

Cotton MS Vitellius A XV

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Date

4th quarter 10th century-2nd half 16th century

Title

The 'Southwick Codex' (including Old English adaptations of Augustine of Hippo's Soliloquia; the Gospel of Nicodemus; and the prose Dialogues of Saturn and Solomon); the 'Nowell Codex' (including Marvels of the East; Beowulf; and Judith)

Content

This manuscript contains two separate collections of Old English texts, bound together for Sir Robert Cotton (d. 1631): f. 2: a 17th-century Cottonian flyleaf. f. 3: a medieval endleaf, containing historical memoranda copied in Latin in the 1st half of the 15th century (f. 3r) and in French in the 2nd half of the 16th century. ff. 4–93: the 'Southwick Codex' copied in the 2nd half of the 12th century, comprising: the Old English adaptation of Augustine of Hippo's Soliloquia, sometimes attributed to Alfred the Great (ff. 4r–59v: imperfect); an Old English version of the Gospel of Nicodemus (ff. 60r–86v: imperfect); the prose Dialogues of Saturn and Solomon (ff. 86v–93v); and a homily on St Quintin (f. 93v: imperfect). ff. 94–209: the 'Nowell Codex' copied at the end of the 10th century or in the early 11th century, comprising: an Old English homily on St Christopher (ff. 94r–98r: imperfect); an Old English version of the Marvels of the East (ff. 98v–106v); an Old English version of the letter purporting to be of Alexander to Aristotle (ff. 107r–131v); Beowulf (ff. 132r–201v); and Judith (ff. 202r–209v: imperfect). A Psalter leaf that Cotton bound in this volume, formerly foliated as f. 1, has been removed to form Royal MS 13 D I*, f. 37.

View: [bindings](#)



Cotton MS Vitellius A XV, ff 2r-2v

Cottonian endleaf: 17th century; Latin; origin England; owned by Sir Robert Cotton (d. 1631)



Cotton MS Vitellius A XV, ff 3r-3v

Medieval endleaf, containing historical memoranda

This folio contains a medieval end leaf, with historical memoranda copied in Latin in the 1st half of the 15th century (f 3r) and in French in the 2nd half of the 16th century (f 3v).



Cotton MS Vitellius A XV, ff 4r-93v

The 'Southwick Codex', containing Old English versions of Augustine of Hippo, Soliloquia; Gospel of Nicodemus; Debate of Saturn and Solomon (prose); and a homily on St Quintin.

These folios, sometimes called the Southwick Codex due to their later medieval provenance, contain several Old English texts copied in England in the 2nd half of the 12th century: ff. 4r-59v: the Old English version of Augustine of Hippo's Soliloquia (imperfect). ff 60r-86v: Old English Gospel of Nicodemus (imperfect). ff 86v-93v: Debate or Dialogues of Saturn and

Solomon, prose version. f. 93v: an Old English homily on St Quintin (imperfect).



Cotton MS Vitellius A XV, ff 94r–209v

The 'Nowell Codex', containing a homily on St Christopher; Marvels of the East; Letter of Alexander to Aristotle; Beowulf; Judith

These folios, sometimes called the 'Nowell Codex', contain several Old English poems and texts copied in the late 10th or early 11th century: ff. 94r–98r: Homily on St Christopher (imperfect). ff. 98v–106v: Marvels of the East, with miniatures (listed below). ff. 107r–131v: Letter of Alexander to Aristotle. ff. 132r–201v: Beowulf. ff. 202r–209v: Judith (imperfect).

Decoration: miniatures consisting of line drawings, with some parts coloured, illustrating the Marvels of the East, including: f. 98v: a single horned sheep, facing right; two horned sheep, facing left. f. 99r: a cock and a hen; a creature with two bodies, two heads and eight legs. f. 99v: a double-headed serpent; a serpent on the left and a deadly two-horned donkey on the right. f. 100r: a cynocephalus, a man with a dog-like head. f. 101r: a half-page miniature of three gold-digging, dog-like ants attacking a tethered camel, with a man in a tunic on the left with a camel, and a young camel tied to a tree. f. 101v: two elephants, resembling camels; a two-faced man. f. 102r: a naked man holding a plant; two men talking, and between them a lertix, a sheep-like beast. f. 102v: a blemmya, i.e., a man with his eyes and mouth in his chest; two snakes; a centaur or homodubius. f. 103r: two wheels side-by-side, representing lakes of the sun and the moon. f. 103v: a tree from which balsam grows; a donestre, a beast-headed man, on the left holding a human leg and foot, and a person on the right. f. 104r: a panotii, a man with ears projecting on stems, holding an object that looks like a bow. f. 104v: a long-haired man in a cloak and tunic, whose eyes shine at night like lamps; the temple called Beliobiles. f. 105r: a golden vine-tree; three people talking, representing a kindly nation who rule the Red Sea, where the best pearls are found. f. 105v: a bearded woman facing right, and an upright beast; a long-haired woman holding a plant. f. 106r: a man sitting on a cushion under an arch; two catini, open-mouthed beasts like dogs; a robed man with a staff, extending his hand to another man; f. 106v: a man lifting a woman; a tree on which gems grow; two men representing the race of Ethiopians.

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Languages
English, Old
French
Latin

Physical Description

- **Condition:** leaves damaged by fire in 1731.
- **Materials:** parchment and ink.
- **Dimensions:** binding 245 x 185 x 85 mm (parchment approximately 202 x 120 mm; paper frames 235 x 170 mm).
- **Foliation:** ff. 209 (where f. 1 has been removed and is now Royal MS 13 D I*, f. 37, f. 2 is an early modern flyleaf, and f. 3 is a medieval flyleaf).
- **Binding:** British Museum 1845.

Ownership

Origin: England (all parts of the volume). Provenance ('Southwick Codex', ff. 4-93): Southwick Priory, Hampshire: inscribed 'Hic liber est Ecclesie beate marie de Suwika quem qui ab eadem abstulerit. vel titulum istum dolose deleverit nisi eidem ecclesie condigne satisfecerit; sit Anathema maranatha. fiat fiat; Amen; Amen' in a late 13th-century hand (f. 5r). Provenance ('Nowell Codex', ff. 94-209): Laurence Nowell (b. 1530, d. c.1570), antiquary: inscribed with his name and the year 1563 (f. 94r). Provenance (all parts of the volume): Sir Robert Bruce Cotton (b. 1571, d. 1631), 1st baronet, antiquary and politician: owned and probably assembled by him (see Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript* (1981), pp. 65-169); his added flyleaf (f. 3). Cotton's collection was augmented by his son, Sir Thomas Cotton (b. 1594, d. 1662), 2nd baronet, and grandson, Sir John Cotton (b. 1621, d. 1702), 3rd baronet, who bequeathed the entire collection of books and manuscripts to trustees 'for Publick Use and Advantage', 12 and 13 William III, c. 7. Formed one of the foundation collections of the British Museum in 1753.

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