

The *Ormulum* now:

Manuscripts and editions

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What is the Ormulum?

By turns:

- An unassuming old book in a **terrible** state of material distress,
- A collection of pedantic and **repetitive** sermons with **simplistic** and derivative theology,
- An invaluable and essential source of key **changes** in the English language in the 12th century,
- The **only** text in its dialect,
- The only large medieval holograph showing extensive **authorial intervention**.

“No other surviving medieval manuscript with comparable subject matter (whether in Latin or English) is written on such wretched parchment and with so little regard for its appearance.”¹

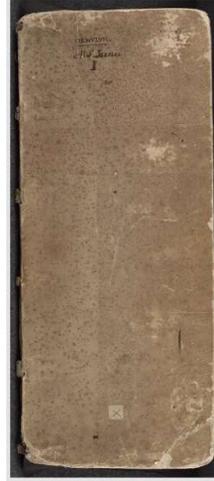


Fig 1. MS Junius 1 front cover.

2

1. Burchfield, R.W. (1956). The Language and Orthography of the Ormulum MS. 1. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 55 (1). 56–87: 57.

The *Ormulum* manuscript

The main source (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 1) is Orm's own working notebook.

- **compiled** from an earlier set of notes between 1150 & 1180,²
- **acquired** by the Dutch philologist Jan van Vliet in 1659 from the estate of Sir Thomas Aylesbury,
- **passed** to Fransiscus Junius in 1666,
- finally to the **Bodleian** in 1677.

Orm's assistant, "Hand C" added some material,
Van Vliet and Junius made some annotations.



Fig 2. MS Junius 1 f. 10r

3

² Parkes, M. (1983). On the Presumed Date and Possible Origin of the Manuscript of the "Ormulum". Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Junius 1. in Stanley, E.G. and Gray, D. (eds) *Five Hundred Years of Words and Sounds: A Festschrift for Eric Dobson*.

Hands A, B, C, P, Van Vliet & Junius

There are 4-6 hands in MS Junius 1.

- White argued that Orm wrote in Hand A, which is corrected by Hand B (note forms of e, ȝ),
- A Hand P has also been suggested for the preface (by e.g. Matthes 1933),
- Turville-Petre (1947) argues that B and P are Orm at different stages of his life,
- Hand C is Orm's assistant, who writes in the Latin pericopes and makes some additions after Orm.
- Junius & van Vliet added some notes.

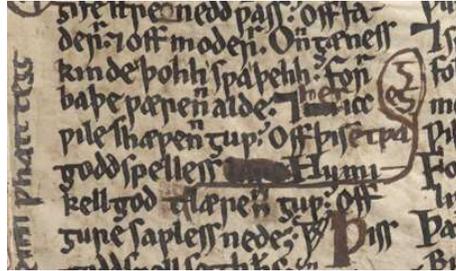


Fig X. Corrected text, f. 12r

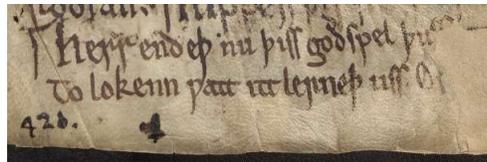


Fig 3. Sample of Hand C's English

4

Turville Petre 1947 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/27712834.pdf?acceptTC=true>

Matthes 1933

https://books.google.se/books/about/Die_einheitlichkeit_des_Orrmulum.html?id=8K6Y-7GTF0C&redir_esc=y

Existing Editions

- The only previous **complete** editions of MS Junius 1 are White (1852), and a revised version by Holt (1878),³
- Many discoveries made subsequently,
- Some samples in anthologies and introductions,⁴
- N.R. Ker discovered extra material in van Vliet's notebook (London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 783).⁵

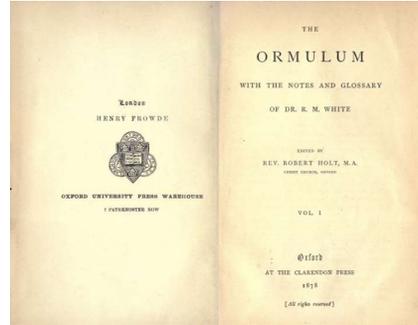


Fig 4. Title pages from Holt-White (1878).

³ White, R.M. (1852). *The Ormulum: with notes and glossary*. (two volumes). Oxford Univ. Press.

Holt, R. (1878). *The Ormulum: with the notes and glossary of Dr R.M. White*. (two volumes). Clarendon.

⁴ e.g. Dickins, B & Wilson, R.M. (1962). *Early Middle English Texts*. Bowes & Bowes; Bennett J.A.W. & Smithers. G.V.

(1966). *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*. Clarendon.

⁵ Ker, N.R. (1936). More of the Ormulum. *Times Literary Supplement*. 14 November, 1936.

— (1940). Unpublished parts of the "Ormulum" printed from MS Lambeth 783. *Medium Aevum* 9 (1). 1–22.

Robert Meadows White



White had an exemplary career:

- Matriculated at Magdalen College Oxford 1815,
- demy 1815-1824,
- fellow 1824-1847,
- Rawlinson Professor of Anglo Saxon 1834–39,
- vice-president of the college in 1838,
- bursar in 1840,
- dean of divinity in 1842,
- D.D. in 1843.



R.M. White 1798–1865
Painting by Ellen Eliza White

The painting was sold by auction in March 2023 before I learned of its existence. I would very much like to acquire it.

<https://www.easyliveauction.com/catalogue/lot/375dd081e7e03a83778301916df4d7d3/0af8d24542e81eb9357e7ef448a6646f/spring-sale-of-antiques-and-fine-art-sale-viewing-by-a-lot-255/>

White was apparently a popular figure around college. Some of his correspondence with the immortal President of Magdalen, Martin Routh
<https://archive-cat.magd.ox.ac.uk/names/e6aa5fd5-2e68-4b19-9495-1951e41893fd>

Robert Holt

Hard to track down, but:

- Born c.1824 in Lancashire (either in Blackburn or Bacup),
- His **revised edition** of the *Ormulum* notes his affiliation with Christ Church and that he was vicar of Hillesden, Bucks.
- “The Rev. Robert Holt. M.A. [B.A. 1846] of St John’s College has been appointed Vicar of Hillesden, near Buckingham. “University Intelligence” *Bedfordshire Times and Independent* (Sat, 19th Dec 1856).
- The 1861 Census notes that Holt was aged 37, and living at Church Lane, Adstock, Bucks.
- The *Northampton Mercury* records that Holt “Anglo-Saxon scholar, vicar of Hillesden” died 19th June 1903 at the age of 79 (Fri 25th Dec 1903).

Thanks to Helen Leith Spencer for finding the census information.

Lambeth Palace Manuscript 783

- In the mid-30's, N.R. Ker discovered that van Vliet had made a partial **copy**, acquired by Lambeth Palace library.
- Some pages can be compared with MS Junius 1, but others represent **lost folios**.
- 553 additional full or partial verses from material from MS 783 are normalised and added in context,
- Further words or groups of words extracted from the glossary are added in context without verse numbers.

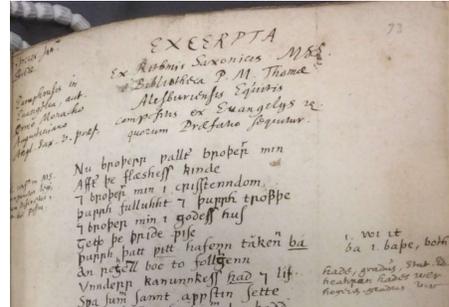


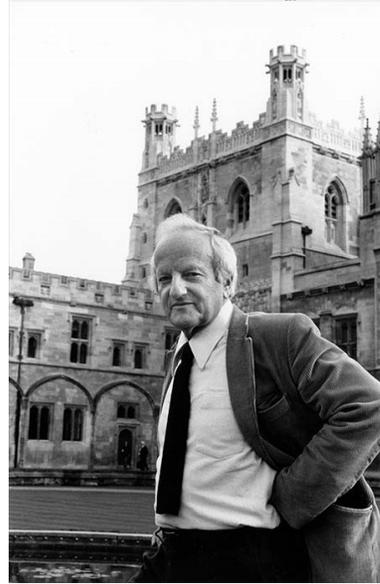
Fig 5. Sample of MS 783, f. 51r (photo by Kees Dekker).

Robert Burchfield

- Started work on the *Ormulum* under Tolkien in the '50s,
- 'Distracted' by being chief editor of the OED (1957–1986),
- Left a highly detailed transcript of MS Junius 1, a vital primary source for the OED.

"That would be my luxury, manuscript Junius 1, which I could pore over without fear of anyone wanting to look at it, poke about with it, it would be *mine*."

R.B. *Desert Island Discs*, 1985



Robert Burchfield 1923–2004
(photo by Terence Spencer)

9

Robert Burchfield

[Desert Island Discs](#) Fri 26 Apr 1985

Roy Plomley's castaway is Oxford English Dictionary Chief Editor Robert Burchfield.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p009mn02>

Nils-Lennart Johannesson (1948–2019)



Nils-Lennart Johannesson 1948–2019
Photo by Kristen Bech

- Began working on the *Ormulum* in 1993,
- Transcribed edition text from:
 - microfiche of MS Junius 1,
 - two sabbatical terms consulting [MS Junius 1](#) in 1997 and 2002,*
 - several weeks with [MS 783](#) in 2006,
 - hi-res [photographs](#) (incl. ultraviolet)*.
- Catalogued all erasures, changes, replacements, insertions, etc.
- Worked extensively on cataloguing Latin sources and matching paraphrased passages.*

10

* Supported by generous grants from *Vetenskapsrådet*

Johannesson's transcript is more detailed and thorough even than Burchfield's.

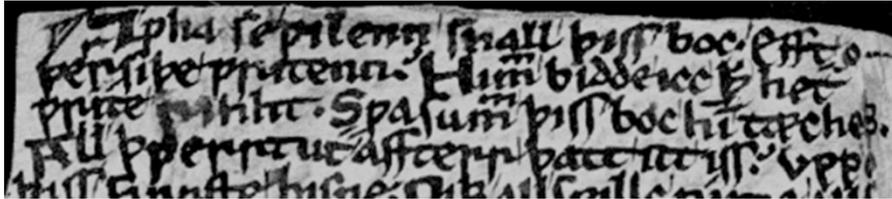


Fig. 6. Sample of MS Junius 1, f. 3r. © Bodleian library.

Ʒ 7 phafe ƿilenn shall þiss boc. Effte o-
þeſi siþe ƿutenn. Him biððe icc þæt hēt
ƿiute riht. Spa sum þiss boc hi tæcheþ.
All þereſe ut affteſe þatt itt iſſ. Ʒpp

Fig. 6. Transcription of Fig. 5 in *Orrmx*.

Some special features

Orm indicates the beginning of short sections with a *paragraphus*

Small number of scribal abbreviations

Accents indicate long vowels

Double letters often indicated by stacking

Nasal strokes above a vowel indicate *m* or *n*

¶ 7 phafe p̄lenn shal þiss boc. Eff̄t o-
þeſi siþe p̄utenn. Hi^m biððe icc þ̄ hēt
p̄iute r̄uhht. Spa su^m þiss boc hī tæcheþ.
All þ̄reſi^t ūt affteſi^r þatt itt iſſ: Vpp

Fig. 6. Transcription of Fig. 5 in *Orrmx*.

Developing fonts – example with *Ormplant*

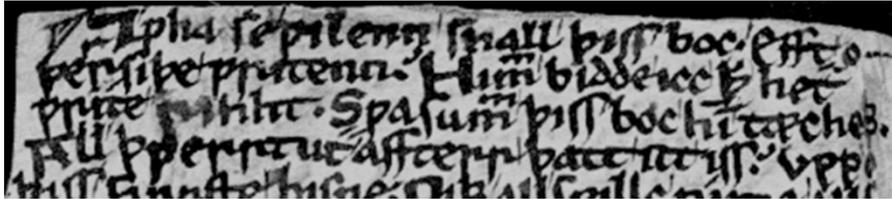


Fig. 6. Sample of MS Junius 1, f. 3r. © Bodleian library.

The *paraphi*
make a closed
set of 8 types

95

¶ 7 whase wilenn shall þiss boc.
Efft oþerr siþe writenn.
Himm bidde icc þatt hét wriþe riht.
Swa summ þiss boc himm tæcheþþ.
All þwertt út affterr þatt itt iss.
Upp...

f. 3r

Apparatus
includes line
and folio
numbers etc.

Tironian *et*
remains, other
abbreviations
silently expanded

100

Fig. 7. Transcription of Fig. 5 in *Ormplant*.

13

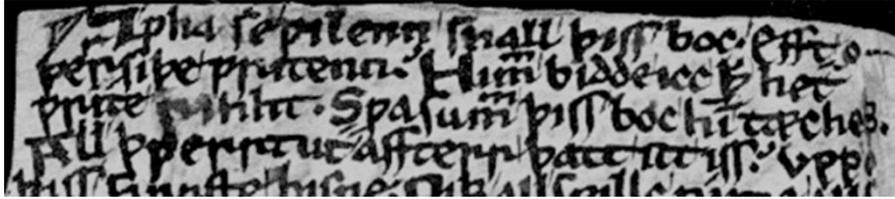


Fig. 5. Sample of MS Junius 1, f. 3r. © Bodleian library.

Focuses on final condition of the text

Erasures, corrections and manuscript features not described

95 ƿ 7 whase wilenn shall þiss boc. f. 3^r
 Effit operr siþe writenn.
 Himm bidde icc þatt hét wriþe riht.
 Swa summ þiss boc himm tæcheþþ.
100 All þwertt út affterr þatt itt iss.
 Upp...

Only Orm's systematic distinctions (and mistakes) remain

Fig. 7. Transcription of Fig. 5 in *Ormlant*.

f. 3 ^v	<p>Wipþ þohht. wipþ word. wipþ dede. ƿ ʒ whase wilenn shall þiss boc. Effþ oþerr siþe writenn? Himm bidde icc þatt hēt write riht. Swa summ þiss boc himm tæcheþþ. All þwerrt út affterr þatt itt iss! Upp o þiss firrste bisne.</p>	<p>P95 P100</p>
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Critical edition summary:

- High standard of accuracy with special fonts,
- All findings since 1878 incorporated,
- All known material from both manuscripts in their apparent intended final form,

Available in all good bookshops any minute now.

Summary

- We think this is the first panel on the *Ormulum* in an international conference,
- We think that the volume is:
 - not only the first **collected volume** on the *Ormulum*,
 - but the first **book** entirely about *Ormulum* not to be a doctoral or habilitation thesis.
- All this relies on Nils-Lennart Johannesson's decades of commitment.

The era of the *Ormulum*'s ability to repel critical involvement is *over*.