

Corpus of Insular, Anglo-Saxon, and Early Anglo-Norman Manuscript Art (650–1100 A.D.)

**A Reference and Teaching Tool in Text and Image
for Specialists, Teachers, and Students**

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Project Abstract

Of value for many disciplines, this project seeks to update, complete, and render accessible a major reference tool through the World Wide Web and other interlinked forms of publication and instruction for varied audiences. This tool catalogues, indexes, and illustrates the surviving manuscript art of the British Isles for an important period in the history of the book. The project will see to completion the long-term collaborative work of experts, and bring its results home to students, specialists, and others in many centers. Results include training of research assistants; publications; workshops and master-classes by experts in numerous fields; the promotion of future research and teaching; and a traveling photographic exhibition, with database demonstration, for colleges, libraries, museums, and schools.

A. Description of the Project

The *Corpus of Insular, Anglo-Saxon, and Early Anglo-Norman Manuscript Art* (CORPUS) is a powerful research tool for scholars, teachers, librarians, students, and others interested in early medieval illuminated manuscripts. It is an electronic guide to the contents, in text and image, of the 232 surviving manuscripts produced or owned in the British Isles from about 650 to 1100 A.D. and containing illustration or decoration. The proposed project seeks to make it accessible, on the World Wide Web and in other ways, both traditional and non-traditional. The project is designed to update, expand, complete, and promulgate the results of its long-term collaborative work which has compiled an indexed and illustrated catalogue, or inventory, of the surviving group. The group belongs to the period when the Anglo-Saxons ruled England and when the Normans, following the Battle of Hastings in 1066, began to establish their domination there and both transmitted and partly transformed Anglo-Saxon practices in many spheres of life and art. The group also represents developments in learning and culture in other areas of the British Isles, whether Wales, Pictland (Scotland), Ireland, or the Viking-dominated Danelaw in parts of England. This broad and wide-ranging group of "Insular" and Early English manuscripts reflects one of the highest points in manuscript production in the British Isles and in the history of book design. The range of types of texts, languages, and other elements encompassed by the group ensures that it holds appeal for many areas of study and interest.

CORPUS surveys the 232 manuscripts known to survive from this group. They are housed in 63 public and private libraries in the British Isles, continental Europe, and North America. Each

manuscript receives an entry. Presented in numerical order, the entries are listed alphabetically by present location, owner, and shelf-mark or press-mark. This sequence gives increased ease of consultation, improving upon earlier surveys of parts of the group, which imposed idiosyncratic and arbitrary systems of numeration unrelated to the locations or collections.

Each entry provides the user with a detailed description of the manuscript and a comprehensive survey of scholarly publications related to it. Proceeding page by page in the book, as the reader might do when facing the original, the entry then lists and describes the decoration and/or illustration found on the individual leaves, or pages, of each manuscript. Cross-references to photographic reproductions of the respective images compliment and enhance the descriptions, by providing a ready means to examine, "test," and extend their information with reference to the "source." This combination of text and image is designed to encourage and enable users to take into account the complex interrelation between "evidence" and "interpretation," as ever present in the quest for knowledge and understanding, no matter what subject matter, in the arts and sciences alike. Thus the project takes care to strengthen techniques in research, investigation, and comprehension to serve a wide variety of inquiries.

Additional features of CORPUS in its electronic form include rapid search and retrieval of information; linking of related terms and concepts; 800 pop-up notes identifying the authors, texts, historical personages, art-historical terms, and iconographic themes in the representations of images; and a detailed glossary of terms, texts, subjects, and other frequently cited or unusual elements. As yet CORPUS does not contain the images themselves, although our publications so far in book form have included many photographic reproductions from selected manuscripts. The integration of textual descriptions with photographic images on the World Wide Web is one of our major goals.

Placing this reference tool on the World Wide Web in a form readily accessible to scholars and teachers will have important results in three principal areas. First, the scholar wishing to access these witnesses to an important period of history can do so quickly and expeditiously, as he will find at his fingertips much information necessary to study them. Second, teachers of the Middle Ages and other subjects will have an essential research tool to provide them with a ready-made body of materials for students to study, explore, and manipulate. Third, by including whole pages, with texts and illustrations, the manuscript images assembled by this project will offer a major "outreach" tool to encourage students in high schools and middle schools to pursue advanced study and research.

B. History of the Project

As interest in the Middle Ages has increased in recent decades, studies of the manuscript art from the British Isles mostly focused upon individual aspects, groups of manuscripts, and other parts of that challenging and richly varied body of material. The first attempt to assemble a full "corpus" of that manuscript art was compiled by Professor Thomas Ohlgren, building upon his long-term study of the text and images in one of the most extensively illustrated manuscripts to survive from that period, the Junius Manuscript of Old English Biblical Poetry, now in Oxford (Bodleian Library, Junius MS 11). A series of research trips to England made him realize that an inventory of Anglo-Saxon illustration would be valuable for researchers in many disciplines, including archaeology, palaeography (the study of scripts), art history, history, literature, and musicology.

With contributions by a team of experts, including Carl T. Berkhout, Mildred Budny, and others, Professor Ohlgren produced a first version of the survey in book form. *Insular and Anglo-Saxon Illuminated Manuscripts: An Iconographic Catalogue, C. A.D. 625 to 1100*, appeared in 1986, with 50 black-and-white plates. Its publication inspired a number of specialists in many institutions to offer updates and expansions to the material made thus available, while Prof. Ohlgren also continued to expand the work. The very many updates and detailed consultations provided by Dr. Budny led to her appointment as Associate Editor of the project in 1990 and Co-Administrator in 1992.

The revised and improved version was presented as a database, using HyperText links for increased accessibility and search of the broad range of subjects covered by the material. The *Corpus of Insular and Anglo-Saxon Illuminated Manuscripts* was issued on disk first in 1991 and, next, with further revisions and expansions, in 1994.

The next steps focused upon making the images themselves alongside the descriptions more readily accessible to scholars, teachers, and students. Professor Ohlgren published the descriptions and images of a selected group, including the Junius Manuscript: *Anglo-Saxon Textual Illustration: Photographs of Sixteen Manuscripts with Descriptions and Index* (1994), with nearly 550 black-and-white plates. Resolving copyright and other issues led to the publication of Dr. Budny's two-volume *Illustrated Catalogue of Insular, Anglo-Saxon, and Early Anglo-Norman Manuscript Art at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge* (1997), which gave readers unprecedented access to the contents and images of one of the largest, and hitherto mostly inaccessible, repositories of CORPUS manuscripts. This step also expanded the definition of "manuscript art" to include a wider range of decoration and sketches, diagrams, maps, and other elements. The *Catalogue* provided detailed descriptions, inventories, and reproductions of 56 manuscripts, with some 770 pages in black-and-white and color, and for which all the photography was expressly made by Dr. Budny. Her care to make a full photographic record of the relevant pages of this group means that the photographs not included in the catalogue for reasons of space constitute an important resource as yet untapped.

C. The Collaborative Process

Uni-disciplinary studies have an indisputable value, whereby specialists write for their own colleagues within a set field. Terms do not need to be defined, as familiarity with a specific background, previous work, continuing controversies, and current issues can be assumed. The discourse generates a focused analysis, but that very concision can render much of the important information inaccessible to scholars even in related fields, let alone to outsiders. For subjects containing material that crosses diverse disciplines, it is necessary to bring together scholars who can traverse those distances sufficiently that the analyses in one field are made accessible to the specialists in another, and can be accurately interpreted or translated, without losing or hiding the complexity and significance of the issues. Such is the case perforce with manuscripts, which function multiply as carriers of text, archaeological artefacts, layers of history, works of art, and monuments of culture. This principle governs the scope and methodology of the project.

D. The Tasks and Scope of the Project

1. We seek to update the bibliography and secondary references to each manuscript included in the survey. During this process more manuscripts may yet come to light so far unrecognized for what they are. Scholarship prior to 1996 has been surveyed and included, but we must now

integrate new and cumulative work done on the manuscripts from 1996 to the present. This work will entail careful sifting through bibliographical surveys and learned journals to find relevant books and articles. We shall employ the services of graduate students to assemble the relevant information, and train them in the skilled research methods needed to “detect” relevant references even where the titles or summaries of the works do not immediately identify themselves as such. Such “pitfalls” are a standard feature of the “terrain” of medieval and manuscript studies, because the evidence is so widely spread and the interconnections between disciplines and materials are less readily apparent than in some other fields.

2. We seek to convert the assembled and updated material of CORPUS into an appropriate format for release on the World Wide Web. We are convinced that a web-based technology will allow the material to be accessible to the widest group of readers and users. Our consultations regarding formats lead us to favor conversion into Extensible Markup Language (XML), enabling the use of “dictionaries” of XML tags such as the Dublin Core for bibliographic markings, and giving users such benefits as more precise searches than those available in Hypertext Markup Language (HTML). For example, whereas HTML gives formatting controls, XML gives semantic controls, so that a search for “cross” could separate out instances of a “crucifix” found in images from the bibliographical writings by “James Cross”; or the occurrences of “Paris” as a place-name from the person “Matthew Paris” and the manuscript “Paris Psalter.”

We thereby intend to leverage the power of metadata for improved information preservation and retrieval of iconographical and related information. As iconography constitutes the characteristics of the individual elements as well as the relationships between them, it combines both taxonomy and ontology, thereby considering both “vertical” and “horizontal” relationships in “tree” structures. The obvious importance for this field extends beyond mere formatting markup into the ability to express taxonomic and ontologic relationships between diverse elements, particularly through a web-based browsing paradigm. For this stage we require the services of a Web programmer.

4. We plan also to cite within the database cross-references to reproductions of the images or facsimiles of the full manuscripts where they are available either online or in other forms, such as in existing books and journals. Inserting links to the websites of institutions owning the materials and copyright of the images will enable users directly to access those resources for further information, as with the full facsimile of the notable *Beowulf* manuscript made available online by the British Library in London. Inserting the Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) of these institutions will make our database a major catalogue source for the manuscripts and their available images alike. By ensuring that our Web-master regularly updates the URLs (such as weekly), we will enable CORPUS and its users to keep abreast of the frequently changing “web-addresses” of the different collections, institutions, and locations.

5. We aim to assemble and prepare high-quality photographic images for a traveling exhibition. Prof. Ohlgren has already gathered some 1500 black-and-white photographs in earlier stages of the project, while Dr. Budny’s professional photography of manuscripts over two decades has yielded a large collection of negatives, transparencies, and prints upon which the project might draw. For the exhibition, the selected images will be accompanied by captions and by a catalogue, to explicate and set them in their cultural milieu. A computer demonstration of CORPUS, along with presentations about how manuscripts were made, used, and enjoyed through the ages, will enhance the “hands-on” learning process of bringing these materials to varied audiences.

We see this traveling exhibition as one of the most important aspects of the project and its intended “outreach.” Because it can travel alike to universities, museums, libraries, and schools alike, we naturally hope and fully expect that it will spark interest in colleges, high schools, middle schools, and other centers.

E. Why the Web

The advent of computer technology has revolutionized the study of manuscripts, the hand-written form in which texts and books circulated before the advent of printing. Previously, scholars were forced either to travel long distances to view individual manuscripts *in situ* (often at great cost and inconvenience), or to view images of manuscripts in microfilm or photographic reproductions (often of poor quality). Frequently, such reproductions were hard or impossible to obtain. In contrast, computers allow us to have a clear or very clear image of individual leaves from manuscripts, in a form which can be easily modified and manipulated. For example, the user is able to enlarge or reduce the image at will. This flexibility makes the study of images and letter-formations much easier. We can also adjust the shading and light intensity, making it possible to decipher more of the lettering as well as various aspects of the decoration of the manuscript, such as the pigment, ink shades, and colors used.

Another aspect of this technology which is vital for teaching is that students can use links to gain important background information readily “on site.” For example, information about the Venerable Bede and Aldhelm, two important Anglo-Saxon authors whose works are transmitted in this corpus, is readily available to students through links provided in the project. In such mediated ways, users will be able to explore, investigate, and examine the materials and their broader context.

F. What will the Project Produce and How will it Benefit its Users?

We are confident that the completed project will yield many benefits, both tangible and intangible, to help train future teachers and other practitioners in many fields.

1. The project will construct a database presence on the Web to provide an important tool for scholarship and teaching in the various fields interested in manuscripts, texts, languages, images, and more. Manuscripts are a fundamental resource for all scholars working in the areas of medieval studies, including Greek, Latin, English, and other vernacular languages; history; art history, and musicology.
2. The project will produce a hardcover, illustrated book to serve as a companion to the website. The book will deal more fully with various aspects of the corpus, its methodology, its materials, and the discoveries which its creation and implementation have uncovered.
3. The project will host five workshops or master-classes for the scholarly community, including faculty and students, on topics central to the project, its work, and its results. They will consider problems and solutions for these challenges: 1) the codicology (study of physical construction) and art history of the manuscripts; 2) the palaeography (study of scripts) of the manuscripts and their texts; 3) making and using catalogues as tools for the technological age; 4) the photography of manuscripts and other works of art; and 5) changing responsibilities regarding intellectual property and its copyright in an era of rapid technological advances.

These workshops will form an important part of the outreach mission of the project. They will provide a forum for scholarly interchange and debate among leading luminaries in the fields. As part of preparing these events, our research assistants will learn valuable techniques for their future participation in and organization of conferences. We aim to open these events to graduate students and the public at large.

4. As another part of its outreach mission, the project will produce a traveling exhibition of high-quality photographic reproductions of images and enhanced images from the manuscripts. The reproductions will supplement the Website and will doubtless generate interest and discussion among the various interest groups to which the exhibition might travel, including colleges as well as high schools and middle schools. Accompanied by its own illustrated catalogue and a computer demonstration of our project, this multimedia resource is bound to make the study of manuscripts, medieval culture, and the on-going history of books and learning in the transmission from one generation to another across the centuries more exciting, meaningful, and “user-friendly” to the student of the present and the future.

5. The database that the project will release on the Web will comprise an important teaching tool for manuscript studies, palaeography, codicology, and other fields. The web-based CORPUS will greatly enhance the quality of instruction in various centers, notably by integrating access to text and image alike for a significant body of evidence, with wide-ranging implications and applications, in the academic world of the arts and sciences as well as in the wider world.

6. The project will enhance training on the graduate, postdoctoral, and undergraduate levels as well as others. We seek to employ graduate students working in medieval studies as research assistants, with at least one based at Purdue. Supervised and trained by Professor Ohlgren, these associates will acquire added skills in the scholarly tools necessary to conduct research in various fields. We seek also to employ one postdoctoral assistant, supervised and trained by Dr. Budny, to help with cataloguing the photographic materials, assembling the exhibition, and preparing its catalogue. All these associates will have the opportunity, through our workshops and outreach projects, to interact with leading scholars in such fields as art history, classics, history, English, and music, and to assemble publications and joint publications which will help to prepare and promote their future careers. Moreover, undergraduate students majoring in medieval studies will be involved as well. Overall, we will be working better to prepare the teachers, scholars, and leaders of the future.