecit signa co-|ram ipso quibus seduxit eos qui acceperunt caracterem bestiae . et qui ado|rant imaginem eius . vivi missi sunt in stagnum ignis ardentis.

Biblia sacra, Genesis to Apocalypse, in the usual order and with the common set of prologues.

2 ff. 294r–297 Canon Tables

ff. 298r–301v blank, offsets of 15th century polyphony.

Construction: Parchment. i + 301 + i. Foliated in modern pencil, including flyleaves, taking account of the missing leaves. Duplicate numbering of f.250, corrected by a later hand to f.250a and f.250b.

Dimensions: 342 x 250 mm.

Layout: Two columns of 60 lines with an inter-columnar space of 11 mm, frame-ruled in lead, with an additional horizontal rule halfway down each column, below the 30th line of writing. Written above top line. Written space 215 x 123 mm. Boundary lines to the side and top at distances of 40 mm (inside), 49 mm (outside), and 30 mm (top) from the written space. All vertical and horizontal rules extending to the edges of the pages. Running-heads centred on the inter-columnar space and divided across the opening, above the outermost frame rule.

Collation: a⁶ (ff. 1–4, wants 1, 4) 1¹⁰ (ff. 5–12, wants 1, 4), 2–6¹⁰ (ff. 13–62), 7¹⁰ (ff. 63–71, wants 5) 8–9¹⁰ (ff. 72–90), 10¹⁰ (ff. 91–100, wants 9) 11–21¹⁰ (ff. 101–210) 22¹⁰ (ff. 211–219, wants 10) 23¹⁰ (ff. 220–228, wants 6) 24–25¹⁰ (ff. 229–248) 26¹⁰ (ff. 249–256 with duplicate numbering of f. 250), wants 4) 27–29¹⁰ (ff. 257–286) 30¹⁰ (ff. 287–293, wants 8, 9, 10) 31⁸ (ff. 294–298, wants 1, 3, 4) b⁴ (ff. 299–301, wants 1).

Quire signatures mostly lost due to trimming; where they survive (1–4, 5–6 (only ascenders still visible), 19–20, 24, 29) they are in roman numerals, centred at the foot of the last page of each quire. Signatures for 1–4 in majuscules and rather larger and in a different style to those in later quires, which are minuscules in the same hand and ink as the script. Quire signature for 29 (f. 286v) in red. Catchwords are given, where they survive (2–3, 8, 19–20, 29), to the right at the foot of the page, also in the same script as the text.

Secundo folio: deprecor desiderii

Script: Tiny, but very neat textura quadrata in one hand throughout, written above top line. On the top line, ascenders long and decorative; on the bottom line, descenders long and decorated, protruding well below the ruling (p,q) or elongated along the line (g). Punctuation by *punctus* and *punctus elevatus*.

Decoration: Richly decorated with small but highly detailed illuminated initials, mainly in blue, pink, and green. Initials are foliate, often with dragon bodies forming the letters, for Jerome's prologues; and historiated with figures on gold background for individual books of the Bible, several still accompanied in the margins by faint plummet sketches of the scenes depicted (e.g. 124v, 222v, 272v, 275v, 276v, 277v, 289v).

Rubrics for *incipits* and *explicitis* throughout, often set wedge-shaped into the column of text. Alternate red and blue lombards with flourishing of the other colour for lists of *capitula* and in the Psalter. Alternating blue and red versals. Red and blue chapter-numbers and running heads. Occasional line-fillers in red (and in one case running for more than one line and there alternating red and blue, f. 66v), in the form of a single row of 'kissing' minuscule 'o'.

Historiated and illuminated initials (Stegmüller's numbers in brackets):

- f. 5v *Praefatio in Pentateucum* (285). Initial D. St Jerome with mitre and staff.
- f. 18r *Exodus* (2). Initial H. Moses leading the Israelites.
- f. 28r *Leviticus* (3). Initial V. God instructing Moses on the laws for sacrifice.
- f. 35r *Numeri* (4). Initial L. Israelites being examined for fitness for military service.
- f. 45r *Deuteronomium* (5). Initial H. Moses addressing a crowd (of Israelites).
- f. 53v *Prol. Iosue* (311). Initial T. Foliate, with dragon as crossbar.
- f. 54r *Iosue* (6). Initial E. God instructing Joshua in the top half of the aperture, Jews battling infidels in the bottom.
- f. 60v *Iudicum* (7). Initial P. Samson breaking open the jaws of the lion.
- f. 67v *I Reg. [I Sam.]* (9). Initial F. Samuel anoints Saul as Israel's first king.
- f. 76r *II Reg. [II Sam.]* (10). Initial F. David orders the Amalekite messenger to be beheaded.
- f. 83r *III Reg. [I Reg.; I Malachim]* (11). Initial E. Abishag brought to King David lying on a bed.
- f. 96v *Prol. I Paralip.* (328). Initial S. Foliate.
- f. 97r *I Paralipomenon* (13). Initial A. Adam labouring, Eve spinning.
- f. 103v *II Paralipomenon* (14). Initial C. Missing.
- f. 112r *Prol. I Esdr* (330). Initial U. Foliate, with dragon.
- f. 113r *I Esdrae* (15). Initial I. Over 40 lines, with four rectangular compartments containing scenes: King Artaxerxes commissions Ezra; Ezra gathers returnees and vessels for the Temple; Ezra reads the law; rebuilding of the temple.
- f. 115r *Nehemias [II Esdrae]* (16). Initial V. Nehemiah serving wine to King Artaxerxes and his queen.
- f. 118v *III Esdrae* (94,1). Initial E. Slaughtering of lambs for Passover, Josiah in the top and three Israelites in the bottom half of the letter.
- f. 122r *Prol. Tob* (332). Initial C. Foliated, with two dragons.
- f. 122r *Tobias* (17). Initial T. Tobias cures Tobit's blindness, with the archangel Raphael looking on from above. Two dragons forming the two letter strokes.
- f. 124r *Prol. Iudith* (335). Initial A. Foliated, with two dragons forming the letter strokes.
- f. 124v *Iudith* (18). Initial A. Judith beheading Holofernes.
- f. 127v *Prol. Esth.* (341). Initial L. Foliate. Strokes formed by two dragons.
- f. 127v *Esther* (19). Initial I. Over 42 lines, with four rectangular compartments containing scenes: King Ahasuerus disowns his queen; Esther crowned; Mordecai on the king's horse being honoured; Haman being hanged.
- f. 130v *Prol. Iob* (344). Initial C. Foliate with dragon.
- f. 130v *Prol. Iob* (357). Initial S. Foliate with dragon.
- f. 131r *Iob* (20). Initial V. Job, afflicted by leeches, with his wife and three friends.
- f. 137r *Psalmi* (21). Initial B. Missing.
- f. 139r *Ps. 27* (21d). Initial D. David receiving instruction from God, under arches.
- f. 140v *Ps. 38* (21d). Initial D. David receiving instruction from God, under arches.
- f. 142r *Ps. 51* (21d). Initial Q. David seated, receiving instruction. Large Dragon as tail of letter.
- f. 142r *Ps. 52* (21d). Initial D. David enthroned, God above. Uncial D.
- f. 143v *Ps. 68* (21d). Initial S. God above, Jonah in the water below, with two figures in a boat nearby.
- f. 145v *Ps. 80* (21d). Initial E. God in majesty, flanked by angels above; three figures playing instruments below.
- f. 147r *Ps. 97* (21d). Initial C. Nativity scene, Christ in a manger with ox and ass above, shepherds with sheep below.
- f. 147r *Ps. 101* (21d). Initial D. A man praying, with God's hand from above.
- f. 148v *Ps. 109* (21d). Initial D. Christ and God the Father seated together.
- f. 152r *Prol. Prov* (457). Initial I. Over 42 lines, foliate with spirals.
- f. 152v *Proverbia* (22). Initial P. Solomon enthroned, with captive man.
- f. 157v *Prol. Eccle* (462). Initial M. Foliate with dragon heads.
- f. 158r *Ecclesiastes* (23). Initial V. David seated, reading a book, surrounded by four figures.

- f. 159v *Canticum Canticorum* (24). Initial O. The Church and Christ.
- f. 160v *Sapientia* (25). Initial D. King Solomon, enthroned with sceptre, three armed men.
- f. 164r *Ecclesiasticus* (26). Initial M. Foliate, with beast head in the middle.
- f. 165r *Ecclesiasticus* (26). Initial O. King Solomon, enthroned with sceptre, a crowd of people to the right.
- f. 174v *Prol. Is* (482). Initial N. Missing.
- f. 175r *Isaias* (27). Initial V. Missing.
- f. 185v *Prol. Ierem* (487). Initial I. Over 42 lines, stem infilled with dragon bodies and heads.
- f. 186v *Ieremias* (28). Initial V. Jeremiah in a garden with trees, instructed by God emerging from clouds above.
- f. 199v *Lamentationes* (29). Initial Q. Jeremiah sitting alone, lamenting.
- f. 200v *Prol. Baruch* (491). Initial L. Foliate with dragon at top of stem.
- f. 200v *Baruch* (30). Initial E. Baruch reading to Jeconiah, king of Judah, enthroned, and his attendants.
- f. 202r *Prol. Ez.* (492). Initial E. Foliate, with beast head in the middle.
- f. 203r *Ezechiel* (31). Initial E. Ezekiel's vision: Ezekiel asleep below, God (man) with three more 'living creatures', lion (left), ox (right) and eagle (above).
- f. 213v *Prol. Dan* (494). Initial D. Foliate, top stroke formed by dragon extending along text in the margin.
- f. 214r *Daniel* (32). Initial A. Daniel refusing food and drink, with a lion crouched below and an angel above. Letter strokes formed by dragon body extending to bottom of page.
- f. 218r *Prol. XII Proph* (500). Initial N. Foliate, with spirals.
- f. 218r *Ps. Hieronymus, Prol. Osee* (507). Initial T. Foliate, with spiral.
- f. 218r *Osee* (33). Initial V. Hosea repurchasing Gomer.
- f. 219v *Prol. Ioel* (511). Initial S. Foliate with dragon.
- f. 219v *Prol. Ioel [Ep. ad Paulinum]* (510). Initial I. Foliate, with spirals made of dragon tail.
- f. 220r *Ioel* (34). Initial V. Joel blessing a crowd of people.
- f. 220v *Prol. Amos* (515). Initial O. Foliate with spirals.
- f. 220v *Prol. Amos [Ep. ad Paulinum]* (512). Initial A. Foliate with dragon.
- f. 220v *Prol. Amos* (513). Initial H. Foliate with spirals.
- f. 220v *Amos* (35). Initial V. God appearing to Amos while he tends his sheep.
- f. 221v *Prol. Abd* (519). Initial I. Foliate, with dragon extending in the margin.
- f. 221v *Prol. Abdias [Comment. in Abdiam]* (517). Initial H. Foliate with four dragons.
- f. 222r *Abdias* (36). Initial V. God appearing to Obadiah.
- f. 222r *Prol. Ionas* (524). Initial S. Foliate.
- f. 222r *Ionas* (37). Initial E. Jonah is swallowed by or emerges from the whale.
- f. 222v *Prol. Mich* (526). Initial T. Foliate.
- f. 222v *Michaeas* (38). Initial V. Micah speaking to a crowd.
- f. 223v *Prol. Nabum* (528). Initial N. Foliate.
- f. 223v *Nabum* (39). Initial O. Nahum in front of Niniveh, instructed by God from above.
- f. 223v *Prol. Habac* (531). Initial Q. Foliate, spirals with dragon inside and a second, large dragon forming tail of letter.
- f. 224r *Habacuc* (40). Initial O. Habakkuk instructed by God.
- f. 224v *Prol. Sophonias* (534). Initial T. Foliate with spirals, two dragons forming strokes of letter.
- f. 224v *Sophonias* (41). Initial V. Zephaniah facing an armed crowd.
- f. 226r *Prol. Malach* (543). Initial D. Foliate.
- f. 226r *Malachias* (44). Initial O. God (?) and Malachi shaking hands.
- f. 226v *Rabanus, Prol. I Macc. [Epistola ad Ludovicum regem]* (547). Initial D. Foliate.
- f. 227r *Rabanus, Prol. I Macc. [Epistola ad Geroldum];* (553). Initial R. Foliate.
- f. 227r *Prol. I Macc* (551). Initial M. Foliate with two dragons.
- f. 227v *I Maccabaeorum* (45). Initial E. In the top space, two knights jousting; at the bottom Judah (?), lying down, speaking to three men.
- f. 234r *II Maccabaeorum* (46). Initial F. Author, seated, copying a book, handing letter to a kneeling person. Stem extended by wavy-eared dragon extending to the bottom of the page.
- f. 239r *Prol. Mt.* (590). Initial M. Matthew seated, writing, to the left, foliate decoration to the right.
- f. 239r *Prol. Mt.* (589). Initial M. Winged ox with book to the left. Right stroke of letter formed by biting dragon.
- f. 239v *Matthaeus* (47). Initial L. Missing.
- f. 246v *Prol. Mc.* (607). Initial M. Foliate, four dragons in spirals.
- f. 247r *Marcus* (48). Initial I. Over 42 lines, extended by dragon to the bottom of the page. Five rectangular compartments; two foliate, three with figures under an arch: Mark writing, with lion above; Mark with Ananias the shoemaker, his left hand being wounded; Mark with a rope around his neck, being captured by armoured men.
- f. 250v *Lucas* (treated like a prologue) (49). Initial Q.
- (f. 250c) unfoliated stub *Lucas* (49). Initial F(?). Missing.
- f. 258v *Prol. Iob.* (624). Initial H. Over 22 lines, spirals and dragons.
- f. 258v *Iohannes* (50). Initial I. Missing.

- f. 264v *Rom.* (52). Initial P. Paul at a desk, writing and handing a letter to a messenger.
- f. 267v Petrus Lombardus, *Prol. I Cor* (685). Initial C. Foliate, acanthus leaves in circles.
- f. 268r *I Cor.* (53). Initial P. Paul and Sosthenes(?)/Timothy(?) with a letter to the left, to the right two seated figures in discussion with two standing ones.
- f. 270v Petrus Lombardus, *Prol. II Cor* (699). Initial P. Foliate, with dragons in a spiral and forming the letter, extending to bottom edge of page.
- f. 271r *II Cor.* (54). Initial P. Paul handing a letter to a messenger, a crowd of 5 in the background.
- f. 272v *Gal.* (55). Initial P. Christ (?) with a letter, crowd of three/four listening.
- f. 273v Marcion, *Prol. Eph* (715). Initial E. Foliate, acanthus leaves.
- f. 273v *Eph.* (56). Initial P. Paul incarcerated in Rome (seated under an arch with a city in the background), speaking to a messenger.
- f. 274v *Philipp.* (57). Initial P. Paul handing a letter to two bishops.
- f. 275r *Col.* (58). Initial P. Paul and Timothy handing letters to a crowd.
- f. 275v *I Thess.* (59). Initial P. Paul, Silvanus and Timothy handing a letter to a crowd.
- f. 276r Marcion, *Prol. II Thess.* (752). Initial A. 2-line foliated initial with dragon head.
- f. 276r *II Thess.* (60). Initial P. Paul delivering letter to two tonsured men, one holding a tool/weapon.
- f. 276v *I Tim.* (61). Initial P. Paul delivering letter to Timothy, behind them Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Satan.
- f. 277v Petrus Lombardus, *Prol. II Tim;* (772). Initial I. Initial in the margin, since the scribe forgot to leave space for it. Dragon headless.
- f. 277v *II Tim.* (62). Initial P. Paul (in prison?) writing from Rome/Laodicea, Timothy to the right, visiting and delivering Paul's cloak and books, with two figures departing.
- f. 278r Petrus Lombardus, *Prol. Tit.* (780). Initial T. Two-line initial with dragon.
- f. 278r *Tit.* (63). Initial P. Paul writing from Rome, Titus (as a bishop), preaching, to the right.
- f. 278v Marcion, *Prol. Philem* (783). Initial P. Two-line initial with dragon.
- f. 278v *Philem.* (64). Initial P. Paul in prison, one kneeling and three standing figures attendant.
- f. 278v Petrus Lombardus, *Prol. Hebr.* (793). Initial I. Foliate, with acanthus leaves.
- f. 279r *Hebr.* (65). Initial M. Paul writing to the left, four figures in Jewish hats to the right.
- f. 281r *Prol. Act.* (640). Initial L. Foliate, with acanthus leaves and dragon extending letter below.
- f. 281r *Actus Apostolorum* (51). Initial P. Dog-headed St Christopher at a lectern, speaking to Andrew and a crowd.
- f. 288r Ps. Hieronymus, *Prol. Epp.* (809). Initial N. Foliate, spirals with dragon.
- f. 288r *Iac.* (66). Initial I. Over 30 lines. 1 rectangular compartment with Jacobus writing, 12 round compartments with portraits (for the 12 tribes), with dragon extending letter into the lower margin.
- f. 289r *I Petr.* (67). Initial P. Peter at a desk, writing.
- f. 289v *II Petr.* (68). Initial S. God above casts the fallen angels into Tartarus.
- f. 290r *I Iob.* (69). Initial Q. St John with a book reading 'verbo vite', three listeners. Tail of letter formed by dragon body.
- f. 290v *II Iob.* (70). Initial S. John, top left, handing a long letter to three others, one in the top and two in the bottom aperture.
- f. 290v *III Iob* (71). Initial S. John handing a letter to another man.
- f. 290v *Iudas* (72). Initial I. Three rectangular compartments: Judas writing at a desk; Michael the Archangel; Satan quarrelling. Dragon tail extending letter stem into the lower margin.
- f. 291r Gilbertus Porretanus, *Prol. Apoc;* (839). Initial O. Foliate, spirals with dragon.
- f. 291r *Apoc.* (73). Initial A. God enthroned, with kneeling supplicant; seven candles in the background. Letter stroke formed by dragon with long tail.

Annotations: f. 3v 'Biblia manusc(ri)pta 4', in an early modern hand. Some corrections in brown ink, e.g. f. 11v and f. 272v, in a 13th-century hand.

Delicate manicules and *nota* marks in brown ink throughout. Alternative chapter enumeration in black ink in the margins throughout. Occasional corrections in brown ink (e.g. additions of verses on f. 11v and f. 272v). Notes on the scenes in individual initials in Anglo-French on both inner and outer margins next to illumination from Exodus to Chronicles (on ff. 18r, 28r, 35r, 45r, 54r, 60v, 67v, 76v, 83v, 97r), many fragmental with letters lost to trimming or in the gutter at re-binding. Faint preliminary sketches in plummet next to initials in later books, for Judith, Micah and several of the Pauline and Catholic Epistles (on ff. 124v, 222v, 272v, 276v, 277v, 289v, and 290v).

Binding: Sewn on seven whittawed bands, raised at the spine. 17th-century binding in blind-tooled leather on wooden boards, marked 'I.A.'; Gibson, *Early Oxford Bindings*, pl. XL, roll XXVII, identifies this as the work of the Oxford binder John Adams, c. 1614–15.

Flyleaves detached from boards.

Labels and marks: Remains of a typed spine label, low on the spine, reading 'MS New. Coll. 7'. Remains of a parchment flag pasted to the top of the inside of the upper board, only 'Bi[b]lia' still readable. On the inside board, pasted-in notice from James Edwards Sewell, librarian, detailing the mutilations observed on June 15, 1843. Notice carries New

College Stamp with '7' in pencil. Top of the front flyleaf (f. 1r) has '4' struck through in red, with a large red '7' underneath; f. 2r another '7' in ink. Use of New College Library stamp restrained, appearing usually the lower right corner on the recto of pages, primarily in the first half of the volume (e.g. ff. 23r, 84r, 98r, 110r, 136r, 164r, 216r). Offsets of antiphonal music on ff. 299–300 (cf. Bowers and Wathey).

History: Historiated initials can be identified as predecessors of figure style, iconography and ornament of the Oxford illuminator William de Brailes and his associates (fl. 1230–1250), but the dating to *c.* 1220 puts the MS roughly a decade before the main production period of the de Brailes workshop.

A fragmentary ex libris on f. 301r, with the name erased, reading only 'Biblia ista [. . .] socij', in a 14th-century hand, suggesting an early owner at an (Oxford?) College. On f. 300r, in a 15th-century hand, a purchase note with the owner's name erased: lib[er] m[agistri] . . . que[m] em[i]t ab executore d[omi]ni Joh[ann]is Greene[is] pro iiii li[bris] vj s[olidis] viij d[enariis]. Emden suggests that John Grene, Fellow of New College 1401–1416, who took the degree of M.A. in 1414 and died in 1434, '[p]ossibly owned MS.7' (II, 818–19). Bowers and Wathey can read 'Ricardi Harton' for the erased name, and note that Emden records a Magister Richard Hertone, *grammaticus*, appointed to teach William of Wykeham's poor scholars at Winchester for ten years from 1373 (Emden, II, 920), though the dates seem to be rather too early to fit.

On f. 4r, undated donation inscription in a large textura: 'Liber Collegii ex dono magistri Willelmi Westbury sacre theologie bacallarii huius Collegii socii et Collegii beate Marie de Etona prepositi'. William Westbury (*c.* 1416–11 March 1477) is recorded as a scholar of Winchester School from 1429 and as enrolled at New College on 9 April 1433 (cf. Emden III, 2020–2021). He was admitted as a fellow in 1435, and his oath is record in the Liber Albus (NCA 9654, ff. 204r–204v). Westbury is mentioned as one of the friends on Thomas Chaundler in MS 288, f. 31 ('Will[el]m[us] Eton[is] prepositus Sarum canonicus sacre quae pagine bacularius', with an annotation 'Westbury' in the margin). He became Headmaster of Eton in 1443 and its Provost from 1447 until his death; as he supplicated for his B.Th. in 1456, the volume must have been donated after that date. New College MS 115 is dedicated to him by the author (Thomas Hill?) on f. 1: 'Pro honorabili domino et venerabili magistro dei gratia collegii regalis beate marie de Etona prenobili preposito'.

Bibliography: Coxe, 2; Bowers and Wathey, 330–332; Eleen, 63–65, pl. 90–103; Alexander 1992, 185 (no. 35).

APPENDIX 2: THE MANY MANUSCRIPTS OF WILLIAM DE BRAILES

MSS with Illumination by the Hand of William de Brailes

Abbreviation	MS	Contents	Date	Size (mm)	Attributed by
B-WAG	Baltimore Walters Art Gallery MS 106	Psalter leaves (cf. P-MM and S-NM)	1230–40 (M)	135 × 98	Morgan no. 71 Donovan no. 18
C-FW	Cambridge Fitzwilliam Museum MS 330	Psalter leaves (cf. NY-M913)	1230–40	215 × 143	SIGNED Morgan no. 72(a) Donovan no. 19
C-GC	Cambridge Gonville and Caius College MS 350/567	Bible	c. 1230–40 (M) c. 1235–40 (D)	167 × 116	Morgan no. 70 Donovan no. 17
L-BLA	London British Library MS Add.49999	Book of Hours (‘de Brailes Hours’)	c. 1240	150 × 123	SIGNED Morgan no. 73 Donovan no. 20
NY-M913	New York Morgan Library and Museum MS M.913	Psalter leaves (cf. C-FW)	c. 1235–40	215 × 143	Morgan no. 72(b) Donovan no. 23
O-BL13	Oxford Bodleian Library MS.Laud Lat.13	Bible	mid-13th century	4to	Pächt/Alexander iii, 435
O-BL7	Oxford Bodleian Library MS.Lat.bib.e.7	Bible (‘de Brailes Bible’)	1234–1240	167 × 116	Morgan no. 69 Donovan no. 16
O-CC	Oxford Christ Church MS 105	Bible	1230–60	300 × 215	Alexander and Temple, no. 200
O-NC	Oxford New College MS 322	Psalter (‘de Brailes Psalter’)	1240–50 (M)	350 × 250	Morgan no. 74 Donovan no. 21
P-MM	Paris Wildenstein Collection, Musée Marmottan	Psalter leaves (cf. B-WAG and S-NM)	c. 1235–40	135 × 98	Donovan no. 18
PS-MAG	Perth, Scotland Museum and Art Gallery MS 462	Bible	c. 1240–60	200 × 146	Pollard no.6
R-BAV	Rome Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana MS Borghesiana 58	Aristotle, Logic	c. 1230–50	225 × 185	Camille
S-NM	Stockholm National Museum B.2010	Psalter (cf. B-WAG and P-MM)	1230–1250	180 × 134	Morgan 2012, no. 32; Noel, <i>Bibelbilder</i> Donovan no. 15 (‘collaboration with ...William de Brailes.’)

MSS with Illumination Associated with the Workshop of William de Brailes

Abbreviation	MS	Contents	Date	Size (mm)	Attributed by
B-DSB	Berlin Deutsche Staatsbibliothek MS Phill.1781	Averroes, Commentary on Aristotle (Metaphysics)	c. 1260	275 × 192	Morgan, no. 156(b) ('direct derivation from the workshop of William de Brailes')
C-UL	Cambridge University Library MS Ee 2.23	Bible	c. 1230–1240	335 × 212	Donovan no.13
L-BLA2	London British Library MS Add. 48985	Book of Hours ('The Salvin Hours')	c. 1265–70	325 × 220	Donovan no. 42: 'one [of two styles] clearly linked with the de Brailes group' p. 205
L-BLA6	London British Library MS Add. 62925	Psalter	c.1260–65	285 × 205	Donovan no. 24, '[l]inks with the de Brailes group', p. 203
L-BLH2	London British Library Harley MS. 2813	Bible	Second quarter 13th cent.	183 × 133	Kidd, Franciscan Bible
L-BLH3	London British Library Harley 3487	Aristotle, Libri naturales	1250–75	370 × 245	Morgan II, 130 ('a development from work of the mid-century in the de Brailes workshop')
L-BLR12	London British Library Royal 12.F.XIII	Bestiary and Lapidary	c. 1230	298 × 214	Donovan, no. 11, ('artists shared with the de Brailes group')
L-GI	London Gray's Inn MS 24	Bible	end 13th/beg. 14th cent.	4to	Bennett; Morgan p. 115 ('a style very close to that of de Brailes')
L-LI	London Lincoln's Inn MS Hale 123	Bible	1230–40	280 × 158	Morgan, no. 62 ('the artist probably has some links with [the de Brailes] workshop')
L-SBY	(London) Sotheby's 21–22 June 1993, Lot 6	Bible	c. 1250–70	180 × 130	'Circle of William de Brailes'
M	formerly London, Maggs Bros	Bible – single leaf	1225–50	213 × 150	Maggs Bros ('perhaps by William de Brailes or his workshop, on the basis of a comparison with [O-BL7]')
NY-M791	New York Pierpoint Morgan Library and Museum MS M.791	Bible	1220	470 × 320	Morgan no. 32 ('links in style and iconography with the later Oxford workshop of William de Brailes')
O-AS	Oxford All Souls College MS 2	Bible	c. 1260/c. 1255–60 (Watson)	265 × 175	Donovan no. 31 ('evidently derived from the Oxford workshop')
O-BL114	Oxford Bodleian Library MS Laud lat. 114	Psalter	c. 1260–65	422 × 305	Morgan II, no. 157 ('original 13th-century decoration...in the tradition of the Oxford illuminator William de Brailes')

O-MC	Oxford Merton College MS 7	Bible	1225–1250	305 × 198	Alexander/Temple no. 190 ('two hands, the first close to William de Brailes')
O-NC7	Oxford New College MS 7	Bible	c. 1220	350 × 250	Temple 'Piece' (recalling the work of some of William de Brailes' assistants), Frotscher
P-BNF	Paris Bibliothèque Nationale MS. Français 19525	Life of Saints	1225–1250	225 × 160	Morgan, II 36 note 35 (by the de Brailes workshop) the 'workshop', <i>ibid.</i> , p. 36 n. 35. 'Style: Atelier William de Brailes'
P-BNL	Paris Bibliothèque Nationale MS lat. 6505	Averroes, Commentary on Aristotle (Physics)	c. 1260	327 × 212	Morgan, no. 156(c) (direct derivation from the workshop of William de Brailes')
P-BNLA	Paris Bibliothèque Nationale MS lat. 6323A	Aristotle, Libri Naturales	c. 1260	340 × 225	Morgan no. 156(a) (direct derivation from the workshop of William de Brailes')
PE-CL	Peterborough Cathedral Library MS 10	Bible	c. 1230–40	128 × 90	Donovan no. 14 (Extensively illustrated, linked through artists shared with the de Brailes group.)
PH-FL	Philadelphia Free Library Lewis E 29	Bible	1225–1240	185 × 125	Bennett
V-MAK	Vienna Museum für angewandte Kunst, Cod. Lat. XIV (S.5)	Book of Hours	c. 1250	158 × 110	Donovan no. 22 (linked with the de Brailes workshop through the decorative style', 185)
Y-ML	York Minster Library XVI.N.6	Bible	mid-13th cent.	203 × 143	Bennett