

## 8 Llanthony Priory Manuscripts

MS 239; Clement of Llanthony, *In Epistolas Catholicas*

Llanthony Priory; late twelfth century

Latin; vellum; 270 x 200 mm, ff. 280

Illustrated: (below; detail) folio preceding 1r, initial 'C', for Clement

MS 119; John of Llanthony, *In Apocalipsim*

Llanthony Priory; late twelfth century

Latin; vellum; 315 x 230 mm, ff. 213

Illustrated: (opposite) f. 72r

Lambeth Palace Library holds approximately 120 manuscript books from Llanthony Priory. Overall, approximately 180 manuscripts (and two printed books) from Llanthony are extant, the largest corpus from any Augustinian religious community in England and Wales. Ranging in date from the ninth to the sixteenth century and from attractive copies of theological works to untidy students' textbooks, they reveal that the Augustinian canons obtained books by manufacturing them in-house, by buying them and by donation and that individual impetus significantly shaped the collection.

Llanthony began life around 1100 as a hermitage in the remote Welsh Black Mountains. Finding themselves on the front line of hostilities along the English–Welsh border, the canons were forced to flee in 1136. Their refuge on the outskirts of Gloucester grew into a daughter-house that soon eclipsed the original foundation in size and wealth. No longer cloistered from the world, Llanthony began a half-century of vigorous efforts to acquire essential texts. Among approximately 65 surviving volumes of c.1150–c.1200, several contain the work of Llanthony's in-house scholars. Always of high rank within the community, these scholars are likely to have



been the very individuals who attempted to build up a wider book collection there.

Some, such as Clement of Llanthony (Prior from c.1150 to post-1169), whose commentary on the Catholic Epistles survives solely in Lambeth MS 239, achieved a measure of repute. By contrast, John of Llanthony is known only from MS 119. Inscribed *Johannes supprior super Apocalipsim*, this late-twelfth-century book is the unique copy of his commentary on the Apocalypse. It consists of salient passages from esteemed authors, interwoven and identified by marginal notes – the page illustrated here demonstrates John's knowledge of Augustine and Jerome. Other annotations, erasures and insertions in the text indicate its revision and suggest that MS 119 was John's own copy. Folio 72r opens the second *visio* of John's commentary, which is heralded by the finest initial in the volume. Its design of delicate internal fringing and open circles is related to one found otherwise only in a group of books produced at Llanthony a generation earlier.

After 1250 Llanthony never again acquired books in such numbers or in such an organised manner. Nonetheless, the efforts of the early canons had borne fruit: a cataloguer of c.1350 recorded around 500 volumes in the Priory's library. As with so many medieval collections, the precise whereabouts of Llanthony's books between its Dissolution in 1538 and the early 1600s is unclear. Some were acquired by local collectors, through whom they reached Oxford colleges, but the bulk probably passed from Llanthony's last prior via his kinsman and executor Thomas Theyer to Archbishop Bancroft. Many Llanthony volumes (including MS 119) are listed in the 1612 inventory of the books that Bancroft bequeathed to Lambeth.

Kirsty Bennett  
Independent Scholar

N. R. Ker (ed.), *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain, A List of Surviving Books*, 2nd edn (London, 1964) and N. R. Ker and A. G. Watson (eds), *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: Supplement to the Second Edition* (London, 1987)

T. Webber and A. Watson (eds), *The Libraries of the Augustinian Canons*, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 6 (London, 1998), lists A16 and A17

K. Bennett, 'The Book Collections of Llanthony Priory from Foundation until Dissolution (c.1100–1538)', Ph.D thesis (University of Kent, 2006)

