

The monastic libraries

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Very little reliable information is available concerning the size of the collections of books in Scottish monasteries immediately before the Reformation.

In a volume printed for private circulation by Ernest A. Savage we find that the seven Scottish monastic houses mentioned had in the thirteenth century a total of 454 volumes. Melrose had most with 96 volumes, while Dunfermline had 43; and though these, on present-day standards, may appear to be very small collections, it must be remembered that the size of all medieval libraries was restricted by the fact that books had to be copied by hand and that the finest of them, the illuminated manuscripts, represent many months, even years, of assiduous labour.

Mr Savage has as his authorities two manuscripts, one in the Bodleian and one in the Cambridge University Library. The first, the *Registrum librorum Angliae*, compiled in the second half of the thirteenth century, is the main source of information, but Mr Savage is of the opinion that libraries in the Scottish monasteries at that time were larger than the figures given suggest. Pointing out that only a small number of the 1850 volumes known to have been in the library of Canterbury cathedral at this time are mentioned, he concludes that the *Registrum* was compiled for a special purpose and was only a selection with many omissions.

The Cambridge list, belonging to the beginning of the fifteenth century, credits Dunfermline with only 19 works, but it is a reasonable assumption that by the outbreak of the Reformation in the mid-sixteenth century a considerably larger number of both manuscript and printed books was housed in the Abbey. It is to be noted, for example, that in the disposition which he made in 1468 Richard de Bothwell is referred to as having "becomingly furnished it (Dunfermline Abbey) with books and ornaments and other ecclesiastical jewels."

Of what happened to these books when, on the 28th of March 1560, the "wholl lordis and barnis," passing from Perth to Stirling, "be the way kest down the abbey of Dumferling," little is known. From the almost complete destruction at this time of the archives at St Andrews and the general disappearance of records and books belonging to other pre-Reformation Scottish religious centres it is clear that many were deliberately destroyed.

Some, however, survived. There is, for example, the Clement Little collection in Edinburgh University to which reference is made in the recent report of the Advisory Council on Libraries, Museums, and Art Galleries:—"As it includes a considerable number of valuable volumes from the Monasteries pillaged or destroyed shortly before that time, one should perhaps refrain from speculating as to how he 'acquired' them, and rather revere his memory for having saved them from destruction."

There would at least have been time for some effort to be made to save the more valuable of the volumes in Dunfermline Abbey; the danger in which the Abbey lay from the violence of the Reformers must have been evident some time before its actual destruction.

One volume at least was taken to France, some may have passed into private hands, and it is probable that some were buried for security in the foundations of the Abbey or monastic buildings.

At present, however, information is available concerning only four volumes: a Psalter now in Boulogne Public Library; St Margaret's Gospel Book (in the Bodleian); a Vulgate Bible (in the Scottish national Library); and an illuminated volume, assumed to be a Missal, the whereabouts of which are at present unknown.

One of the volumes known to have been in Dunfermline Abbey in pre-Reformation times is a Psalter now in the Public Library of Boulogne-sur-Mer, and it is of particular interest owing to its associations with Richard de Bothwell, Abbot of Dunfermline, 1445-1470, and the builder of the North Porch of the Nave in 1450.

The existence of this Psalter was brought to the notice of the Rev. Dr J. M. Webster by a monk in a Monastery in France. The following note on the volume was obligingly supplied by

the Librarian of the Boulogne Public Library:—"Our manuscript 92 certainly comes from Dunfermline Abbey, as is shown by the following note written on the first page—'Me fieri fecit Richardus Botwel, abbas huius monasterii de Dunfermlyn. Anime eius propitius sit Deus.' (Richard Bothwell, abbot of this monastery of Dunfermline, had me made. May the Lord have mercy on his soul.)

"It is a small volume without artistic value, which the Abbot V. Leroquais examined in his book, *Latin Manuscript Psalters in French Public Libraries*. Apart from the inscription on the first page it contains no notes of any interest, except perhaps a reference on page 226 'to the Capucin monks of Boulogne.'

"The volume thus comes from the monastery of the Capucins of Boulogne which had amongst its monks, from 1726 to 1735, a British monk—the Father Archangel of Scotland. This monk, who was engaged in the conversion of Protestants to Catholicism, had a brother, Dr William Groeme (Graham), who presented to the convent an English book of hours belonging to the Holland family. It is possible that our manuscript 92 was gifted to the Capucins by the Father Archangel or by his brother."

In his book, *Les Psautiers Manuscrits*, the Abbot Leroquais gives a detailed account of the contents of the volume and describes it as having been written and illustrated for Dunfermline Abbey, the writing and decoration indicating the early or middle fifteenth century. In the opinion of the Abbot Leroquais it is probable that the Psalter was the property of the Abbot Richard de Bothwell.

Literary treasures of Dunfermline Abbey. Where manuscripts have gone. Dunfermline, 1951, 3-5. Carnegie Library, Dunfermline: ...

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