

II.

NOTES ON THE CULROSS PSALTER IN THE ADVOCATES' LIBRARY.

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The manuscript known as the Culross Psalter (Advocates MS., 18. 8. 11) has now been in the Advocates' Library for more than two hundred years. In the seventeenth century it belonged to the collection of Sir James Balfour of Denmilne and Kinnaird, the well-known antiquary and collector, who was Lyon King-of-Arms to Charles I. It was acquired by the Faculty of Advocates at the sale of his library, which took place in 1699, after the death of his brother, Sir David Balfour—the sale at which the foundation of the Faculty's collection of Scottish MSS. was laid. It is of special interest as being the earliest example which the library possesses of an illuminated manuscript which is known to have been written in Scotland.

The Book of Psalms, in various forms and in many languages, has always been the most widely used of all devotional books. The typical mediæval Latin Psalter is thus described by Mr J. A. Herbert (*Illuminated Manuscripts*, 1911, p. 327):—

“The Psalter contains the 150 Psalms, usually preceded by a Calendar and followed by the *Te Deum* and other Canticles, a Litany of Saints, and prayers; often, too, by Vigils of the Dead. Illuminated Psalters occur as early as the eighth century, and from the eleventh to the beginning of the fourteenth they form by far the most numerous class of illuminated manuscripts. Several pages at the beginning are filled in some copies, especially in the thirteenth century, with scenes from the life of Christ. The initial ‘B’ of Psalm i. is always lavishly decorated, and so are the initial letters of the principal divisions of the Psalter. These divisions vary with country and date; in the majority of thirteenth and fourteenth century manuscripts they occur at Psalms xxvi. (*Dominus illuminatio mea*, usually illustrated by a miniature of David looking up to God and pointing to his eyes, enclosed within the ‘D’); xxxviii. (*Dixi custodiam*, David pointing to his lips); lii. (*Dixit insipiens*, a fool with club and ball, either alone or before King David); lxxviii. (*Salvum me fac*, David up to his waist in water, appealing to God for help; or sometimes Jonah and the whale); lxx. (*Exultate Domino*, choristers singing); cix. (*Dixit Dominus*, the Father and Son enthroned, the Dove hovering between them).¹

¹ The numbering of the Psalms is the old numbering of the Vulgate, in which Psalms ix. and x. of the Hebrew Psalter, and of the Authorised Version, are reckoned as one and numbered ix., and the subsequent numbers are altered accordingly.

The more sumptuous copies have a great wealth of additional illustration, from scriptural, hagiographical, and other sources."

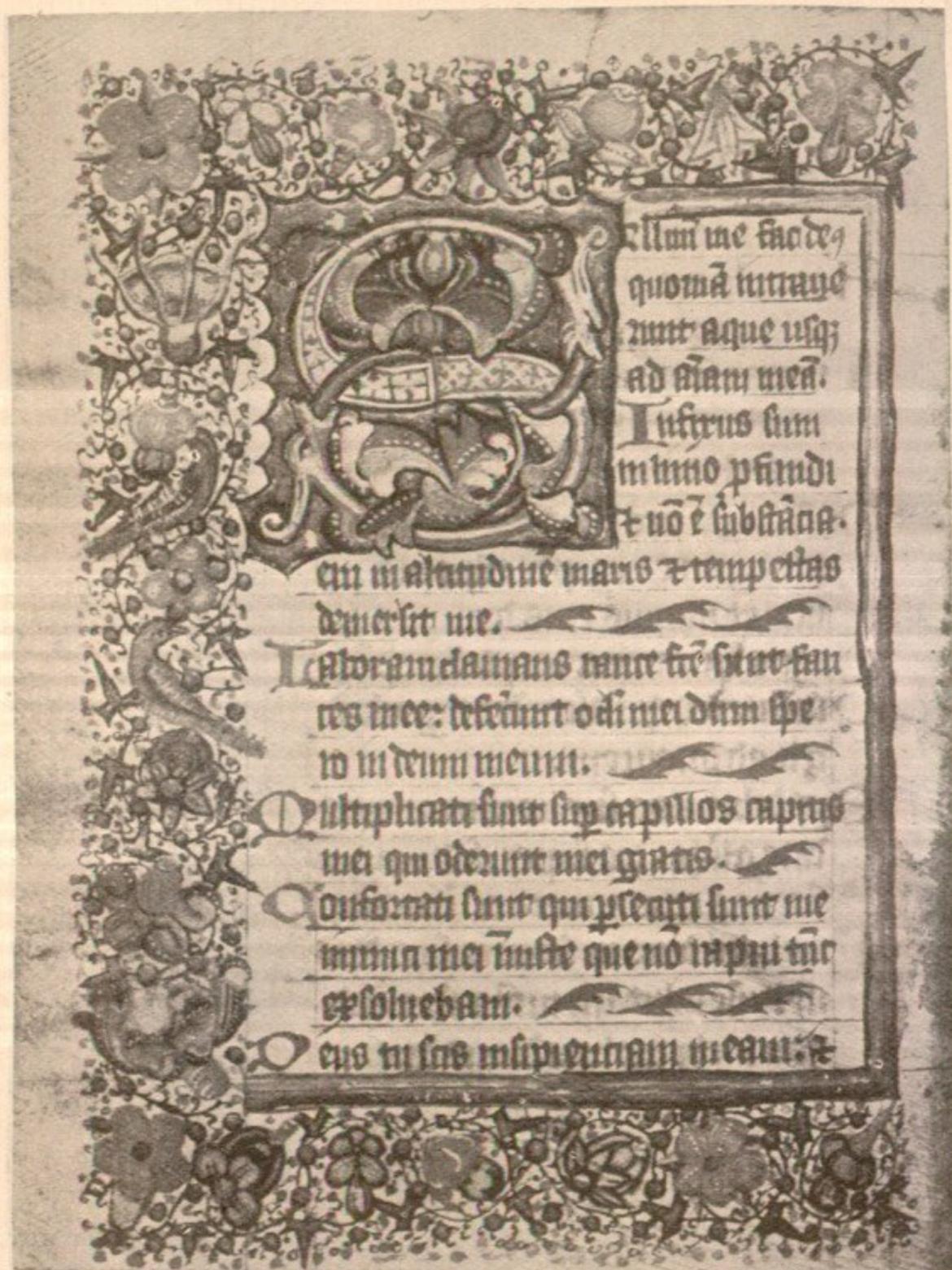
The Culross Psalter conforms to this general type, though artistically it is of quite humble pretensions. It is a small volume measuring 6¼ inches by 4¼ inches, and consists of 203 leaves of vellum, 18 lines to a page. The collation is:—Calendar in one gathering of 6; the rest as follows: *a*⁸, *b-m*¹⁰, *n*⁸, *opq*¹⁰, *r*⁸, *s*¹⁰, *tv*⁸. Two leaves are missing after ff. 12 and 16 respectively. The volume is in a modern binding of dark red niger morocco.

The volume contains the Calendar in red and black; the Psalms, the *Benedicite omnia opera*, *Benedictus*, *Magnificat*, and *Nunc Dimittis*; various prayers; the Athanasian Creed, Litany of Saints, and Vigils of the Dead.

On the front flyleaf is written in Sir James Balfour's handwriting: "*Psalterium Ricardi Marishell Abbatis de Culenrosse vel Culros in A° 1305.*" Clearly, however, the book is of much later date. At the end of the Calendar is the following inscription in gold letters:—" *Me fieri fecit Ricardus Marchel quōdā abbas de Culēros quē d̄s salvet hic et in evum.*" In the list of abbots of St Serf's, Culenros, given in the Scoti-Monasticon, the name of Richard Marshall appears with the note, "Degraded: died 1470." The MS. is written in the ordinary book-hand of the fifteenth century, and the decoration is the characteristic floriated work of the period.

The Calendar is printed in Bishop Forbes's *Kalendar of Scottish Saints*. The only Celtic saints whose names appear in it are St Servanus, St Felan, and St Fyndoca, and Bishop Forbes comments at some length upon its composition as illustrating the historical attitude of the Cistercian Order to the ancient Celtic Church. "Culross," he says, "was a Cistercian house, founded in 1217 on an already existing religious establishment, which traditionally stretched back to the days of S. Servanus, and S. Kentigern, whose mother, S. Thenew, gave birth to him there. This kalendar is a witness to the complete Anglicanisation of the Scottish Church which took place after the epoch of S. Margaret. It will be seen how very few of the Celtic saints occur among its entries, and therefore we must believe that, while they retained a veneration for the ancient founder of the place, who was joined to the Blessed Virgin in the dedication of the church, the Cistercians of Culross very much ignored what had gone before, and cut themselves off in sentiment from the old historical Church of Scotland."

Culross was a noted centre of learning. Dr Hay Fleming, in his *Reformation in Scotland* (p. 515), notes a passage in the Register of the Privy Seal of 1589, in which it is stated that there had been "in all tyme by-gane" a grammar school within the abbey. Bishop Forbes

Fig. 1. The Culross Psalter. *Saluum me fac.*

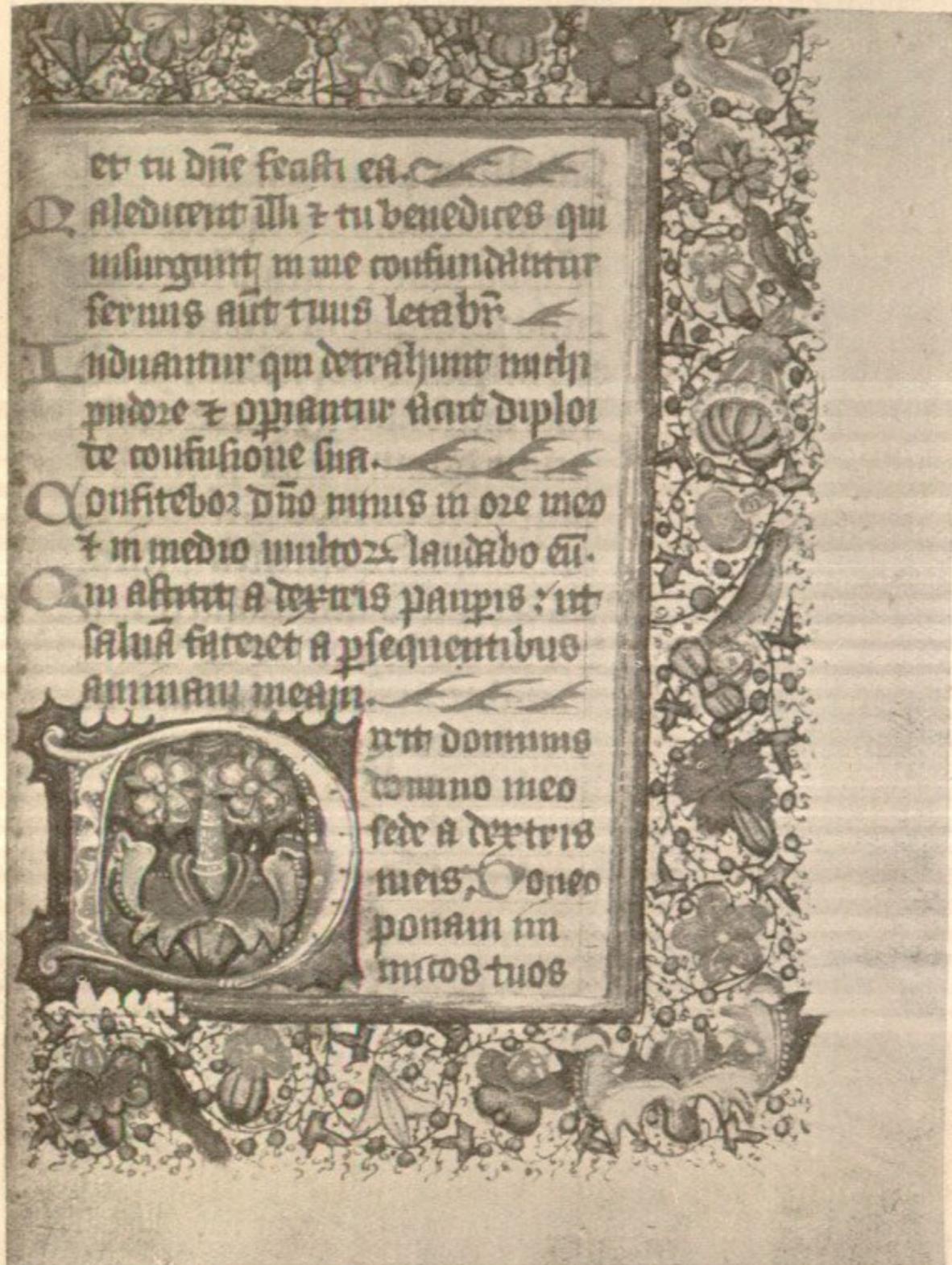


Fig. 2. The Culross Psalter. *Dixit Dominus.*

says that even after the invention of printing the abbey was a great school of ecclesiastical calligraphy. Dr Joseph Robertson, in his Preface to the *Inventories of Mary Queen of Scots* (p. cxvi, note), notes that payments were made from the Treasury of £14 to the monks of Culross, for books to the Franciscans of Stirling, in 1502-1504; and of £24 "to Dene Mychaell Donaldsone, monk of Culross, for an grete Antiphonall buke" for the Chapel Royal, in 1538-39. It is to be feared that the "grete Antiphonall buke" has shared the fate of the Royal "Mess Buikis" which were burnt by the Regent Moray in 1569. Dr Robertson also points out, in Ferrerius' *Historia Abbatum de Kynlos*, that, in recording that Abbot Thomas who died in 1535 gave a Missal and a Gradual to his monastery of Kinloss, his biographer is careful to add that both were written at Culross.

The body of the book is written in a careful book-hand, with alternate red and blue versal letters, and numerous line-finishings in red, of a conventional leaf form. Some of the canticles, etc., at the end have been added in another hand, not so carefully. There is only one miniature in the book, in the initial B of Psalm i., representing David enthroned, playing on his harp. An illuminated initial is prefixed to each of the following Psalms: xxvi., xxviii., li., lii., lxviii., lxx., xvii., cix., cxviii., and cxxxvii.¹ In almost all cases the pages containing these initials are surrounded by decorative borders of flowers and birds. In these gold is freely used. A small quantity of silver has also been used, which is now in a tarnished condition.

The manuscript is of interest in the technical history of painting. It was one of the MSS. examined by Principal A. P. Laurie in the preparation of his book on *The Pigments and Mediums of the Old Masters* (London, 1914). With reference to it he says (p. 94):—"The next manuscript examined was the Culross Psalter. The pigments on this seemed to be malachite, vermilion, a yellow about which I am not certain, and a fine quality of lake, but the main interest of this manuscript is the blue, which is no longer ultramarine, but azurite. This is the first appearance on the British manuscripts we have examined of the very bright and beautiful azurite which is found on late fifteenth-century manuscripts, and it continues through the sixteenth to the beginning of the seventeenth century. It is quite different in tint to the azurite found on the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century manuscripts. We do not know the place from which it was obtained, but we are told by Pacheco, the father-in-law of Velasquez, that azurite was getting rare owing to the conquest of Hungary by the Turks, and he mentions some being obtained from Venice. It is possible, therefore, that the origin of this fine azurite was some discovery of a new copper vein in Hungary. Azurite is found

¹ See note, p. 208.

as a surface copper deposit, and as the mining operations are carried deeper into the earth, it disappears, so that we could expect to find that the supply decreases after a certain length of time. If, however, Pacheco's statement is correct, the ultimate disappearance of azurite from the European palette may have been due to the presence of the Turks, and the old mines may have been lost during their period of occupation and never rediscovered."

The volume contains an interesting mark of ownership. A marginal note in a sixteenth-century hand states that "This buik pertens to Sir Archibald Prymrois." This is no doubt the Archibald Primrose who became a monk of Culross about the year 1540, and who after the dissolution of the monastery was Chamberlain of Culross. He was the elder brother of David Primrose in Culross, who was the great-grandfather of Archibald Primrose of Dalmeñy, who on the accession of Queen Anne in 1703 became the first Earl of Rosebery. In the year 1630 the book was in the library of Sir James Balfour.