

## LONGLEAT HOUSE MS 257: A DESCRIPTION

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From fresh examination of the manuscript, this paper presents a codicological description of Longleat House MS 257, a fifteenth-century codex in vellum that contains Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*, Chaucer's *Knight's and Clerk's Tale*, and *Ipomedon C*, among other texts. First, the article discusses the date and place of production of this textual artifact, and after listing the contents of the volume, it examines the manuscript's material circumstances, provides the collation and compilation, describes the morphology of the hands, and analyzes the decoration.

KEY WORDS: codicology, paleography, Middle English manuscripts, Chaucer manuscripts, Lydgate manuscripts, Middle English romances, *Ipomedon*.

### 1. Date and provenance

Longleat House MS 257 (olim Bath 25) is a vellum manuscript consisting of two eighteenth-century paper flyleaves, plus 212 leaves (including 28 lost), and measuring 300mm by 210mm (Guddat-Figge provides a mistaken measuring: 215 x 114mm [1976: 235]).<sup>1</sup> It has two separate parts which were produced independently, but bound and illuminated together at a very early stage. The strongest evidence for its dating is provided by an autograph of Richard III at the bottom of fol. 98v, which reads, “tant le desieree/R Gloucestre” (for a facsimile, see Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, 1997: 6, fig. 2), which must have been signed between 1 November 1461—when Richard was made duke of Gloucester—and before 26 June 1483—when Richard became king. Yet, using Kathleen L. Scott's recent findings (2002), the border decoration in the manuscript enables us to suggest a more specific production date. First, the borders in the Longleat manuscript display the characteristic departure from the rigidity of bar-frames of the earlier part of the period of Scott's survey (2002: 8–9). Next, Scott also mentions a dating criterion relevant to our manuscript: “In the fourth quarter of the [fifteenth] century . . . the sprays become disconnected from the bars to emerge with less rationale directly from initial corners” (2002: 8; see her pl. xxviii, p. 88, dated 1467–1469; for this type of spray, see fols. 2v and

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1. For other descriptions of this manuscript, see *Third Report of the Royal Commission of Historical Manuscripts* (1872: 188); Kölbing 1887: 203–06; Kalén 1923: vi–ix; Erdmann and Ekwall 1930: 42–43; Manly and Rickert 1940: 339–42; Guddat-Figge 1976: 235–37; Tudor-Craig 1977: 63–64; Sutton and Visser-Fuchs 1997: 279–81. See also Meale 1984: 137, 138–42. Seymour (1995: 146–47) provides a description of the contents only of the first half of the manuscript.

12r of Longleat). Furthermore, if we compare the border decoration in our manuscript with the dated examples in Scott's handbook, the similarity of the first page of *Ipomedon* (fol. 90r; see facsimile in Meale, 1984: 186, pl. 3) with Scott's plate xxviii (2002: 85; dated c. 1457–c. 1461) becomes apparent. From the evidence provided by Scott, I would situate the border decoration of the Longleat manuscript between 1457 and 1469, which is in accordance with the external information available.

The book was purchased by Sir Thomas Thynne, the first Viscount Weymouth (1640–1714), from the sale of the collection of Sir Henry Spelman (1564?–1641) in the book sale that began on 28 November 1709 (Harris 2000: 237–38). The book appears in the "Catalogus Manuscriptorum" as folio lot 58 with the following description: "Chaucer's Works, with other Poetry, [Vellum]" (*Bibliotheca Selectissima*: 56; for copies of the catalogue, see Munby and Coral, 1977: 23). Fortunately, Humphrey Wanley (1672–1726), "library-keeper" of the Harleian collection and competent palaeographer, compiled his own "Catalogue of the MSS. in the Library of Sir. Henry Spelman, sold by Auction by John Harding who bought them, December 20, 21, & 22. A.D. 1709" (now British Library, MS Harley 7055, *Papers of Humphrey Wanley*, fols. 232–39), providing a more detailed description of our manuscript: "Seige of Thebes.\\Whilome as old stories tellen us.//—Arcite & Palamon—Grisild full of Pacience—*Incip.* There is at y<sup>e</sup> west side of Italie, with *Chaucers Lenvoye!*—*Ipomedon* a Romance in Prose, imperf.—History of y<sup>e</sup> Old Test. in Old English Verse, wants some leaves at beginn—/*scriptus circa tempus Henrici 6*" (fol. 234r; qtd. with minor variations in Harris 2000: 246n23).

In relation to its provenance, Manly and Rickert (1940: 342), based on a far-fetched interpretation of some scribbles on fol. 107r, argue for its production at the Priory of the Austin Canons at Hempton in Norfolk, a conjecture that Meale (1984: 139–40, 164n32) rejects for its tenuousness, and by adducing dialectological considerations, although she is unable to put forward any specific location.<sup>2</sup> I would like to propose a possible provenance for this volume—at least for the first part of it—based on the characteristics of the manuscript itself, and on our knowledge of its early ownership (Meale 1994: 215 and n. 21, comments on the possibility that Richard's signature was not in fact an *ex libris* inscription at all). The first significant feature of the manuscript is its decoration, which has been unanimously condemned as tasteless, and criticized for its choice of colors (for instance, see Manly and Rickert's opinion: "The decoration in Ll' [Longleat MS 257] is heavy and over-crowded, and the coloring ugly" [1940: 581]; see also Meale 1984: 141; Seymour 1995: 147; Sutton and Visser-Fuchs 1997: 280). Regardless of the aesthetic merits of its illumination, it is precisely the limner's palette that sets this volume apart, since its most prominent pigment is green. And green was a color that would rarely have received such privileged treatment in late medieval England, according to Kathleen Scott's recent survey of English illuminated books (1996: 1: 74n39). There is, however, a regional exception to Scott's appreciation: one of the defining characteristics of manuscripts produced in Yorkshire in the period 1375–1497 is precisely the dominant presence of green in its decoration, as John Friedman has recently argued (1995: 73–86). In the light of Friedman's study, the combination of green with purple in the illumination, preferably of

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2. Guddat-Figge (1976: 237n2) also expresses the need for more supporting evidence to validate Manly and Rickert's hypothesis; Ralph Hanna states, "their [Manly and Rickert's] evidence seems to me unconvincing" (2000: 41n37).

foliate borders and floriate initials, as occurs in Longleat MS 257 (see *Decoration* below), would enable us to localize the production of a manuscript in Yorkshire (Friedman 1995: 73).<sup>3</sup>

How could that manuscript have come into the hands of a young Richard? Our knowledge about Richard's upbringing is limited, yet we know that towards the end of 1465 he was placed in the custody of Richard Neville, earl of Warwick, until at least 1468 or the beginning of 1469, which agrees with the date proposed above for the production of the border illumination (on the role played by Richard Neville and his family in the North-East between 1461–71, see Pollard 1990: 285–315; for Richard's presence in Neville's household, see Ross 1981: 7; for Richard's connections with the North in general, see Horrox 1986). The Neville family was extremely influential in political affairs in the North, especially Richard the "Kingmaker," but they also revealed an interest in learning, in particular George Neville, who was chancellor of the University of Oxford and later Archbishop of York, and even appears in an illustration in Jean de Wavrin's *Chronicles of England* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS fr. 85, fol. 277). Richard is most likely to have received his basic education in Neville's household, as Sutton and Visser-Fuchs suggest (1997: 5), thus implying ready access to books. The characteristics of any library the Nevilles might have had are unknown to us, but we do know that a missal from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century belonged to the Neville family (Boston Public Library MS 1576; qtd. Friedman 1995: 100), that a surviving manuscript of the *Enseignement de la vraie noblesse* can be associated with the earl of Warwick (Geneva, Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire, MS fr. 166; see Sutton and Visser-Fuchs 1997: 30), and a de-luxe copy of English statutes with Richard's brother, John, Earl of Northumberland and Marquess Montague (London, Lincoln's Inn, MS Hale 194; see Sutton and Visser-Fuchs 1997: 30), and that the arms of Anne Neville appear infilling an initial in the manuscript of Vegetius's *De re militari* which would pass into Richard's collection (London, British Library, Royal MS 18 a XII, fol. 49v; see facsimile in Ross, 1981: fig. 16[a], and Sutton and Visser-Fuchs 1997: 78, fig. 35; see the initial *H* on fol. 201v of Longleat MS 257, which also has space left blank for the addition of arms; see p. 9 below).

In addition to acquiring his education, the future King Richard III's stay in the earl of Warwick's household gave him access to York, the administrative, educational, and economic capital of the North. There we find a thriving mercantile class that, together with the gentry and religious institutions of the region, offered a sufficient market for a consolidated community of book traders. E. Gordon Duff (1912: 42) informs us that "York . . . was from very early times an important centre of book production. The text writers and illuminators of manuscripts had formed themselves into a guild as early as the time of Edward III." Considering that texts by Lydgate and from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* were accessible in the North,<sup>4</sup> and that *Ipomadon A* was in all likelihood originally

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3. See for instance initials in Friedman's figs. 2 and 10, and border decoration in fig. 24. This piece of circumstantial evidence can corroborate a hypothetical Northern origin for the manuscript; however, in the light of some criticism of Friedman's study (Hanna 1998: 176–77), it would not be taken as a valid criterion on its own.

4. In the will of Sir Thomas Chaworth of Wiverton, Notts. (note that this county was at this time part of the diocese of York; a map is provided in Hill 1900: between 232–33) of 1458–89, there is mention of "a newe boke of Inglisse, y<sup>e</sup> which begynnyth with y<sup>e</sup> lyffe of Seynt Albon and Amphiabell

composed in the West Riding of Yorkshire (Purdie 2001: XLIII–XLVII) and *Ipomydon B* in the North-East Midland (Ikegami 1983: LX), it is very likely that the first part of Longleat MS 257 was copied and illuminated by members of the book-trade community of York, from whom Richard or its earlier owner obtained this volume (Sutton and Visser-Fuchs [1997: 18] state that Richard acquired this manuscript as a used-book, although they do not give any evidence for that).

## 2. Contents

This manuscript is composed of two discrete parts, each of which displays thematic cohesion, and both are integrated by a common program of decoration. While the first part collects literary texts of a romantic type, the second part represents an example of religious-didactic poetry of biblical inspiration.

### Part I

1. Lydgate, “Siege of Thebes,”<sup>5</sup> fols. 1r–48v. Verse. “Whan that Phebus passed was the Ram . . . In this assemble afforn as I you told.” *IMEV* 3928/23.
2. Chaucer, “Arcite *and* Palamon,” fols. 53r–77r. Verse. “Whilome as olde stories tellen vs . . . Thus endeth Palomon and Emelie/And god save all this fair companye Explicit Arcite *and* Palamon.” *IMEV* 4019/65.
3. Chaucer, “Grisild,” fols. 77v–89v. Verse. “There is at the west side of Italie . . . Ay clappeth as a myllu I yov counsaile Explicit Grisild full of Pacience.” *IMEV* 4019/78.
4. “Ipomedon,” fols. 90r–105v. Prose. “Svm tyme there was in the land of Cecile a king that . . . And he asked whoo was his moder And Ipomedon said the quene of Poill.” Fol. 106 missing. Fol. 107r illegible scribbles.
5. Doggerel, fol. 107v. Verse. “That kinge that first gauē Life to the in . . . dispatch this cost of yenar it to fete.” Not in *IMEV*. Fol. 108 misplaced before fol. 1. The central part is destroyed. On the recto the inscription “A and Elizabeth” is written in a careful Anglicana hand upside down. Two more notes and the whole verso seem illegible to me.
6. *Rules of Conduct for a Gentleman Usher*, fol. 109rv. Prose. “The order how A Jentylman hvscher schall scerue hys greet master . . . the sysys And ffor the lytt that schall beryn Alle nyt on the coberd.”

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and other mony dyvers lyfeȝ and thynges in y<sup>e</sup> same boke” (Raine 1855: 227). Manly and Rickert (1940: 609) have suggested an identification of this manuscript with San Marino, Huntington Museum MS 140, which begins with John Lydgate’s *Life of St. Alban and St. Amphibal*, and includes in the first part Chaucer’s *Clerk’s Tale* as well (for a description, see Dutschke et al. 1989: 185–90). Dutschke et al. (1989: 189) believe that this first part may correspond with the book mentioned in Chaworth’s will. The watermarks, however, may suggest a date later in the fifteenth century (Turville-Peter 1983: 133n16), although their identification is only approximate.

5. Quotation marks are used for titles taken from *incipits* or *explicitis* of the manuscript, whereas italics indicate a modern, editorial title. In quotations, italics indicate expanded manuscript abbreviations.

7. *How to serve in a nobleman's household*, fols. 110rv. Prose. "Hou and in what mannar A gentellmannes howsschare shall sarue his gret mastar or myster . . . doth know no more of ragyn heate than doth a womans harte."

#### Part II

Fols. 111r–118v lost.

8. *A Middle English Metrical Paraphrase of the Old Testament*, fols. 119r–212r. Verse. "Thre monethes theym hym hyd and lenger they durst noght abyde . . . To wonne *with* them in heven Explicit." *IMEV* 944/2.
9. Latin numbers, fol. 212v.
10. *A medicine for the axes*, fol. 212v. Prose. ". . . full endyve ii handful lettys . . . and it shal hele him in short space. Quia probatum est." (Fol. 212v is heavily soiled, and Dr Kate Harris, Longleat's Curator of Historic Collections, has suggested that this must have occurred during a period when the book was unbound [personal communication]).

### 3. Material

This is a vellum manuscript rebound in the nineteenth century,<sup>6</sup> and on the spine it reads, "LYDGATE'S SIEGE OF THEBES/CHAUCER'S ARCITE AND PALAMON, ETC./THE OLD TESTAMENT IN VERSE/XV CENT." The volume has been well preserved and aptly repaired, although portions of some leaves have been cut out, probably due to the richness of their extravagant illumination—e.g. on fol. 56 all the area surrounding the justification has been excised. Furthermore, a significant number of leaves have been lost (see collation below), thus rendering all the texts imperfect. Foliation is by Henry Bradshaw, who accommodates for the missing and displaced leaves. The body of the text and the individual lines are ruled after folding, giving a variable size for the writing block (e.g. fol. 9v, 208 x 113mm; fol. 90v, 221 x 151mm).

### 4. Collation and compilation

Collation was established by Henry Bradshaw in his examination of the manuscript after its rebinding, and it is copied on a flyleaf at the beginning.

Part I: 1+1<sup>8</sup> (fols. 1–8), 2<sup>8</sup> (fols. 9–16), 3<sup>8</sup> (fols. 17–24), 4<sup>8</sup> wanting 4 (fols. 25–32), 5<sup>8</sup> (fols. 33–40), 6<sup>8</sup> (fols. 41–48), 7<sup>8</sup> wanting 1–4 (fols. 49–56), 8<sup>8</sup> (fols. 57–64), 9<sup>8</sup> wanting 4 (fols. 65–72), 10<sup>8</sup> (fols. 73–80), 11<sup>8</sup> wanting 1, 2, 7, 8 (fols. 81–88), 12<sup>8</sup> (fols. 89–96), 13<sup>8</sup> wanting 5 (fols. 97–104), 14<sup>8</sup> wanting 2, 7, 8 (fols. 105–12; fol. 108 misplaced before fol. 1).

Part II: a quire missing (fols. 113–18 in Bradshaw's foliation), 1<sup>8</sup> (fols. 119–26), 2<sup>8</sup> (fols.

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6. During rebinding fol. 108 was misplaced and bound as a flyleaf before the first text, being numbered as fol. ir and receiving the signature oiv by a modern hand in pencil (see Meale 1984: 162n22).

127–34), 3<sup>8</sup> (fols. 135–42), 4<sup>8</sup> wanting 3–6 (fols. 143–50), 5<sup>8</sup> wanting 1, 4, 5 (fols. 151–58), 6<sup>8</sup> (fols. 159–66), 7<sup>8</sup> (fols. 167–74), 8<sup>8</sup> (fols. 175–82), 9<sup>6</sup> wanting 6 (fols. 183–88), 10<sup>8</sup> (fols. 189–96), 11<sup>8</sup> (197–204), 12<sup>8</sup> (205–12)<sup>7</sup>.

Catchwords: 126v, 142v, 158v, 166v, 174v, 182v, 196v.

Register of signatures: part I first gathering unsigned, B-O<sup>8</sup> [\$1-4 (- D4, I4, K1, K4, L1, L2, O1, O2, O4) signed]; part II: first gathering missing, b-i<sup>8</sup>, k<sup>6</sup>, l-n<sup>8</sup> [\$1-4 (- d4, e3, e4, fi, f2, f4) signed].

## 5. Script

Two scribes are responsible for copying the main texts of each part of the manuscript. Here follows a description of the main features of these and other minor hands.

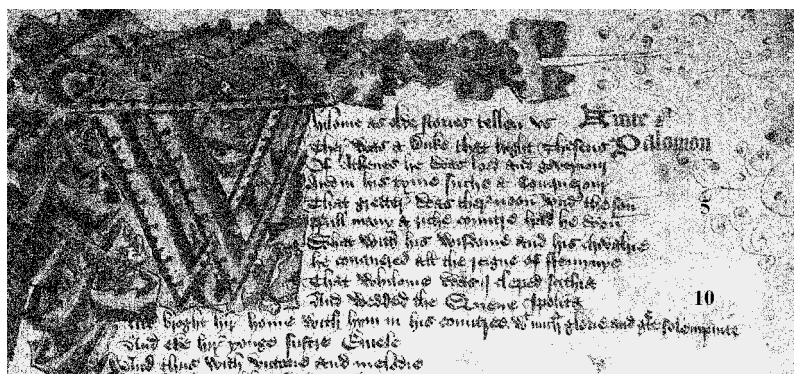


Figure 1: Longleat House, MS 257, fol. 53r, hand 1<sup>8</sup>

— Hand 1 (fols. 11r-106v; see fig. 1 above; fol. 90r is reproduced in Meale [1984: 186, pl. 3], and in Sutton and Visser-Fuchs [1997: 218, fig. 69]): Anglicana formata (Seymour classifies it as “secretary, with some *anglicana* forms” [1995: 147]). Two-compartment *a* (“was,” l. 5), *d* with looped-ascender (“olde,” l. 1), round and uncial *e* used indistinctly (“wedded,” l. 10), two-lobed *g* (“brought,” l. 11), two forms of *r*, “2” shaped (“glorie,” l. 11) and long-tailed (“chivalrie,” l. 7), long and sigma *s* (“stories,” l. 1), two forms of *w* (“whilome was,” l. 9).

— Hand 2 (fol. 107v, 110rv; see fig. 2 below): mid-sixteenth century Elizabethan secretary (cf. Rycraft 1972: pl. 6; Petti 1977: 17). One-compartment *a* (“mannar,” l. 1), uncial *d* (“and,” l. 14), Greek and reversed forms of *e* (“gentellmane,” l. 1; “nature,” l. 16), one-lobed *g* with stem protruding above the headline (“gret,” l. 2), distinctive form of *h*, with its body

7. Seymour’s collation of the second part is faulty, as he identifies only eleven gatherings, and fails to see that the missing fol. 188 is the last one of a quire of six leaves (1995: 146). For the first part, he states that the sixth folio of quire 13 is missing (1995: 146), when in fact it lacks the fifth folio.

8. All the illustrations from the Longleat manuscript are reproduced by permission of the Marquess of Bath, Longleat House, Warminster, Wiltshire, Great Britain.

going below the baseline (“schambar,” l. 4), left-shouldered *r* (“sarue,” l. 2), long and sigma form of *s* (“mastur,” l. 7; “his,” l. 2), bending *t* (“gret,” l. 7).

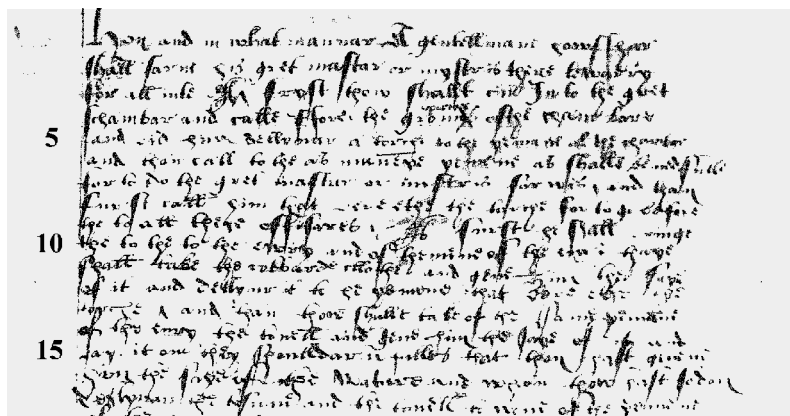


Figure 2: Longleat House, MS 257, fol. 110r, hand 2

— Hand 3 (fol. 108r-109v; see fig. 3 below): early Tudor secretary.<sup>9</sup> Two-compartment *a* (“schall,” l. 1), open-bodied looped *d* (“and,” l. 4), reverse form of *e* (“alle,” l. 10), one-compartment *g* with the stem protruding (“go,” l. 4), broad-bodied *h* with looped links (“there,” l. 5), long-tailed *r* (“fryst,” l. 3), sigma and long *s* (“his,” l. 1, “schehall,” l. 5), secretary form of *w* (“sarwyse,” l. 2).

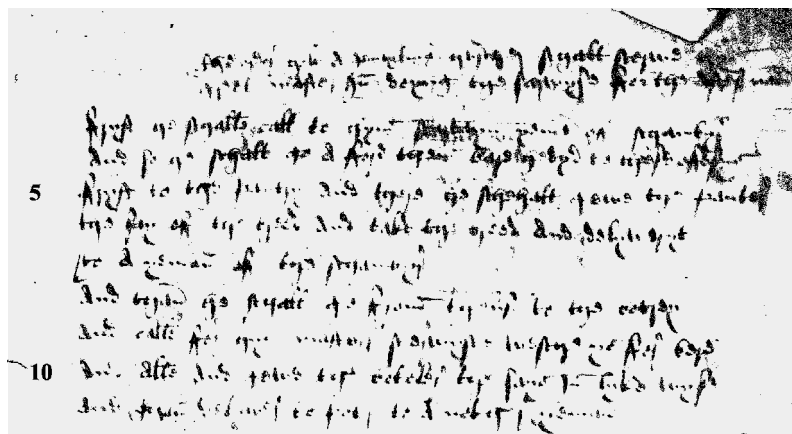


Figure 3: Longleat House, MS 257, fol. 109r, hand 3

9. See Petti 1977: 16. Meale describes it as “a current hand of the second half of the fifteenth century” (1984: 153). Tudor-Craig suggests the possibility of it being Richard’s own hand (1977: 64), but Meale proves it wrong (1984: 176n93). Dr. Kate Harris expressed some reservations about fols. 108 and 109 being copied by the same scribe (personal communication).

— Hand 4 (fols. 119r-212r; see fig. 4 below; a rotograph of fol. 136r can be found in Kalén 1923: 00): Anglicana formata. Two-compartment *a* (“names,” l. 2); *d* with looped-ascender (“belde,” l. 10); uncial *e* only (“kinges,” l. 1); two-lobed *g* (“god,” l. 14); “2” shaped and long-tailed *r* (“more,” l. 14; “dred,” l. 14); long and sigma *s* (“messingers,” l. 17).

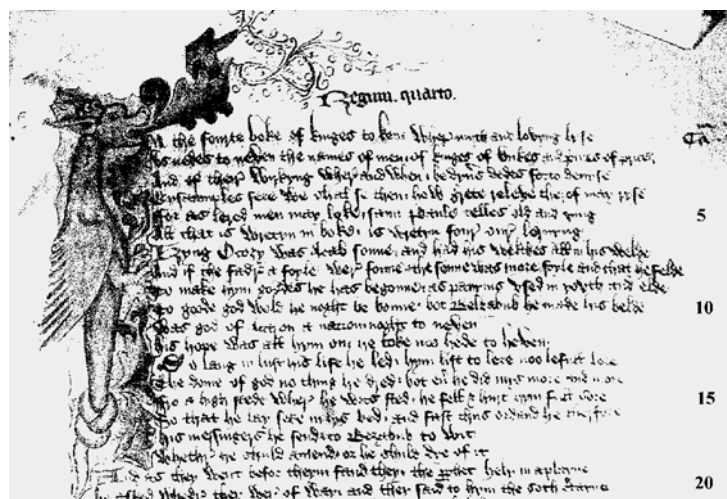


Figure 4: Longleat House, MS 257, fol. 176r, hand 4

## 6. Decoration

The two parts of the manuscript feature a different kind of scribal decoration upon which a single artist has imposed a common program of illumination, thus endowing this disparate collection with an element of cohesion, while generating a hierarchy of decoration (see Scott, 2002: 7; cf. Owen 1991: 109). Accordingly, the most elaborate border is reserved for the first page of the manuscript, where we find two rows of acanthus leaves in green, purple, and ochre, which enclose a blue and white twelve-line capital *W*, and end in pointed aroids from whose center sprays extend to create a complete spraywork border without a bar (see fig. 5 below; for the description of manuscript decoration I follow the terminology in Valentine 1965, and Scott 2002: 120–25). The beginning of the other three literary pieces in the first part (the first page of the *Old Testament Paraphrase* is missing) is marked with the same kind of foliated ornament surrounding large capitals with aroids generating spraywork, but only partial borders are formed (two sides): a ten-line *W* at the beginning of *The Knight's Tale* (fol. 53r; see fig. 1), a seven-line *T* at the beginning of *The Clerk's Tale* which includes a dragon with long ears (fol. 77v; see Scott 1996: vol. 2, 371), and a nine-line capital *S* at the beginning of *Ipomedon* (fol. 90r; see facsimile in Meale 1984: 186, pl. 3). Internal textual divisions are marked by means of large capitals with the same leafy motifs and very limited border decoration (one side): an eight-line capital *P* marking the beginning of the first part of *The Siege of Thebes* (fol. 2v), and a twelve-line capital *P* at the beginning of the second part (fol. 28 containing the beginning of the third part is missing); each of the books in the *Old Testament Paraphrase* receives the same kind of treatment (a large eighteen-line capital *I* deserves special mention, since it has the form



of a dragon: fol. 176r, marking the beginning of *Regime quarto*; see fig. 4). Several of the initials have space left blank for the inscription of arms, which in some cases were added, but later erased (on fols. 12r and 135r; see Meale 1984: 165n37).

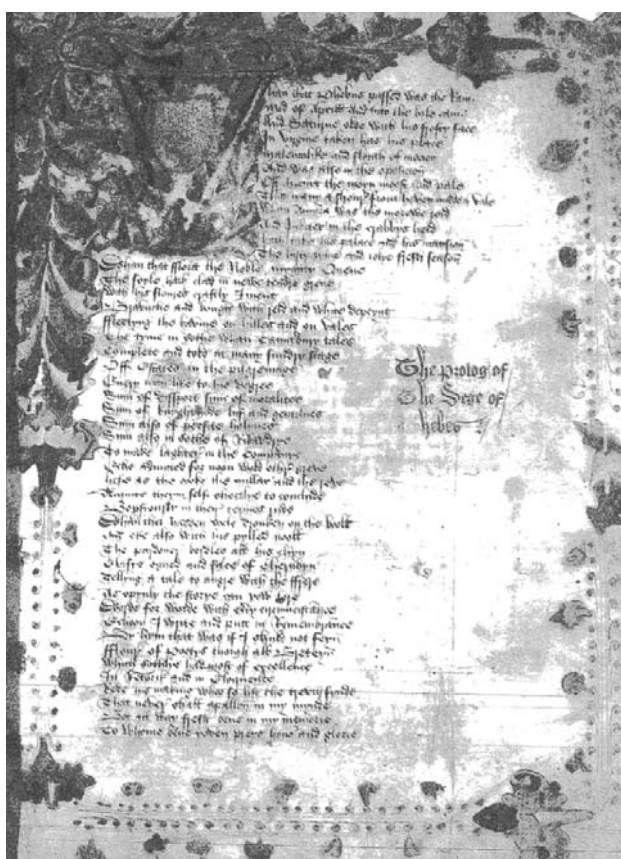


Figure 5: Longleat House, MS 257, fol. 1r

Scribal decoration consists, for the first part, of the use of two- and three-line calligraphic initials alternating in red and blue that, in the second part, are less frequent and devoid of any strap-work. In the Old Testament section, however, the capitals in the lines are touched with red, and internal rhymes are marked with red dots. None of the texts is introduced by an *incipit*, but titles are given in textura in the margin; there are also rubricated running titles in textura copied on the top of rectos and versos for the first two items, and only on the rectos for the rest of the manuscript, with the exception of the last verso of a gathering (e.g. fol. 80v reads “Grisild,” and fol. 96v “Ipomedon”). Especially in the first part, the first letter of every page receives strap-work elaboration in the same ink as the text.<sup>10</sup>

10. I would like to express my gratitude to the Secretaría de Estado de Educación y Universidades and the Fondo Social Europeo, whose financial support was instrumental in undertaking this

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