A GUIDE TO
Western Historical Scripts
FROM ANTIQUITY TO 1600

Michelle P. Brown

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The Gothic System of Scripts

The Gothic System of Scripts is a complex hierarchy of formal and cursive scripts developed from s. xii<sup>e</sup>-s. xvi (and later in conservative areas). Its principal initial characteristics are the formation of distinct categories of script suited for use in a well-perceived hierarchy of books and texts, from de luxe liturgical volumes to university textbooks, and the rediscovery of cursive scripts proper (as opposed to the dual purpose Caroline and Protogothic), initially (from s. xii<sup>e</sup> in England which was the first area to re-invent cursive) for documentary use, but also for book use from s. xiii<sup>e</sup>. These scripts were used in a secular production context (in which clerics often participated) and the monastic scriptorium alike.

From s. xii<sup>e</sup> the tendency towards lateral compression noted in Protogothic <i>textualis</i> became more extreme and was accompanied by a squarer, more compact aspect and increasing elaboration in the treatment of minims. The latter feature was the determinant in a descending hierarchy of four grades of <i>textualis</i>: <i>prescissa</i>; <i>quadrata</i>; <i>semi-quadrata</i>; <i>rotunda</i>. These grades were well understood and widespread and only very detailed analysis, much of which has still to be undertaken, may assist in the identification of scirbal and local characteristics. Variants of <i>textualis</i>, sometimes employing limited cursive features, used for glosses (<i>littera gothica glossularis</i>) and notes (<i>littera gothica notularis</i>) are primarily distinguished by their scale and function, with <i>notularis</i> practically confined to s. xiii, after which it was replaced by cursive.

During s. xiii<sup>ex</sup> Protogothic semicursive developed in England, probably in the royal chancery, into a fully rediscovered cursive (<i>cursiva anglicana</i>), with linking of letters and the introduction of features such as loops. Speed was not the only production criterion, style, with its ability to impress, was also a factor, entailing the introduction of a number of decorative features which changed in fashion throughout the period and may assist dating. Cursive developments also occurred on the Continent and by s. xiv<sup>th</sup> the French chancery had perfected a distinctive ‘prickly’ cursive termed Secretary. This was introduced into England and Germany (which had already adopted some cursive elements into its <i>littera carolina documentaria</i>) from c.1375 and co-existed with other scripts. Other areas developed their own cursive features, often with reference to these scripts. From s. xiii<sup>ex</sup> cursive were also used for books, especially in the context of professional university book production which helped to disseminate influences and generalize trends throughout much of Europe.
With the acceptance of cursive for book use a predictable scenario of contamination of scripts occurs, termed ‘bastard’ or ‘hybrid’. Neither of these terms is without difficulties, for they have also been applied to more specific scripts. ‘Bastard’ is the term preferred here to denote a script of mixed textualis / cursiva parentage (for example, Bastard Anglicana and Bastard Secretary), with hybrida reserved to denote a specific script which is basically a textualis with the introduction of a few cursive letter-forms (without linking of letters and thereby distinguished from hybrida cursiva, with links). The relative degree of admixture determines classification, with anglicana formata representing the most formal expression of English cursive script, whilst Bastard Anglicana fuses the rounded loops and certain distinctive letter-forms of cursiva anglicana with textualis. A de luxe, formal version of Bastard Secretary is lettre bourguignonne (bâtarde), which was particularly associated with the patronage of the Burgundian court and was extremely popular for high grade production during s. xv—s. xvi. Another category to be taken into consideration is fere-textualis (more commonly fere-textura) and fere-hybrida, which represent attempts to imitate, or almost ‘fake’, textualis and hybrida, often for display purposes, titles, colophons etcetera.

This plethora of ‘compromise’ book hands increasingly supplanted the original textualis hierarchy in all but the most formal or conservative of works from s. xiv—s. xvi.

In England cursiva anglicana and Secretary continue in use, often contaminating each other, into s. xviii within certain administrative contexts and within everyday handwriting, until supplanted by copperplate. Late examples (from say s. xv) are often termed ‘Later Court Hands’, if cursiva anglicana elements predominate, or ‘Later Secretary’ if Secretary forms predominate. Distinctive formal versions of these hands with ‘house’ features were often employed by individual administrative offices, such as the Chancery and the Pipe Office, and these are called ‘Set Hands’. ‘Mixed Hands’ which combine the basic scripts and which often also introduce Humanistic forms are common from s. xvix or s. xvi. Similar developments may be traced on the Continent.

**Diffusion and duration**: s. xii—s. xvi (and even into s. xviii in certain contexts); most of Europe, with some variation in Italy.
TEXTUALIS PRECISSA
(Gothic Book-hand, Black Letter, Textura, Sine Pedibus)

PROVENANCE: Earl of Rutland, s. xvi; seized by a customs official for Queen Mary Tudor (hence its present name), thence to the Royal Collection which entered the British Museum in 1757.

SCRIPT: English Gothic book script of the highest grade and of very good quality (littera minuscula gothica textualis presciissa formata). The grade of the script (presciissa) is determined by the treatment of the bottoms of minimis, which terminate horizontally on the base-line in artificial imitation of a straight pen script. The additional effort required to achieve this degree of formality made it suitable for use only in the more luxurious of manuscripts and for items intended for display (including use in wall paintings). Despite the generous proportions and spacing of the script the stylistic features of compression and biting of bows are retained.

Note the following: the elegant manner in which the ‘dotting’ of i assumes the form of a light serif to the head of the minim; the tail of g is closed by a similar serif; the second stroke of h descends below the line in a graceful serif; the angular compression of the bow of round d, of which the bow may occasionally be left slightly open (see damiam, line 3 of the folio), this also applies somewhat to the bow of b; d assumes both round and straight forms, r both short and round forms and s both round and tall forms; tall s has a prominent wedge at its shoulder; the head-stroke of t does not extend to the left and its body-stroke does not rise much above the head; x may be crossed. Note also the unusual shape of p in spiritus (line 14), which resembles the Old English character thorn. Script is ‘below top-line’.

Pricking and ruling, in ink, for single bounding lines and ruling for horizontals, with first, second and final lines extending to the edge of the folio.

TRANSCRIPTION:

1 prebis enim ante faciem domini, pa[rare] vias eius.|
Ad[1] damiam sciencia(m) salutis plebi ei(us), in |
remissione(m) pec(atur)orum eorum. | Per viscera |
misericordie dei n(ost)ri, in | quib(us) visitavit nos |
oriens ex alto. | Illuminare hiis qui in tenebris et |
in umbra mortis sedent, ad dirige(n)dos | pedes |
n(ost)ros in viam pacis. | Magnificat,2 | anima me(a) |
dominu(m). | Et exulta-[vit spiritus meus, in d(e)o |
salutari meo.

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petibus eum antefacem domini in
magnas equestres.

Hodie in sancti salutis plebis
intermissione pro omnibus
per usura misericordiae de his
quibus usurari non osce et alios
illum marchius qui intende sit
in umbra mortis sedent ad dirigendos
pedes in uiam puras.

Agnus in anima mea
ad dominum.

Exulta
usque
meus indi
salutem meo.
TEXTUALIS QUADRATA

(Gothic Book-Hand, Black Letter, Textura, Fracta, Grossa, Psalterialis)

PROVENANCE: arms (f.iii) in honour of the intended marriage between Alphonso, son of Edward I, and Margaret of Holland. Alphonso died in 1284 and the decoration would appear to have been completed (in Queen Mary Group style) for Elizabeth de Bohun (Calendar obit, 1316); Bohun family (endleaf refers to Humphrey de Bohun, d.1322); Mannyng, d.1384 (f.i); Edward Graveley, s. xvi (f.iv); Archbishop Tenison, sold to Nicholas Tite via Sotheby’s (1861), and to the British Museum via Sotheby’s (1862).

SCRIPT: English Gothic book script of a high grade and of very good quality (littera minuscule gothica textualis quadrata libraria formata). The grade of the script (quadrata) is determined by the treatment of the bottoms of minimis, which have consistently applied feet. Note the calligraphic regularity of script, achieved by the rhythmic elaboration of minimis, which is a distinctive feature of Gothic textualis, particularly of this grade. Note also the pronounced biting of bows, despite the relatively generous spacing, a feature which increases in importance from the mid-thirteenth-century onwards. The crossed tironian et symbol also becomes a standard, if not exclusive, feature during s. xiii².

Note the following: the ar monogram in maris (lines 17 and 18 of the folio) which echoes the way in which round r originated in the Roman system of scripts; the concave heads to ascenders. Script is ‘below top-line’. Pricking and ruling, in plummet, for double bounding lines which extend almost to the edges of the folio, with ruling for horizontal.

TRANSCRIPTION:

I Confitebor¹ domino secundum iusticiam eius, | et psallam nomini domini alissimi. | Domine² dominus noster, quam admira|bile est nomen tuum in universa terra. | Quoniam elevata est magnificencia³ tua, super celos.⁴ | | Ex ore infancia|t|a|nciem⁵ per fecisti laude|m⁶, | | propter inimicos tuos ut destruas inimi|cu|m⁷ (et) ultorem|m⁸. | | Quoniam videbo celos tuos⁹ opera digitó|um| tuorum, lunam et stellas qu[|e]⁰ tu fundasti. | Quid est homo quod memores eius, aut filius ho|minis quoniam visitas eum. |
Omne dominus nostrum quanquam admirabile
et nomen uerum in uniuersa terra
E nocte evangelii et diano in uviu.

Sunt in_empresa et de uerbo uirgine.

Textualis Quadrata
TEXTUALIS SEMI-QUADRATA
(Gothic Book-Hand, Black Letter, Textura)

PROVENANCE: the saints named in the Calendar indicate an origin in or near Maastricht (e.g. 23 April, Albert, patron saint of Maastricht; 13 May, Servais, Bishop of Maastricht, etc.); entered the British Museum with the Stowe Collection in 1883.

SCRIPT: an example of Flemish Gothic book script of a lower grade and of medium quality (littera minuscula gothica textualis semi-quadrata libraria media). The grade of the script (semi-quadrata) is determined by the treatment of the bottoms of the minims which have sporadically applied feet to some minims (as in quadrata) whilst others are simply rounded off (as in rotunda). This may be seen in the treatment of -mine, at the beginning of line 4 of the folio, in which the first two minims of m have feet but the third minim, the i and the n do not. This grade of script was often used for the less formal or luxurious literary and devotional manuscripts of the central Middle Ages.

Note the rhythmic ductus, the slight forking at the heads of ascenders, the hair-line serif to the head of r, the serif ‘dotting’ of i and hyphenation, and the vertical wedge to the cross-stroke of t at word ends. Also the general preference for et in full, although the crossed tironian form also occurs.

Pricking and ruling, in ink, for single bounding lines (which extend to the edges of the folio) and for horizontals.

TRANSCRIPTION:

1. The gilded littera notabilior D overlaps the script, indicating that the act of writing preceded that of decorating.
2. Rubric for the antiphon in red.
3. Note the use of a smaller semi-quadrata script to indicate the antiphon.
4. Decoration consists of pen-flourished litterae notabiliores in blue and red at the beginnings of lines and in gold and blue within the text. Marginal figure of an angel carrying an organ and a bas-de-page scene of God creating the firmament. These are executed in an elegant and extremely playful style characteristic of Flemish manuscripts of this period.

1. cres celci et pisces maris, qui perambula(n)t | semitas maris. Do/min(e) n(u)s n(oste)r, quam | admirabile est nom(en) tuum in univ(er)s(alis) t(e)r(a) | Gloria patri et filio et spiritui sancto. Sic(s)t | erat in principio et n(un)c | et semper, et in sec(undum) sec(undo) amen. ant(iphon)a. Benedicta tua in mulie(rib) us et benedictus fructus  

[86]
Glória patris et filii et spiritus sancti
et in unum seculum
et in terra
seculum secundum
et in choro
seculorum.
Amen.
Benedicta tu in mulier
rubiz et benedictus fructul.
TEXTUALIS ROTUNDA
(Gothic Book-Hand, Black Letter, Textura)

PROVENANCE: assigned to Battle Abbey by N. R. Ker, where it was noted in Leland's Collectanea, iv.68., i. xvi; entered the British Museum with the Burney Collection in 1818.

SCRIPT: an early example of English Gothic book script of the lowest grade and of medium quality (littera minussula gothica textualis rotunda libraria media). The grade of the script (rotunda) is determined by the treatment of the bottoms of the minimis, which lack formally applied feet and are simply rounded off with a natural upwards curve of the pen. In this example the attenuated litterae notabiliores of Protogothic script which may survive throughout s. xiii are prominent, but the general aspect has changed from the oval forms of Protogothic to the squarer forms of Gothic. The treatment of minimis conveys an impression of increased regularity and there is some tendency towards lateral compression, although this is less marked during the first quarter of s. xiii. Other early features of this example are the uncrossed tironian et symbol and the placing of the first line of script 'above top-line'.

Note the following: the pronounced tail to x; the introduction of capitals and monograms at line-ends (e.g. R, lines 9 and 31, and NS, line 30 of the folio).

Pricking and ruling for single bounding lines and horizontals. Ruling is in lead point, or possibly silver point, which has, unusually, turned brown, perhaps in reaction to the surface treatment of the membrane. Horizontals extend into the gutter margin and the frame ruling extends to the edges of the folio. Unusually the ruling for the third and the third-from-last lines also extends, as do the lines which mark the top and bottom of the initial.

TRANSCRIPTION: (from the rubric, line 15).

1 De i co q(uo) d scriptu(m) (est), ut s int unu(m) sicut nos unu(m) sumus ego tu in me.1 Ut2 sint unu(m) sicut (et) nos unu(m) sumus(um)3 Pro testimonio eni(m) fidei positu(m) est, licet ab

2 arrianis ad ar-gumentu(m) p(er)tidie dirivet(ur). Et eni(m) q(ua)m tociens lecta(m) negare non queunt unitate(m), exstenuar conant(ur), ut talis videat(ur) divinitatis unitas int(et) patre(m) (et) fili(m), qualis est int(et) ho(m)i(n)es unitas devotionis (et)

3 fidei, licet etia(m) int(et) ip(s)os4 ho(m)i(n)es in suo unitas nature sitt ex co(m) munitate nature.

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LITTERA GLOSSULARIS
(Gothic Glossing Script)

PROVENANCE: not distinctly identifiable in the old Royal catalogues; entered the British Museum with the Royal collection in 1757.

SCRIPT: The main text is written in a Gothic book script of a lower grade and of medium quality (littera minuscula gothica textualis semi-quadrata librarla media); the commentary is in a glossing script (littera minuscula gothica glossularis medius), essentially a smaller, modified version of the lower grade Gothic book scripts. Note the way in which the scale of the scripts and the mise-en-page are manipulated to ensure that both texts run concurrently. Attempts to confront the problems of layout posed by formally glossed texts had been made during the Carolingian period. From the late-twelfth-century onwards, following the rise of the universities, significant developments occurred in this sphere, leading to the evolution of formal glossing scripts.

Complex prickping and ruling, in plummet, for four columns with triple bounding lines which extend to the edges of the folio, and for horizontals. There are additional double and single bounding lines in the outer margin and a double at the head to accommodate running titles. The margins are particularly generous, presumably to accommodate any additional annotation. Note the high frequency of abbreviations.

TRANSCRIPTION:

Text.

Paul(us) servus d(e)i, ap(osto)l(um) aut(e)m |  hue(s)u (christi) s(c)um(d)um | fide(um) elect(um) d(e)i | (et) agnitio(n) | v(eri)ta(que) s(ecundum) | pietate(m) e(st) i(n) spe(m) | vite et(c)iae.

Gloss.

Paul(us) servus d(e)i, | (et) c(aetera). Ha(n)c | ep(isto)lam | scribit | ap(osto)l(u)s tito que(m) | creavit | ep(iscopu)m, (com)mone(re)s eu(m) fore sollicitu(m) i(n) ecclesiastica disciplina tito, eni(m) relicto crete | ep(iscopu)o ex humilitate, et ex | simplicitate nimi

5 pa(cientes).
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BÂTARDE

( _Lettre Bourguignonne, Cursiva Bastarda, Cursiva Formata _
_Hybrida, Lettre de Fourme_)

PROVENANCE: in the Royal Collection at Richmond Palace, 1535 and in the 1666 catalogue; entered the British Museum with the Royal Collection in 1757.

SCRIPT: the varied nomenclature of Bâtarde has entailed some confusion with other bastard scripts. It represents the highest grade of cursive script, with the greatest influence from _textualis_, to be found on the Continent. A similar English grade is Malcolm Parkes's Bastard _Anglicana_ (Julian Brown's _cursiva anglica formata hybrida_). Its particular association with the patronage of the Burgundian court has led to the alternative nomenclature _lettre bourguignonne_.

Note the clubbed Secretary tall s and secretory g and the right-facing serif to the head of d. Note also the general absence of loops. The overall effect is extremely calligraphic with some retention of the 'prickly' appearance of Secretary coupled with the set formality and regularity of _textualis_. It was extremely popular for use in _de luxe_ manuscripts of s. xv—s. xvi.

TRANSCRIPTION: (from the initial).

1 La\(^1\) vie et convers\-sation de nostre | seigneur
   Ihesucrist filz | de dieu, dieu et ho\(m\)me ney | de
   marie vierge. Rachateur | et sauvier de lumain
   li\-\-gnage au monde. Est fon\|ement ferme droite
   regle | exemple cler esperance. | Vraye et seure
   attendue | de sauentment pour tous | bien voeullans.
   Et n\(ull\)e est | point daultre.