

# Saint Birgitta, Syon and Vadstena

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## Scribes at Syon

### The Communal Usage and Production of Legislative Manuscripts at the English Birgittine House

LIKE ANY FOUNDATION of Saint Birgitta's Order, Syon Abbey's beating heart, as it were, is Saint Birgitta's *Regula Salvatoris*. Unlike any other monastic rule, however, the Rule of Saint Saviour exists not only as a legislative text, but also as a divine revelation, revealed to Birgitta by Christ in a sudden burst of visionary activity in the 1340s.<sup>1</sup> This layered dualism – vision and reality, revelation and legislation – informed how the Birgittines read their rule, and likewise influenced how the rule was presented in manuscripts. At Syon we have a rich manuscript legacy which clearly demonstrates how the *Regula* was read in two parallel contexts: private reading, or reading by the individual, and public reading, or reading as a community.

The only definite example we have of explicitly private reading of Birgitta's rule at Syon is the small, carefully-made manuscript Cambridge University Library, MS Ff.6.33, which contains the most complete copy of the Middle English translation of the *Rewyll of Seynt Sauioure* (both prologue and chapters). William Darker (d. 1512), a Carthusian monk at the neighboring charterhouse of Sheen, wrote out this book in his elegant 'fere-textura' script for female readers at Syon.<sup>2</sup> The Rule is set among a selection of vernacular devotional works, and the contents offer a fascinating window into the *lectio divina* of the Birgittine nuns at Syon.<sup>3</sup> Small enough to put in a pocket yet packed with over seventeen different vernacular works, this manuscript includes both the Birgittine rule and the Augustinian rule; *The Book of 12 Patriarchs*, attributed to the author of the *Cloud of*

1. Sahlin 2001, p. 17, pp. 57–58; Eklund 1975, pp. 21–23.

2. Darker's hand has been identified in at least nine other manuscripts; see Biggs 1997, pp. xxiii–xxiv, no. 11 for a list and discussion of Darker's work.

3. Hutchison 1989 and 1995 offer the foundational discussions of 'what the nuns read' at Syon; see also Grisé 2002.

*Unknowing*; a translation of Guigo II's *Scala Claustralium* (*The Ladder of Monks*); a short excerpt from a chapter in Birgitta's *Revelationes*; and some generic *Pater Noster* expositions, among other devotional prose works.<sup>4</sup> Here, the Rule exists as a contemplative text read for private meditation, more like the rest of Birgitta's *Revelationes*, and less like an official governing document; while the manuscript might have been a part of the women's library, about which we know very little, it was more likely one of those books on permanent or semi-permanent loan to a sister, kept among her few possessions and close at hand during the hours of contemplation and prayer.

But for now we will leave the individual in her cell, and rather turn outwards to the public spaces of the cloister, frater, chapel and library, to examine a larger, more complex group of legislative manuscripts from Syon. The community utilized Birgitta's rule and its accompanying texts in a variety of ways to fulfill a variety of communal needs. According to a papal decree the Birgittine rule was officially subordinate to the *Regula Sancti Augustini* so that together they operated as a kind of 'functional legislative unit'.<sup>5</sup> These rules were supplemented with the detailed *Additions for the Sisters* and the *Additions for the Brethren*, produced specifically for Syon; together, these four basic texts defined ruled life at the abbey. We are not going to look at that ruled life, *per se*, as that has been the direction of most recent scholarship on the Rule,<sup>6</sup> but pursue a different angle: how did these legislative texts themselves operate within that ruled life? The handful of extant manuscripts containing these texts, in both Latin and the vernacular, represents an ideal corpus of books for outlining the production and utilization of manuscripts at the abbey. By looking beyond the inner content, the substance, of Syon's legislative documents – by stepping back from the text to examine the book itself – we can gain a more nuanced view of communal

4. Contents listed in Hardwick & Luard 1856–1867, pp. 534–536. For more detailed descriptions and discussion of the manuscripts discussed in this paper, see Miles 2005, p. 1 ff.
5. This was due to Canon 13 of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which forbade the foundation of new monastic orders; Morris 1999, pp. 160–163.
6. See, for example, Ellis 1984, on the Rule and everyday life in the house; almost all of Gillespie and Hutchison's recent research relies heavily upon the directions of the legislative texts concerning reading, devotion, care of books, and preaching at Syon. James Hogg was the pioneering explorer of the manuscript side of legislative texts at the abbey: in his 1978–1980 series *The Rewyll of Seynt Sauioure and Other Middle English Brigittine Legislative Texts*, he provides coarse facsimiles of CUL, MS Ff.6.33 and Cambridge, St John's College, MS 11 (vol. 2); a diplomatic transcription of the *Additions for the Brethren* and the table of signs in Guildhall Library, MS 25524 (vol. 3); and a diplomatic transcription of the *Additions for the Sisters* in British Library, MS Arundel 146 (vol. 4).

monastic life, and of the three main book collections at Syon: the women's library, the men's library, and the books held for common use in the common spaces of chapel, chapter, and frater.<sup>7</sup> This paper will first examine where, when and how legislative texts were used communally at Syon, and second, how their manuscripts reveal a web of scribes working together to provide the community with copies of these documents. We will focus on a core group of surviving manuscripts and map out their presence in multiple book collections throughout both sides of the house, trace their usage by the sisters and brethren, and try to reconstruct how, over its lifetime, Syon ensured the reliability and availability of its legislative texts.

### SYON'S LEGISLATIVE TEXTS

The first copies of the Latin Birgittine and Augustinian rules were probably brought over from the motherhouse at Vadstena to Syon in its earliest years by Swedish brothers, charged with helping to start the new foundation.<sup>8</sup> Of the generations of copies made from these originals, six manuscripts containing the Latin *Regula Salvatoris* survive. Sten Eklund in his 1975 analysis of all the extant *Regula* texts includes these copies in his stemma, and they represent at least three distinct versions; thus there are several different textual traditions represented at Syon.<sup>9</sup> Both the Latin Augustinian and Birgittine rules were translated into Middle English, most likely in time for the first postulants, for whom the Birgittine rule would have been completely new.

It appears that the Middle English Rule was not made from any of Syon's extant Latin versions, but from some unknown exemplar or pair of exemplars.<sup>10</sup> Likewise the three surviving copies of the vernacular rule are all copies of earlier copies, not the original translation; in other words, we do not have any autograph of the vernacular translation or first-generation copy of the autograph.<sup>11</sup>

7. A 1471 document in the *Martyrology* regarding benefactors to the library refers to the men's library, the women's library, and books for common use; see Gillespie 2000, p. 189.

8. Aungier 1840, p. 38 and de Hamel 1991, pp. 55–57.

9. Within a complicated textual tradition, Eklund 1975 (pp. 21–31) establishes seven archetypal texts, two of which are most relevant here: the Π text of Birgitta's 'own version', with the prologue and chapters in the first person, *in prima persona* (London, British Library, MS Harley 612); and the Σ text of the bull of 1378, with the prologue and chapters in the third person, *in tertia persona* (Oxford, Balliol College, MS 225; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS 346; Cambridge, St John's College, MS 11; London, British Library, MS Additional 5208).

10. These conclusions derive for the most part from my edition of the Middle English rule, Miles 2005, as well as from previous work in Waltzer 1950.

11. The Middle English translation is constructed of the prologue of the Π text, *in prima*

So (as expected) we are missing many manuscripts: there is no trace of at least two or three copies of the Latin *Regula*, and no trace of at least two copies of the Middle English translation, which altogether we could see as representing five to seven central manuscripts in use by the house during its formative years. Stemmatological analysis of the text, while not foolproof, does allow us to envision the gaps left in the manuscript record and flesh out the textual landscape of a controlled reading population like Syon.

Even less is known about the vernacular translation of the Augustinian rule. It is a text that deserves more attention; even though the Latin exemplar may not have been unique to Syon, the vernacular version appears to be a product of a Syon translator, and the relationship between the two texts could shed light on translation practices at the abbey.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, we have the set of *Additions* to the Birgittine rule, a pair of lengthy documents for each side of the house as prescribed by the 23rd, penultimate, chapter of the Rule, where it is written: ‘ther must be sowghte some devout bretheren of the rewlys of Benett or Barnard, whiche addyng to these constitucions must wryte’ of method of burial, rules for visitors, form of election for the Abbes and the ordinance of officers, how silence is to be kept, ‘and all other thinges necessary to regulere obseruance which are not conteyned in thes constitucions to ther perfeccion and strength must be take of the rules above sayde.’<sup>13</sup> Both the *Additions for the Sisters* and the *Additions for the Brethren* survive in the vernacular, with some portions of the *Additions for the Brethren* found in Latin. These documents were likely composed soon after the abbey’s foundation in the first quarter of the fifteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

#### SYON’S COMMUNAL USAGE OF LEGISLATIVE TEXTS

How did the community as a whole utilize these texts? When and by whom were they read, and where were their copies kept? Looking first to the sisters’ side of the house, we find that there is specific legislation concerning the learning of the rules. Chapter 50 of the *Additions for the Sisters* describes reading aloud at communal meal time in the frater, or refectory:

*persona* (most like MS Harley 612), and the chapters of the  $\Sigma$  text, *in tertia persona* (most like MS Additional 5208). See Miles 2005, pp. 22–29 and Waltzer 1950, p. cxcv ff.

12. D’Evelyn 1970, pp. 465–467 also cites a later printed translation by Richard Whitford, a brother of Syon (1495–1555).
13. Miles 2005, p. 87, lines 654–664 (CUL, MS Ff.6.33, fols 66v–67r).
14. Gillespie 2000, p. 189.

And than al enclynyng religiously, eche schal go take ther setes as they be in order, but the legister schal go to the redyng place, and the seruitours to bryng in mete. And whan al be sette, anone the legister schal begyn to rede, distynctly and openly, that al may vnderstonde it. And sche muste rede suche mater, as the abbes or chauntres assigneth, to the edyfyng of sowles ... Ones every wyke, schal be redde the rewles of seynt sauour, and of seynt austyn, hoole, and also a parte of thes addicions.<sup>15</sup>

Evidently the appointed *legister* or reader of the week would eat early so she could read to her silently eating sisters, and there would have been a kind of lectern upon which would rest a large book of these legislative texts, ready to be read aloud.

I would like to propose that one of these large legislative books used in the frater survives in a set of mutilated fragments now part of the library of the modern Syon Abbey community, and kept at Exeter University Library. Catalogued as Syon Fragment MS 1 (hereafter ‘the Syon Fragments’), these seven bifolia contain nearly half the Middle English *Rewyll of Seynt Sauoure* (both prologue and chapters), and small portions of the Middle English *Additions for the Sisters* (see figure 1).<sup>16</sup> They attest to a large (at least 415 x 310 mm) high-quality manuscript written in a clear, elegant textualis semi-quadrata and marked with red punctuation for reading aloud. The book would have been perfectly suited for the legister to read at the lectern in front of her sisters at table. As for its storage during the rest of the week, it seems likely this manuscript was kept permanently in the frater. Chapter 45 of *Additions for the Sisters* describes the duties of the chantress regarding books, ‘Also it is her charge to have alle the bokes in kepyng that longe to dyuyne seruyse, chapter, and freytour, and to se that they be corrected, and made of one accorde.’<sup>17</sup> Among those books belonging to the frater and tended by the chantress, we might place the once grand legislative manuscript survived only by these few fragments.

Another legislative manuscript which almost certainly belonged to the sisters is the fifteenth-century London, British Library, MS Arundel 146. It is a plain,

15. Hogg 1980 (v. 4), pp. 160–161 (British Library, MS Arundel 146, fol. 80).

16. The fragments are described in Miles 2005, and in Ker & Piper 1992, pp. 348–349, where they are identified as mid-fifteenth-century, though that dating is far from definitive; and listed in de Hamel 1991 as nos 81–85, and in Bell 1995 as A.48. Despite its fragmentary nature the Rule version preserved in the fragments is an important textual witness for the Middle English translation; its variants are included in the critical edition of the Rule in Miles 2005. (Hogg 2003 mentions this manuscript in passing in note 4, p. vii, and the text is not included alongside the diplomatic transcriptions of the other two vernacular texts; Hogg 2000 likewise relegates the fragments to note 17, p. 155.)

17. Hogg 1980 (v.4), p. 149.



FIG. 1: Exeter University Library, Syon Fragments, MS 1, fragment 3, fol. 11 (415 x 210 mm). End of chapter 2 and beginning of chapter 3 of the *Rewyll of Seynt Sauoure*. Courtesy of University of Exeter Information Services Special Collections, and by kind permission of the Lady Abbess of Syon Abbey.

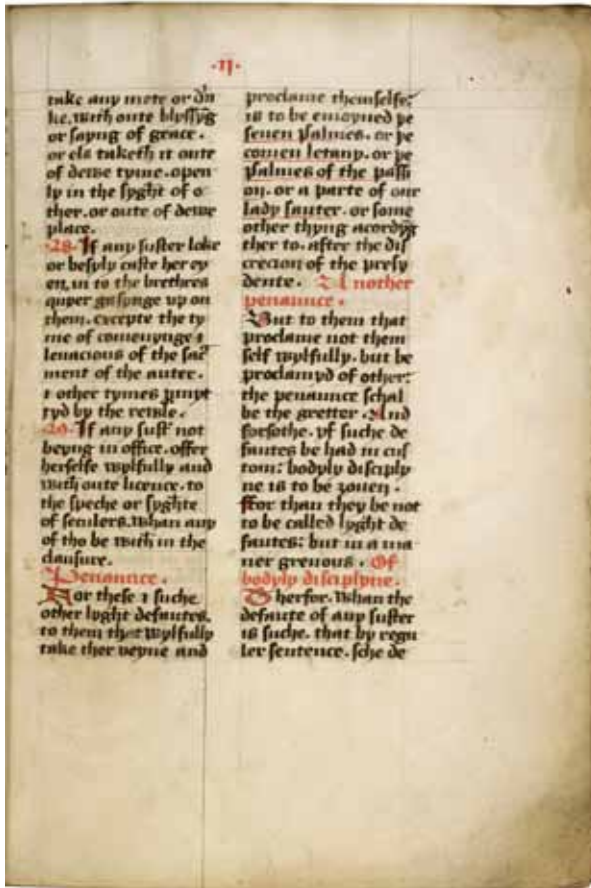


FIG. 2: London, British Library, MS Arundel 146, fol. 3r (330 x 220 mm). *Additions for the Sisters*, chapter 2. By permission of the British Library.



medium-sized book of the sole copy of the vernacular *Additions for the Sisters* (see figure 2).<sup>18</sup> Unlike the Syon Fragments this text is not marked for reading, suggesting that it was a reference copy kept not in the frater but in another collection in the house. Little is known about the women's main library, as no catalogue or record of it exists, but MS Arundel 146 would seem a useful addition to such a central collection. Likewise, it would have been appropriate for consultation in the chapter, and could have been one of those books that belonged to chapter as described in the *Additions* passage above. In any case it is important to recognize that because both this reference copy and the copy read at mealtimes are in the vernacular, all the nuns would have been sufficiently educated in their rules, regardless of level of literacy in Latin or English.

On the men's side of the house, meanwhile, legislative texts play a much stronger and more defined role in the library. Unlike the *Additions for the Sisters*, the *Additions for the Brethren* contains no special instructions to read the rules aloud in frater, and none of the extant men's manuscripts display the kind of marked-up text which would suggest public reading aloud. Instead, the men's legislative manuscripts appear to be copies kept either permanently in the men's reference library, or floating between the more fluid book collections of cell, chapel and chapter. Fortunately the remarkable library catalogue or *registrum*, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 141, survives to offer us a record of the men's library extensive holdings as they existed in the first quarter of the sixteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Yet as Vincent Gillespie notes, 'it is important, however, when assessing the nature and size of book holdings at Syon, to remember not only that there were at least these three collections [men's library, women's library, and collections of common use], but also that the books could and probably did move between them and that the catalogue of the brethren's library as it survives today represents a snapshot, or a series of snapshots, of the holdings as they were in one of the house's collections at one phase in its relatively short history.'<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, the fundamental demands of the community on their legislative texts, and the manuscript context in these texts are found, help to narrow our understanding of where and when these books were utilized by Syon's members.

To begin with, two small Latin Birgittine anthologies survive: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS 346 and Oxford, Balliol College, MS 225, both centered around Saint Birgitta's *Revelationes* and the *Regula*, and both from the first half of the fif-

18. Listed in de Hamel 1991, no. 48 and Bell 1995, A.22.

19. Edited in Gillespie 2001.

20. Gillespie 2000, p. 189.

teenth century.<sup>21</sup> Their provenance indicates they perhaps belonged to individual brothers early in Syon's history, or existed as reference books in the early library – or they were a combination of both, as examples of those books which 'edded round the community in formal and informal collections and circulations.'<sup>22</sup> In any case their function seems to be more scholastic than administrative. In the library itself, we will first turn to the majestic London, British Library, MS Harley 612, a huge and beautiful anthology of core Latin Birgittine texts including the *Revelationes*, the *Regula*, several defenses of Saint Birgitta, her canonization proceedings, and related vita – all of which have proven relationship to texts held at Vadstena. This book is listed as M. 64 in the library's catalogue and was perhaps commissioned by Syon from professional scribes, as Christopher de Hamel has suggested, or written out by a Thomas Colyngburn in the 1440s if A.I. Doyle's identification of a marginal note is correct.<sup>23</sup> Also listed in the library catalogue at shelfmark M. 72 is the more modest reference book British Library, MS Additional 5208, which contains the Latin *Regula Salvatoris* and *Regula Augustini*, followed by Latin commentaries on the Augustinian rule by Hugh of St Victor and Nicholas Trevet.<sup>24</sup>

Outside the library, our last two legislative manuscripts demonstrate a different kind of communal usage. Cambridge, St John's College, MS A.II (II) contains first the Latin *Regula Salvatoris* and *Regula Augustini*, joined by a series of Latin liturgical ceremonies from the *Additions for the Brethren*, such as for the profession of a nun, the installation of an abbess and a confessor-general, and the promotion of a brother, all of which feature English translations of the questions and answers required of the participants (see figure 3).<sup>25</sup> It is not listed in the Syon library catalogue, and indeed MS Additional 5208 would have made it largely redundant: the liturgical contents strongly suggests the book was used during service in chapel, or for guidance in chapter, and would have been of most use specifically to the confessor-general. The combination of legislation and liturgy in St John's College, MS A.II (II) demonstrates the layered function of such a book within the community, and the fluidity of book collections between the spaces of chapel and chapter. Our last manuscript is London, Guildhall Library,

21. On Bodleian MS 346, see Madan & Craster 1922, vol. 2, pp. 357–358; on Balliol College, MS 225, once owned by Thomas Gascoigne, see Mynors 1963, pp. 224–225.

22. Gillespie 2000, p. 193.

23. de Hamel 1991, pp. 90–91; see Hogg 2003, p. xiv for Doyle's identification of the main scribe.

24. The most up-to-date catalogue description of MS Additional 5208 can be found online at [www.bl.uk/catalogues/manuscripts](http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/manuscripts).

25. See catalogue description in James 1913, p. 14.



FIG. 3: Cambridge, St John's College, MS A.11 (11), fol. 1v (303 x 206 mm). End of table of contents and beginning of the *Regula Salvatoris*, chapter 1 and the beginning of chapter 2. Note the prayer request half-way down the first column: 'Orate pro vestro Waltero.' By permission of the Master and Fellows of St John's College, Cambridge.

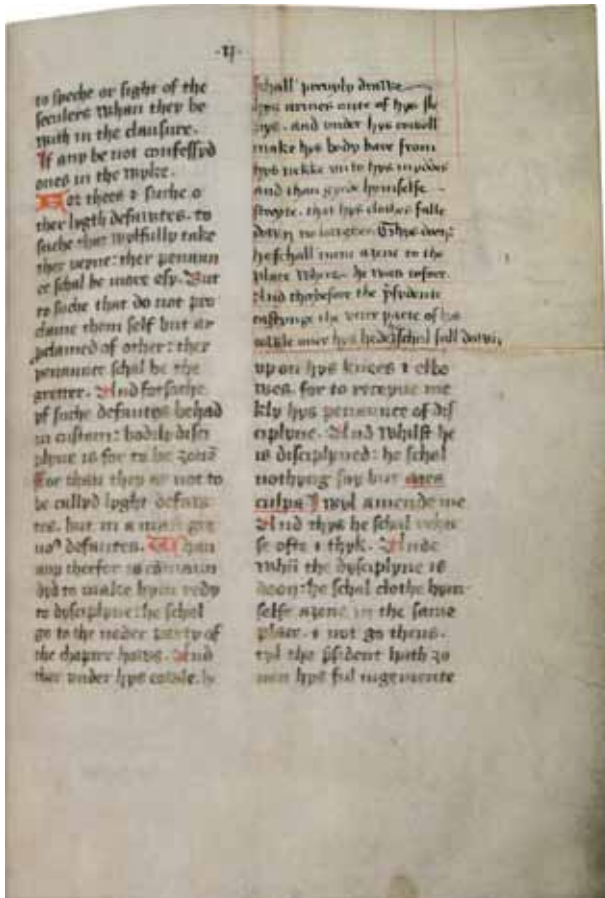


FIG. 4: London, Guildhall Library, MS 25524 (formerly London, St Paul's Cathedral, MS 5), fol. 10r (305 x 220 mm). *Additions for the Brethren*, chapter 2. Note the careful repair and re-writing of the top outer quarter. By permission of the Guildhall Library, City of London Corporation; and of the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral.

MS 25524<sup>26</sup> (see Fig. 4). In Guildhall Library, MS 25524 we have the Middle English Birgittine rule (chapters only, no prologue), the Augustinian rule, and the *Additions for the Brethren*, as well as a ceremonial calendar and a table of hand-signs for use during the hours of silence (see Fig. 4).<sup>27</sup> The practical aspect of this manuscript advocates its frequent usage in chapter by the community of brethren as a whole, where it could be easily consulted by those members not yet fluent in Latin.

#### SCRIBES OF THE LEGISLATIVE TEXTS

Now that we have traced the usage and storage of these manuscripts at Syon, we can look backwards, as it were, to examine the paleographical and codicological evidence of how these books were produced for the community. With a singular, fixed reading audience and self-defining functions, this interconnected family of manuscripts provides a rewarding case study for late-medieval monastic book production. What can the scripts tell us about who was responsible for providing the books used by the entire community? Can we attempt to map out a limited 'taxonomy' of scribes at Syon? Recent scholarship on Syon's legislation has yet to explore these questions, though their answers could have significant implications for understanding many aspects of the abbey's social and intellectual history.

The first hand we will observe in several of these manuscripts is that of Thomas Betson, member of Syon from 1481 until his death in 1516.<sup>28</sup> During his tenure as librarian of the men's library he wrote out the *registrum* of Corpus Christi College, MS 141. This elegant manuscript clearly displays Betson's paleographical talent; the range of scripts under his skilled command, as well as the presence of his distinctively-styled invocation with a Tau cross and 'TB' monogram, have linked several manuscripts to his name.<sup>29</sup> It has long been established that in British Library, MS Additional 5208, Betson employed an elegant large bastard secretary to copy out the pair of Latin rules (fols 3v–19v). In Guildhall Library, MS 25524, Betson's portion (fols 3r–4v and 57r–88r) includes the vernacular Birgittine and Augustinian rules, as well as a ceremonial calendar, a table of signs to be used during silence, and an index to the already existing *Additions for the Brethren*. At the

26. Formerly London, St Paul's Cathedral, MS 5.

27. See the description in Ker 1969, pp. 243–244.

28. For Betson's biography, see Doyle 1956; Gillespie 2000, esp. pp. 196–199, and Gillespie 2001, pp. xlvi–xlviii, present the fullest discussion of his career as librarian and work on the *registrum*.

29. Doyle 2004 describes Betson's scripts and distinguishing techniques. Also surviving are Betson's notebook, Cambridge, St John's College, MS E.6; and a short letter in English in Durham University Library, Cosin MS V.iii.16, analyzed in Doyle 2004.

end of the table of signs on fol. 72r he signs his work, ‘Deo Gracias. Prey for your thomas betson.’ Betson also embraced the new print technology by publishing two pamphlets of his own authorship, *Ars moriendi* (c.1491) and *A ryght profytable treatyse* (c.1500) with Wynken de Worde, as well as an illustrated broadside.<sup>30</sup> One of his signature techniques was to paste into his manuscripts printed initials cut out from paper broadsides; these paste-ins can be seen several times in Guildhall Library, MS 25524 (fols 57v, 69r, 69v, and 84r), and on the opening page of MS Additional 5208. A pasted-in initial from another manuscript accompanies an as-yet undocumented short prayer in Betson’s bastard secretary and signed with his monogram on the last page of an older, generic Sarum breviary that belonged to Syon, London, British Library, MS Royal 2.A.XIV (fol. 290r; see Fig. 5).<sup>31</sup>

Working alongside Betson at Syon was the scribe Walter Falkley, fourth confessor-general of the abbey. After copying the opening portion of the Birgittine *Regula* one of the scribes of St John’s College, MS A.II (II) identifies himself with a prayer request, where he asks his readers to ‘Orate pro vestro Waltero’, to ‘Pray for your Walter’ (see Fig. 3).<sup>32</sup> It has been suggested that this is the Walter Falkley whose death in 1497 is recorded in the list of confessors-general which opens the Syon Martyrology, London, British Library, MS Additional 22285.<sup>33</sup> I would like to support that identification and further propose that based on matching scripts, Falkley could also have been the scribe of the first half of Guildhall Library, MS 25524 (fols 1r–55v) and the entirety of MS Arundel 146. For the *Additions for the Brethren* in the Guildhall Library, MS 25524, we see the same broad, square rounded textualis, similar page layout and matching ruling as in St John’s College, MS A.II (II) (see Fig. 4). Again, the *Additions for the Sisters* in Arundel 146 is in a remarkably similar hand (see Fig. 2). Specific paleographical characteristics which link the three hands include an angled ascender on the lower-case *d*; matching double-compartment *a* and *g*; hairline finishes on the descenders of such letters as *y* and the second stroke of *h* in the vernacular, and *x* and select abbreviations in the Latin; and matching side-loops on the *w* letter-form in the vernacular texts. Possibly Falkley himself wrote out all these texts – or perhaps a

30. Erler 1992, pp. 191–195.

31. As far as I know, this piece of Betson’s scribal work has remained unnoticed until now; the prayer begins with ‘Ascendit ...’.

32. The hand of the prayer request begins the manuscript on fol. 1r and breaks off on the fourth line of the first column of fol. 2v, where a more formal, prickly textura takes over until the end (except for about ten lines in the first column of fol. 51r, where the first hand appears again).

33. Hogg 1980 (vol. 2), p. ix, n. 8; also de Hamel 1991, p. 91. We know little else of Falkley beyond his date of death.

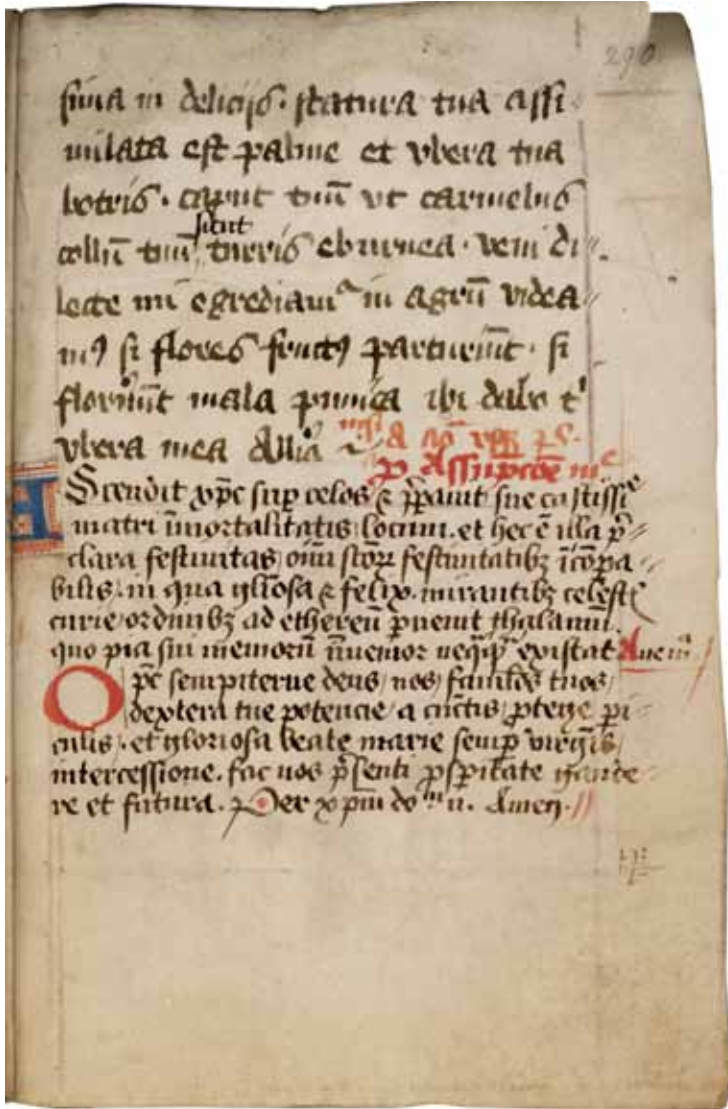


FIG. 5: London, British Library, MS Royal 2.A.XIV, fol. 290r (200 x 125 mm). This fifteenth-century Sarum Breviary was probably second-hand to Syon Abbey, and on the final page Thomas Betson has written out a short prayer marked by his distinctive monogram and a pasted-in initial from another manuscript. By permission of the British Library.

scribe of the next generation trained by Falkley closely echoed his script. Slight variations between the manuscripts, however, could easily be justified as natural changes in Falkley's writing style over the years.

Guildhall Library, MS 25524 proffers a particularly interesting history of interaction between these two scribes. It appears that Betson carefully mended Falkley's portion of the manuscript, patching worn corners and re-writing text (top outer quarters of fols 10–12; see Fig. 4), and completely re-copied the texts of the Birgittine and Augustinian rules that apparently fell apart through use (fols 75–88).<sup>34</sup> Because of the ceremonial calendar we know Betson's contributions to Guildhall Library, MS 25524 date to 1501, just four years after Falkley's death. So we can presume that Falkley originally wrote out this legislative document some years before, and through constant reference by the community it required repairs that were executed by Betson. Falkley's participation in scribal production at Syon follows logically from his role as confessor-general: not only did he himself need to use these legislative texts, particularly the ceremonies found in St John's College, MS A.11 (11), but evidently he was also in a position to provide both sides of the house with copies of these central documents with his own hand. Likewise in MS Additional 5208, Betson found himself similarly supplying a new copy of the legislative portion of a manuscript written by an earlier Syon scribe. Clement Maidstone (d. 1456), one of the first generations of deacons at the house, presumably wrote out the first four items in the book – the Augustinian and Birgittine rules followed by two commentaries – as the two commentaries survive in his hand; but at some point, Betson replaced the set of rules (fols 3v–19v) with his own copy, reversing the order as they are originally listed in the *registrum* entry.

Betson and Falkley's work epitomizes one way Syon equipped its members with everyday texts of common use: rely on in-house talent to copy and preserve distinctly in-house legislation, an efficient and cost-effective option. The Syon Fragments, meanwhile, may be one of the many manuscripts which demonstrate Syon's reliance on commercial scribal work or workshop production to provide crucial manuscripts for the community.<sup>35</sup> The size and scope of this book would

34. See Hogg 1980 (vol. 3), pp. ix–x for Gillespie's fuller description of the repairs made by Betson on Guildhall Library, MS 25524 (also mentioned in Gillespie 2000, pp. 195–196). On Betson's contribution to Additional 5208 and its entry in the *registrum*, see Gillespie 2000, pp. 196.
35. In my first encounter with these fragments while producing a critical edition of the *Rewyll* (Miles 2005) it seemed like this hand matched the formal textualis script of Thomas Betson, but on further consideration it appears unlikely Betson would employ such a taxing display script for such a large volume when he is only shown to use his



have been commensurate with a professional workshop job commissioned from London scribes working either in the city or on-site at the abbey (see Fig. 1). Christopher de Hamel has identified a large number of liturgical and devotional books made around 1500 which appear to be professional commissions by the members of Syon or their patrons, and his claim that the ‘nuns consistently patronized a workshop in London’ could be logically applied to the large, high-quality legislative manuscript survived by these fragments.<sup>36</sup> Though the fragments have been generally dated to the mid-fifteenth century, there is no definitive evidence locking them into those early decades, and so recognizing them as a commission apart from the brethren’s work may help to date them more accurately to later in the abbey’s lifetime. The question of whether the trend de Hamel outlines surged at the turn of the century or grew steadily throughout Syon’s lifetime could be explored from many angles: by more closely dating those manuscripts which appear to be professional, by matching similar scripts or identifying individual scribes, or by pursuing information connecting Syon to specific London workshops or their work for other customers. In the men’s library at the very least, there was, as Gillespie outlines, a definite increase in activity in the men’s library in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, crested by the creation of the *registrum* around 1504.<sup>37</sup> If the cloistered brethren were not sending exemplars away to the city, then they brought the scribes to the abbey: we know from Mary Erler’s careful work on Syon’s records that by the last quarter of the fifteenth century, and until its dissolution, Syon had a resident bookbinder and scribe.<sup>38</sup> In 1482, just a year after Betson most likely entered the abbey, layman Thomas Baillie signed a contract with the abbess to be that resident artisan, paid in both yearly wage and ‘for each individual book bound, written, noted, or limned.’<sup>39</sup> While Erler notes that because this position was ‘to be responsible to chanter and chantress for the choir’s books, and to the keepers of the brethren’s and sisters’ libraries, respectively, for the library books ... it is possible that Thomas [Baillie] worked with and for Thomas Betson,’ we can now accept that since the confessor-general, Walter Falkley, was also an active scribe during this period, it is equally possible Baillie worked with and for him as well. And with both Betson

more comfortable bastard secretary for major work, as in Guildhall Library, MS 25524. In general display scripts – by nature so highly regularized – prove to elude secure scribal identification.

36. de Hamel 1991, p. 92.

37. Gillespie 2001, pp. xliv–xlvi.

38. Erler 1985, pp. 306–307. As Gillespie 2001, p. xlvi, notes, his name is correctly transcribed as ‘Baillie’, not ‘Raille’.

39. Erler 1985, p. 298.

and Falkley to some extent responsible for providing copies of legislation for the abbey, Baillie's involvement in the production of legislative books – extant or lost – should be considered highly plausible.

It is worth turning to one last manuscript, the magnificent Syon Martyrology of British Library, MS Additional 22285. The manuscript's central portion of the Martyrology text itself, read daily to the community in chapter or frater, was probably a conventional, commercially-produced copy bought or commissioned by Syon, to which were added marginal lections.<sup>40</sup> Like the Syon Fragments, the main text of the Martyrology is in a formal display script of high quality marked up with red punctuation for reading aloud. Surrounding the main Martyrology folios are pages of lists of confessors-general, benefactors, obits, places of members' burial, community decisions and special liturgical observances – all written in a variety of hands over the decades. Among these may be spotted Betson's hand as well as other hands likewise found contributing to his *registrum*.<sup>41</sup> With so many readers, so many community members leaving their mark on the text, these two manuscripts in particular must offer vital information waiting to be extracted from their wealth of paleographical evidence. 'To my mind the identification of individual hands in writing and decoration is the most promising path for improving our assessment of the monastic share of book production,'<sup>42</sup> Doyle proclaimed almost two decades ago, and the same call to arms should be applied today to book production within this unique monastic house in particular: I see the connection of hand to hand, script to script, to create a paleographical map, a kind of taxonomy of scribes responsible for the dozens of surviving liturgical and devotional manuscripts, as one of the most exciting new frontiers of Syon studies.<sup>43</sup> Falkley and Betson's work proves how fruitful this kind of exploration can be for tracing book production within the abbey; with the distinct possibility that the Syon Fragments represent the house's periodic patronage of professional scribal workshops, we have even more evidence with which to develop our understanding of how Syon's insatiable desire for fine communal books balanced

40. Gillespie 2004, pp. 196–197. The Martyrology and the lections remain unedited, but Dr Claes Gejrot and Dr Virginia Bainbridge are currently working on an edition of the historical parts of the manuscript.

41. Betson's hand may be found on fol. 72r, among others; see Gillespie 2001, p. xlvi on the other hands.

42. Doyle 1990, p. 16.

43. The extensive and fascinating paleographical work being done on the many manuscripts from the motherhouse in Vadstena exemplifies how fruitful this frontier may be (though of course Syon's extant book collection is considerably smaller than Vadstena's, unfortunately).

in-house jobs with outsourcing, and of the extent of Syon's role in manuscript production in late medieval England.

This interconnected family of legislative manuscripts, whether doing duty in the doubled book collections of frater, chapel, chapter, or library, sheds new light on Syon's everyday operation. Looking beyond the texts themselves, and into their manuscript context and usage, forces us to think critically – and flexibly – about the interaction of liturgy, devotion, and administration at Syon. In this way Saint Birgitta's rule, as both revelation and legislation and liturgy, sets a precedent for blurring boundaries, a precedent which we should follow to our advantage as Birgittine scholars.

Attempting to link scribal work to names like Thomas Betson and Walter Falkley brings into dramatic relief the reality of life at Syon and how their members labored to preserve books essential to the identity of the community, and thus ensure the continuation of that community through their craftsmanship.<sup>44</sup>

## APPENDIX

### Books used by the sisters

Syon Fragments, MS 1  
British Library, MS Arundel 146

### Books used by the brethren

Cambridge, St John's College, MS 11  
London, Guildhall Library, MS 25524  
British Library, MS Add. 5208  
British Library, MS Harley 612  
Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS 346  
Oxford, Balliol College, MS 225

### Legislative texts

*Rewyll of Seynt Sauioure, Rule of St Augustine*  
*Additions for the Sisters*

### Legislative texts

*Regula Sancti Salvatoris, Additions for the Brethren* in Latin (portions)  
*Additions for the Brethren, Rewyll of Seynt Sauioure, Rule of Saint Augustine*  
*Regula Sancti Salvatoris, Regula Augustini*  
*Regula Sancti Salvatoris*  
*Regula Sancti Salvatoris*  
*Regula Sancti Salvatoris*

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