

Note

A HUMANIST HAND IN A FIFTEENTH-CENTURY REGIMENT OF PRINCES

This note is to bring attention to a curious humanist script in a manuscript of Middle English poetry. It is remarkably unusual to find handwriting typical of scholars of humanism (the *studia humanitatis*) in vernacular manuscripts in late medieval England. David Rundle and Daniel Wakelin identify only a handful of examples in the fifteenth century.¹ To this list can now be added one more notable instance.

Cambridge University Library, MS Gg.6.17 is a copy of Thomas Hoccleve's *The Regiment of Princes* from the fourth quarter of the fifteenth century.² As is typical, the Middle English poem is accompanied by a series of Latin glosses. It is one of the more heavily glossed manuscripts in the corpus, with seventy-five glosses copied by the poem's scribe in an ornate display script. They are positioned, not in the margins as is usual, but in the same column as the verse. However, a later hand, modelled on a humanist script of the early sixteenth century, adds an additional sixty-seven

glosses to the manuscript, predominantly in Latin but also in English.³ This distinctive handwriting, as well as the content of these glosses, tells us something about the literary interests of this individual.

The humanist script developed from the Caroline miniscule that spread throughout France and Germany from the early ninth century, though it was the form used in Northern and Central Italy in the eleventh and twelfth centuries which became the model for new humanist scripts.⁴ Humanists preferred manuscripts in large clear writing, like the twelfth-century late Caroline script, which they valued for its formal balance, sobriety, and legibility.⁵ The beginnings of humanism can be traced to Florence at the close of the fourteenth century, a movement inspired by the example of Petrarch and engaged in an act, not of creation, but of recovery of the literary heritage of ancient Rome.⁶ It is typified by a self-conscious concern with the study and imitation of classical antiquity.⁷

Two variations of humanist script were in use in the fifteenth century, as a direct result of a conscious reform of handwriting led by the Italian humanists.⁸ The so-called roman humanist script is characterized by many small strokes made when the pen is lifted from the page frequently. It has many of the same morphological features as Caroline miniscule, though Gothic influences can also be seen in the fusions and ligatures.⁹ Two-compartment **a**, vertical **d**, and straight **s** not descending below the baseline are essential.¹⁰

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¹ David Rundle, *The Renaissance Reform of the Book and Britain: The English Quattrocento* (Cambridge, 2019) identifies Rome, Archivum Collegii Anglorum de Urbe, Liber 17, fol. 26v, a register of the Hospice of St Thomas in English; and humanist writing in the Latin supplement to an English-language manuscript of devotional texts, San Marino, Huntington Library, MS HM 142. Daniel Wakelin, *Humanism, Reading, and English Literature, 1430-1530* (Oxford, 2007), 60-1, identifies British Library, MS Additional 10304 with Latin verse prologues and titles in a red humanist script; eight English letters in humanist script in an Oxford formulary (Corpus Christi College Cambridge, MS 423, pp. 37-44); some humanist influence in Chaudler's copy of Walton's *Boethius* in London, British Library, MS Harley 43; and some individual humanist graphs in a secretary hand noted in Edward Wilson and Iain Fenlon, *The Winchester Anthology* (Cambridge, 1981), 4.

² Comparable scripts in: Andrew G. Watson, *Catalogue of Dated and Datable Manuscripts c.435-1600 in Oxford Libraries* (Oxford, 1984), vol. II, plate 785 (Oxford, England, 1491); Pamela Robinson, *Catalogue of Dated and Datable Manuscripts c.888-1600 in London Libraries* (London, 2003), vol. II plate 221 (London, England, 1491); also similarities with scribe A in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Arch. Selden B.24 (fols. 1-209v), dated c.1489.

³ Dateable from a portion of writing in Secretary script on folio 1r and his spelling of 'sweringe' which places the hand before the mid-sixteenth century, see *Middle English Compendium*, swering (e.g.).

⁴ Alfred J. Fairbank and Richard William Hunt, *Humanistic Script of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Oxford, 1993), 5.

⁵ Berthold Louis Ullman, *The Origin and Development of Humanistic Script* (Roma, 1960), 12; Teresa De Robertis, 'Humanistic Script: Origins', *Oxford Handbook of Latin Palaeography* (Oxford, 2020), 510-21 (510).

⁶ James Wardrop, *The Script of Humanism: Some Aspects of Humanistic Script, 1460-1560* (Oxford, 1963), 3.

⁷ The standard definition is typically taken from Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'Humanism', *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, eds Charles B. Schmitt, Quentin Skinner, Eckhard Kessler, and Jill Kraye (Cambridge, 1988), 113-37 (113).

⁸ Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts* (Princeton, 2021), 81-2.

⁹ Albert Derolez, 'The Nomenclature of Humanistic Scripts', *Quaerendo*, 41 (2011), 162-71 (165).

¹⁰ Derolez, 'Nomenclature', 165.

A speedier style of humanist script is also seen, known as humanistic cursive or italic, which shows a reluctance to lift the pen so often but retains many features of the roman script.¹¹ Single-compartment **a** and long **s** that dips below the baseline are key, and the script generally slopes to the right.¹² It is this second script that is witnessed in MS Gg.6.17.

As is typical of humanistic cursive, the hand in this manuscript is distinguishable by the proportion of its letters, with a relatively small x-height and long ascenders and descenders.¹³ This hand is also distinct from the neighbouring secretary script of the poem by its noticeable slant to the right. Noteworthy graphs are the open-lobed **g** which swings to the left before flicking inwards to the right to form a curved hook; vertical unlooped **d**; unlooped **h** where the barrel descends below the baseline and curls back towards the ascender; and long diagonal **f** formed by the downward stroke of the pen which flicks upwards to form a short crossbar. Also used is the rounded bracket or *lunula* to introduce the chapter numbers in Biblical citations, a notable humanistic graph which is extremely rare in vernacular manuscripts of the fifteenth century.¹⁴ The scribe also occasionally uses graphs more typical of the traditional English form, for instance sigmoid initial majuscule **S** in his first gloss.¹⁵

Of the sixty-seven glosses in this humanist script, thirty-one can be traced to another manuscript of Hoccleve's *Regiment*: British Library, Additional MS 18632. Agreements between gloss-variants suggest that this was the exemplar against which this hand checked and corrected MS

Gg.6.17.¹⁶ The glosses copied by this scribe are typical of the corpus, drawing on a range of sources both biblical and classical. Perhaps the original scribe's decision to copy his glosses in the same column as the verse prompted him to omit so many glosses, and in turn authorized the humanist scribe to replenish the text with glosses from another manuscript. Intriguingly, of the sixty-seven glosses, thirty-six are not found in any of the forty-four *Regiment* manuscripts, and might thus be the scribe's own composition.

Several of the unique glosses summarize the key moral teachings that Hoccleve gives in the poem, in Latin and following the style of the poet's glosses. Accompanying the line 'He wole his konnyng hid be and nat wist' is the gloss 'Deus occulte operatur'.¹⁷ Similarly, Hoccleve's warning that 'Undir an old poore habyt regneth ofte | Greet vertu' is glossed 'Virtus latet sub humili habito'.¹⁸ Others are more literal: next to the line 'That to moneie obeien alle thynges' is annotated 'Omnia pecunie obedient'.¹⁹

At several points throughout the *Dialogue to the Regiment*, the humanist hand annotates the margins with 'Egenus' and 'Sapiens', as if to label the characters of the speaker and the Old Man as 'the needy' and 'the wise'. This isn't the only *Regiment* to add this type of gloss: in another manuscript a scribe annotates these characters as 'Iuvenis' and 'Senex', and in another as 'Amicus'.²⁰ Perhaps the humanist scribe was inspired by glosses to Walton's translation of Boethius's *De Consolatione philosophiae*, which indicate when Boethius and Philosophy are speaking with 'B' and 'P' glosses. Walton's *De Consolatione* is, as Wakelin notes, perhaps the most obvious precedent for humanist rendering of classical texts into English.²¹ This type of

¹¹ Fairbank and Hunt, *Humanistic Script*, 5. Others have identified further subtypes of this script, for a summary see Derolez, 'Nomenclature', 163.

¹² Derolez, 'Nomenclature', 168.

¹³ For comparable scripts, see Fairbank and Hunt, *Humanistic Script*, plates 9 and 11, both humanist cursive.

¹⁴ Daniel Wakelin, 'Scholarly Scribes and the Creation of *Knyghthode and Bataile*', *English Manuscript Studies 1100-1700: Scribes and Transmission in English Manuscripts 1400-1700*, eds Peter Beal and A.S.G. Edwards (London, 2005), 26–45 (36–7, 40–1).

¹⁵ Fol. 4r. On the use of humanist **S** in the Winchester anthology as evidence of a hand 'picking up' the script later on, see: Edward Wilson and Iain Fenlon, *The Winchester Anthology: A Facsimile of British Library Additional Manuscript 60577* (Cambridge, 1981), 4–5; and *A Middle English Translation from Petrarch's Secretum*, ed. Edward Wilson and Daniel Wakelin (Oxford, 2018), xxiv–v.

¹⁶ A revision of the stemma, initially published by Marcia Smith Marzec ('The Latin Marginalia of the *Regiment of Princes* as an Aid to Stemmatic Analysis', *Text*, 3 (1987), 269–84), is forthcoming in my thesis 'The Transmission, Circulation, and Reception of Thomas Hoccleve's *The Regiment of Princes* in Late Medieval England' (University of Oxford, 2025).

¹⁷ Line 350, fol. 7r. Quoted from *The Regiment of Princes*, ed. Charles R. Blyth (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 1999). This phrase appears in the *Vitae Fratrum* (Prologue, 3.21-4.27), but was likely also a phrase that was used more widely relating to proverbial belief.

¹⁸ Line 414, fol. 8r.

¹⁹ Line 709, fol. 13r.

²⁰ Corpus Christi College Cambridge, MS 496, fol. 21v; New Haven, Beinecke Library, MS 493, fols. 86r, 87r-v.

²¹ Wakelin, *Humanism*, 10.

clarification was evidently important to the humanist scribe, as there are eighteen of these ‘Egenus’ and ‘Sapiens’ glosses in MS Gg.6.17.

Twice the scribe adds glosses to books of the Bible. The *Regiment* already has plenty of these from Hoccleve, typically following the format of a source and a brief quotation which connects to the moral lesson given in Middle English. For example, the story of Abimelech is accompanied by the gloss ‘Genesis vicensimo: Redde uxorem viro suo; si autem nolueris, scito quod morte morieris tu et omnia que tua sunt’.²² The scribe copies many of the missing biblical glosses from his exemplar, and twice compiles his own, once to Proverbs 28 and then to Ecclesiasticus 25. As with Hoccleve’s glosses, the citation links directly to the Middle English verse, firstly to those who stop their ears against the cries of the poor, and secondly to the value of age and experience when giving counsel.²³

The humanist scribe’s emulation of Hoccleve’s glossing style is worth pausing upon. Hoccleve describes the *Regiment* as ‘avys | That I compyle’ and himself as a compiler, and his glosses reflect this by pointing towards an external *auctoritas* of classical and scriptural texts.²⁴ By adding glosses of his own composition following Hoccleve’s style, the humanist scribe participates in the same interplay of authority that the poet exploits in the text, showing that that he too is learned enough to embellish the margins with Latin citations.

But in choosing a script in which to pen these glosses, this scribe does not attempt to conform to the poem. His distinctive humanist script instantly evokes the literary interests of the *studia humanitatis*. This goes hand in hand with a glossed poem like Hoccleve’s *Regiment*, vernacular verse that is buttressed from the margins by allusions to classical and scriptural authority. Can we see parallels between the humanist desire to study and imitate classical antiquity and Hoccleve’s own practice of glossing?²⁵ It would be taking the argument too far to suggest that the poet had this in mind as he was composing the *Regiment*, but that is not to say that a later reader could not have recognized a mutual interest in such classical sources as Seneca, Sallust, Martial, Quintilian, Isidore, and Boethius. The continuity, brought to light in this copy of *The Regiment of Princes*, in turn helps to break down the divide between our preconceptions of vernacular and humanist poetry in late medieval England.

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²² Line 1737. Quoted from *Regiment of Princes*, ed. Blyth.

²³ Lines 4534 and 4944.

²⁴ 2132, heading before 5440. Aditi Nafde, ‘Deciphering the Manuscript Page: The Mise-en-Page of Chaucer, Gower, and Hoccleve Manuscripts’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford, 2012), 215.

²⁵ On medieval glossing practices see Jane Griffiths, *Diverting Authorities: Experimental Glossing Practices in Manuscript and Print* (Oxford, 2014), and on Hoccleve’s glossing see ‘“In Bookes Thus Writen I Fynde”’: Hoccleve’s Self-Glossing in *The Regiment of Princes*’ and the *Series*, *Medium aevum*, 86.1 (2017), 91–107.

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