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***TWO PREVIOUSLY UNRECORDED
MARGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS IN A
CHRIST CHURCH CANTERBURY
MANUSCRIPT: COTTON TIBERIUS
A.III***

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TWO PREVIOUSLY UNRECORDED MARGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS IN A CHRIST CHURCH, CANTERBURY MANUSCRIPT: COTTON TIBERIUS A. III.

London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A. iii is a compilation manuscript most probably produced at Christ Church, Canterbury, in the first half of the eleventh century.¹ This manuscript is perhaps most famous for its monastic texts: the *Rule of Benedict* and the *Regularis Concordia*, both of which are glossed into Old English and preceded by full-page frontispieces (a painted illumination in the case of the *Rule of Benedict* and a tinted drawing in the case of the *Regularis*). Both of these pictures have been discussed elsewhere by scholars.² As well as these two monastic rules there are also nearly one hundred other texts which were compiled together at this time to produce Cotton Tiberius A. iii: these include prognostics, prayers and instructions for the use of a confessor, homilies, scientific treatises, a manual on monastic sign language, the interrogation questions given to an incumbent archbishop and the first full office of the Virgin Mary.³ Two of these texts have also received illustrations, which have not previously been recorded.⁴ Though literally marginalized and, therefore, one must assume, less planned than the two full-page frontispieces referred to above, these illustrations nevertheless share a common trait with the two

¹ See N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts containing Anglo-Saxon*, (Oxford, 1957), 240-9, no.186; H. Gness, 'The Origin and Provenance of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts Cotton Tiberius A. iii', in *Of the making of Books: Medieval Manuscripts, their Scribes and Readers – Essays presented to M. B. Parkes*, eds., P.R. Robinson and R. Zim. (Aldershot, 1997), 1-60; T. A. Cooper, *Reconstructing a deconstructed manuscript, culture and community: The evidence of Cotton Tiberius A. iii* (Thesis to be presented for the degree of Ph.D., Boston College, 2005).

² See F. Wormald, *English Drawings of the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London, 1952), 42-49; J. Backhouse, *et al*, ed., *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art 966-1066* (London, 1984), no.28; E. Temple, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts 900-1066* (London, 1976), no.100; Madeline Caviness, 'Images of Divine Order and the Third Mode of seeing', *Gesta* 22/22 (1983), 99-120.

³ See Ker, no. 186.

⁴ Although there is a very incomplete illustration of Christ on the Cross in the right-hand margin of f.173r, this amounts to no more than a few pen-strokes, and as it is opposite text which has been erased,

frontispieces - an immediate and literal relevancy to the texts which they accompany.

George Henderson has recently argued that:

...the real idiosyncrasies of Anglo-Saxon art spring from another sort of sensibility, a careful connecting of sacred words and visual images, a first-hand commitment to literal illustration.⁵

While Henderson's evidence was derived largely from manuscripts with extensive and complex programmes of illustration, this same 'idiosyncrasy' can be seen even in the much humbler marginal illustrations of Cotton Tiberius A. iii.

The first of these illustrations occurs in the left-hand margin of f.35r, surrounding a vertical slash, which most probably made as the result of over-vigorous ruling on this first page on the twelfth quire. The slash corresponds to the outermost ruled line on the left side of the folio. Due to the current state of the binding, it is not possible to tell whether or not the slash continued through the bottom of the folio, but as it is wider at the top and tapers significantly at the bottom, it does not seem likely.⁶ The slash is 8.5cm long and it has been decorated with a wash of red ink surrounding the slash and with horizontal red lines towards the top of the slash, so that it resembles an open wound. The horizontal lines probably represent the tearing and puckering of the flesh at the deeper upper end of the wound and not stitches because they are only at the top and do not close the wound. This decoration is also repeated on the reverse of this folio. At first one is put in mind of the wounds of Christ, but when one takes into account the text adjacent on f.35v, the literal illustrative quality of this adaptation of an accident becomes apparent. The text is a composite lunaria, entitled *De obseruacione lune et que cauenda sunt*, which gives prognostics for the character of a boy or a girl, beneficial actions, the outcome of an illness and a dream, and good and bad times for bloodletting depending on each day in the lunar cycle.⁷ It is this last

but which was probably the closing three chapters of a *Capitula* drawn up at Aachen in 818, it will not be considered further here.

⁵ G. Henderson, 'The Idiosyncrasy of Late Anglo-Saxon Religious Imagery', in *England in the Eleventh Century: Proceedings of the Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. C. Hicks (Stamford, Lincolnshire, 1992), 239-249, at 240.

⁶ The manuscript was damaged in the Cotton fire and each folio is now mounted separately.

⁷ For an edition of this text see M. Förster, 'Vom Fortleben antiker Sammellunare in Englischen und in anderen Volkssprachen', *Anglia*, 67-68 (1944), 1-171, at 79. For a recent and insightful discussion of

element of the prognostic that provides the literal interpretation of this illustration. Indeed, the top of the slash is directly opposite a line of text, which indicates that it is a good thing to let blood after the sixth hour on the twenty-third day of the lunar cycle.

While this adaptation of a probably accidental slash in the manuscript can be interpreted as someone, perhaps humorously, making the best of a bad thing, the other unrecorded marginal illustration in Cotton Tiberius A. iii is, however, both deliberate and enigmatic. On f.96v, in the left-hand margin, is an extremely faint drawing of a man praying. It is executed in pale grey paint only a shade darker than the skin-side of the vellum on which it appears. The man's face is long and gaunt even by the standards of the drawings of the eleventh-century Canterbury School.⁸ His eyes are deeply sunk, as is shown by lines both above and below the eye-socket, and his hands are clasped in prayer just below his chin. It is not clear whether or not the man is tonsured, but the inclination of the present writer is to interpret the very faint lines of the sketch as neither clearly nor deliberately showing a tonsured man.

While this face is faint but very clear, below the man is another series of very faint grey lines, which are not quite so clear and can perhaps be interpreted in two ways. They could merely represent the folds of the man's clothes, but – and this is the interpretation to which the present writer is more inclined – they possibly show another face. This head is tilted to the right and thus only the nose and the left eye are shown; the eye is closed, suggesting a peaceful sleep or perhaps even death. At the left-hand side of the head is a zigzag design inside two lines, which perhaps indicates a pillow, or even a woman's plait. The whole illustration is some 9cm in length.

Anglo-Saxon prognostics see R. M. Luizza, 'Anglo-Saxon Prognostics in Context', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 30 (2001), 181-231.

⁸ For discussion of the Canterbury school see Wormald (1952).

This illustration appears in the margin opposite a direction to a confessor, which is entitled *Her cyþ on hu seoc man mot fasten alysan* – ‘How a sick man is able to redeem his fast’.⁹ Below is my translation of this text.

A man is able to redeem one day’s fast with one penny. Moreover, a man is able to redeem one day’s fast with two hundred and twenty psalms. Moreover, a man is able to redeem twelve month’s fast with 30 shillings, or a man may manumit goods of that value. And for one day’s fast let that man sing six times *Beati* and six times *Pater Noster*. And for one day’s fast let that man kneel and bow sixty times to the earth together with *Pater Noster*. Also a man may redeem one day’s fasting if he stretches out all his limbs to God at his prayers, and with true repentance and with correct belief and sings fifteen times *Misere mei Deus* and fifteen *Pater Noster*; and then to him is given a lightening of his sins all day. Seven winters fast is able to be penanced in twelve months, if he sings every day the psalms of the Psalter, and further at night and fifty in the evening. Also with one mass a man is able to redeem twelve days fast and with ten masses a man is able to lighten four months fast, if he wishes with the true love of God to ask for and pray as he was taught, and eagerly ever to cease from [sin].

The illustrative quality of the marginal drawing is immediately apparent. The man with the gaunt sunken-eyed face is obviously the one seeking to relieve himself of over-taxing fasts which would be detrimental to his frail condition; and his clasped hands indicate the preferred method of redeeming the fast. The face in peaceful repose, therefore, may represent a person who has effectively redeemed all earthly penance and can now pass shriven into the hereafter.

The tenor of this text and those confessional directives accompanying it (f.94v-97r) all urge moderation and deep consideration of rank, age and circumstances upon the confessor. Indeed, the text immediately preceding this provides instruction for almsgiving and good deeds which vary according to the relative wealth and power of the man involved.¹⁰ Given this sympathetic consideration of circumstance it is

⁹ For an edition of this text see R. Fowler, ‘A Late Old English Handbook for the use of a Confessor’, *Anglia* 83 (1965) 31-32, collated as N.

¹⁰ For an edition of this text see Thorpe 1840, ii. 282. (Be dædbetan xiii-xvii). Here the confessor is instructed to expect different actions of men according to three different ranks. The most powerful men should build churches and bridges to get to those churches, and concern themselves deeply with monetary charity, while those less powerful should pay tithes and give alms and undertake active charity, and those less mighty still need take care only of their own temptations and anger and try to persuade others from sin.

probable, therefore, that this illustration is supposed to invoke sympathy for the sick in the confessor. It serves to remind him of the consequences of his decision. In this fleeting, transitory life special consideration must be given to the sick because they have most need, being that much closer to judgement than the healthy. The very faintness of the lines of this illustration serves a dual purpose, it emphasises both this transitoriness and the harsh reality that this weighty decision is the confessor's alone, as it is too faint to be seen by any casual observer.

Each of these pictures has been shown to be intimately tied to a literal interpretation of the texts which they accompany. The wound on f.35r, though interpreting the text to which it is adjacent, was probably an improvisation. The drawing of the sick penitent on f.96v, however, displays more thoughtful and deliberate intent. The confessor's directive is, therefore, the only text in this compilation to have been accorded the honour of a deliberate marginal illustration, which must indicate its relative importance to those who used this manuscript.