

MS 130 in the New College Library has a part to play in a curious philological tale. For it stands, most unusually, in a textual tradition whose antique archetype is extant. Normally, for a text composed in Antiquity, the archetype can only be posited to have existed; it is something which gathers its shape in the outline created by a comparison of the common and separative errors in the extant witnesses. The textual critic uses these clues to angle backwards towards the archetypal copy from which those later witnesses, many centuries later, apparently trace their descent. The archetype is normally only hypothetical, it is a vanishingly unlikely chance to find one that exists. But that is precisely what one is able to do with the tradition to which MS 130 belongs.

The manuscript contains the treatises and letters of St Cyprian

New College Library, Oxford, MS 130, f. 53v

as 'n'.⁴ Eight of the manuscripts are from the twelfth

(English script), Lambeth Palace, MS 106 (Lanthonay priory); BL Royal 6 B. xv (Salisbury cathedral), Shrewsbury School, MS 26 (Christ Church, Canterbury), and New College 130. There are three further witnesses from the end of middle ages.

What may be said of our manuscript? Not perhaps as much as one would like since it has lost any mark of ownership it might once have had; but there are a few observations that bear making. By its script, it was written very early in the thirteenth century and in England, with every appearance of having been done by Cistercian monks. It has the dignified restraint of a Cistercian manuscript, a plainness—in itself rather stylish—which was in keeping with the principles of life established by the order's rule.⁵ There is nothing here to distract the eye or excite fickle pleasure. The initials are plain, unelaborated and applied flat, and obey the 'one-colour rule' established by a statute of the Cistercian general chapter datable to . 1145 × 1151.⁶ There is no scheme of marginal figures, animals and grotesques, such a popular feature of other books of this date. There are a few drawings at the foot of a few pages, but these are doodles by a reader, albeit rather skilfully done. It may be significant that there are wyverns on fols. 20r and 40v, a decorative motif found quite widely in Cistercian manuscripts, particularly in early manuscripts from the mother-house of Cîteaux, which these resemble in style. Flex punctuation () is also present: shaped rather like a jagged question mark, the mark signifies a medial pause within a where the is complete but the is not.⁷ It is a near unique characteristic of Cistercian scribal production in the twelfth century.

New College Library, Oxford, MS 130, f. 40v

⁵ On which, see A. Lawrence, 'English Cistercian Manuscripts of the Twelfth Century', in , ed. C. Norton and D. Park (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 284–98; and 'Cistercian Decoration: Twelfth-Century Legislation on Illumination and its Interpretation in England', 21 (1995), pp. 31–52.

⁶ *ibid.* p. 36.

⁷ M. B. Parkes,

Taking these hints together

The exemplar of our manuscript would naturally have been provided by another house within the order, and it is significant in this connection that there should be evidence for hostility among Cistercians to Cyprian's views on rebaptism. Here, the [redacted] adds a grain of knowledge. This was a union catalogue apparently compiled by Franciscan friars in Oxford at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It details around 1,400 works by ancient, patristic and medieval writers, on the basis of first-hand searching in 185 monastic and cathedral libraries in England, Scotland and Wales.¹³ The letters of Cyprian were reported for fourteen houses, with a further eight libraries containing one or