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NOTAE IN THE MARGINS OF CASSIODORUS, “EXPOSITIO PSALMORUM”

An interesting volume has appeared this year, which unfortunately I have not seen, but that I learned about from [Jesse Keskiaho](#) on twitter. The book is by Evina Steinová, based on her 2016 dissertation (online [here](#), I now find), and now in a revised book form from Brepols [here](#) as *Notam superponere studui : The Use of Annotation Symbols in the Early Middle Ages* (2019). I understand that it contains an interesting piece on a work by the 6th century statesman-turned-monk Cassiodorus.

Cassiodorus’ commentary on the Psalms, the *Expositio Psalmorum* (= *Clavis Patrum Latinorum* no. 900) is a long allegorical commentary based largely on Augustine. So long a work was set forth in three manuscript volumes each containing the commentary on 50 psalms. It was completed at the start of 548 and dedicated to Pope Vigilius; and then reworked between 560-70 with marginal “notae” or symbols, which indicate the type of content.^[1] He provided the key to these signs at the beginning of the work.

The Latin text is printed in the *Patrologia Latina* vol. 70. A more modern edition by Adriaen was printed in the *Corpus Christianorum* 97-8 (1958), but Walsh states that it is merely a revision of the *PL* text, and full of mistakes. There is an English translation by P.G. Walsh in the *Ancient Christian Writers* series (in three volumes 50, 51 and 52). A new edition was intended by James W. Halporn, who published a list of the manuscripts in “The manuscripts of Cassiodorus’ ‘Expositio Psalmorum’” in *Traditio* 37 (1981), p.388-396. I’m unclear that any edition ever appeared, and Halporn died in 2011. Discussion of the tradition of the text is in Richard N. Bailey, “Bede’s text of Cassiodorus’ Commentary on the Psalms”, *JTS* 34 (1983), 189-193.

The *Patrologia Latina* text, infuriatingly, omits the notae, and the introductory list. Here is the page on which the *praefatio* ends, and the commentary text begins:

ad Dominum Salvatorem pura et humili satisfactione perducunt. A textus totius Psalterii duodecim partibus divisus in apostolorum numero mirabili laude concluditur, quatenus et iste illud agat quod Christi discipulos fecisse cognovimus. Est etiam ejusdem rei aliud evidentius sacramentum, quod centum quinquaginta diebus diluvio superducto criminibus suis terra diluta est: sic et hi psalmi tali numero producti, genus humanum peccatis suis pollutum convenienter reddunt absolutum. Nunc minutatim ad exponenda Psalterii verba veniamus.

Undecima, variatis verbis, iterum laudes Domini hymnidica exsultatione concelebrat: modo Patris, modo Filii, modo Spiritus sancti prædicans majestatem; ut nulli sit dubium sanctam Trinitatem singulariter omnipotentem, quæ vult facere in cælo et in terra.

Duodecima, septem psalmi relinquuntur in fine, qui exsultationibus hymnidicis totam gloriam sanctæ Trinitatis generaliter devota mente concelebrant. Sic

M. AURELII CASSIODORI IN PSALTERIUM EXPOSITIO. PRIMA PARS.

EXPOSITIO IN PSALMUM PRIMUM.

Quare primus psalmus non habet titulum.

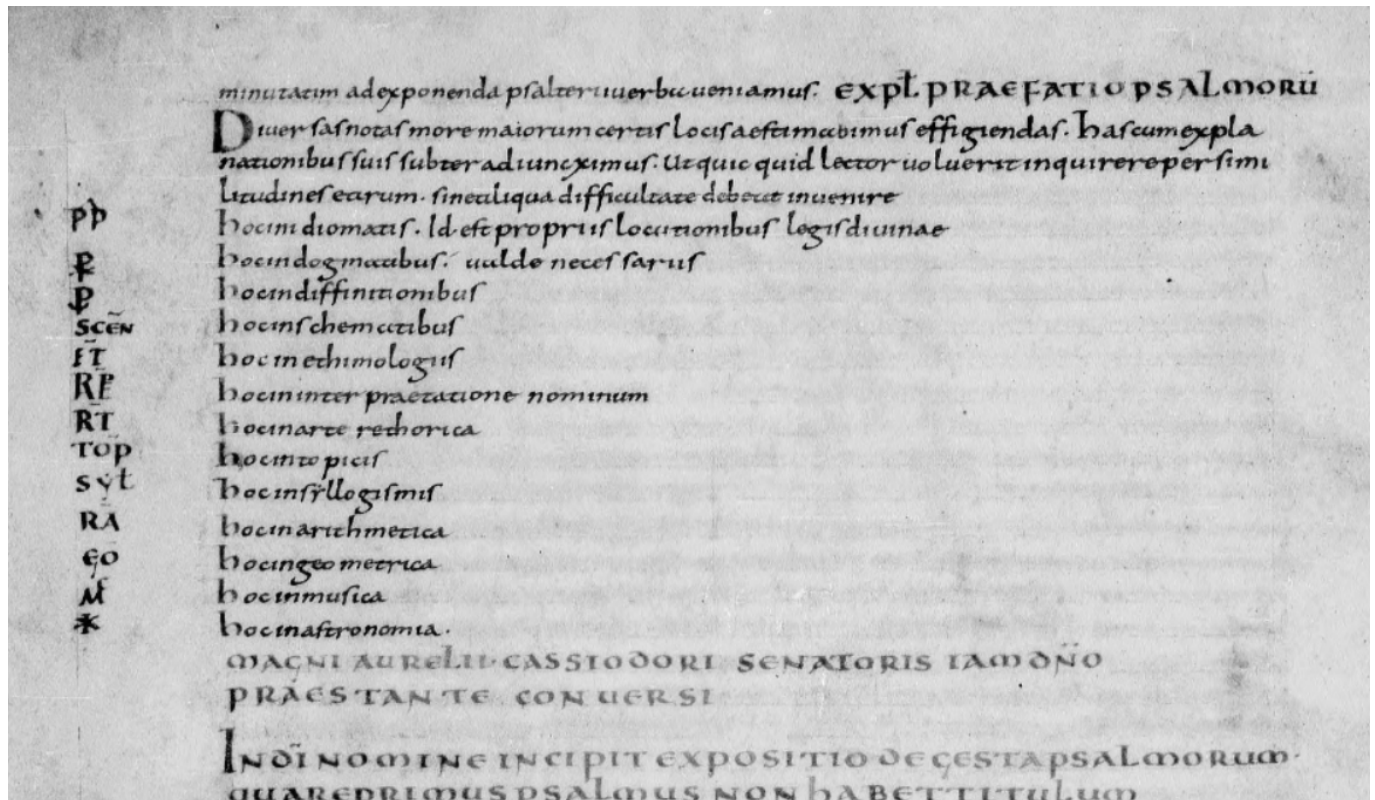
¶ Psalmus hic ideo non habet titulum, quia capiti nostro Domino Salvatori, de quo absolute dicturus est, nihil debuit præponi; dum ipsum rerum omnium constat esse principium, sicut ipse in Evangelio di-

B in cathedra pestilentiae non sedit (Psal. 1, 2), etc. Mirabilis ordo, cælestis revera dispositio, ut ab ipso nobis psalmorum proveniret initium, quem salutarem januam constat esse cælorum.

Quapropter intrare cum summo gaudio festinemus, ubi patentem januam, ipsum Advocatum nostrum esse

Inevitably the translation by Walsh from this text also omits the notae.

The marginal notae may be seen, however, in a 9th century manuscript now in the Bibliothèque Nationale Française in Paris, shelfmark BNF lat. 14491, originally in the abbey of Saint-Victor in Paris. This is online [here](#) in an exceedingly clear microfilm copy (the download, sadly, is low resolution). On folio 10, following the "praefatio", there is a list of the symbols used and their meaning:



Isn't this gorgeous? RA = 'rithmetic. Mc = music... and a little star, an asterisk = astronomy. This section appears between the "veniamus" at the end of the praefatio and the heading of the first section of the commentary. Transcribing as best I can:

Diversas notas more maiorum certis locis aestimabimus effigiendas. Has cum explanationibus suis subter adiuncimus. Ut quicquid lector voluerit inquirere per similitudines earum, sine aliqua difficultate debeat inuenire. (*We will find that various symbols need to be marked in certain places, according to the custom of the ancients. We've added these with their explanations below. If any reader wishes to search by using their appearance, they ought to find them without difficulty.*)

Hoc in idiomatis. Id est propriis locutionibus legis divinae. (*idioms. i.e. the correct way of speaking of the divine law*)

Hoc in dogmatibus. ualde necessariis. (*doctrines. Very necessary*)

Hoc in diffinitionibus. (*definitions*)

Hoc in schematibus. (*figures*)

Hoc in ethimologiis. (*etymologies*)

Hoc in interpraetatione nominum. (*the interpretation of names*)

Hoc in arte rethorica. (*the art of rhetoric*)

Hoc in topicis. (*topics*)

Hoc in syllogismis. (*syllogisms*)

Hoc in arithmetica. (*arithmetic*)

Hoc in geometrica. (*geometry*)

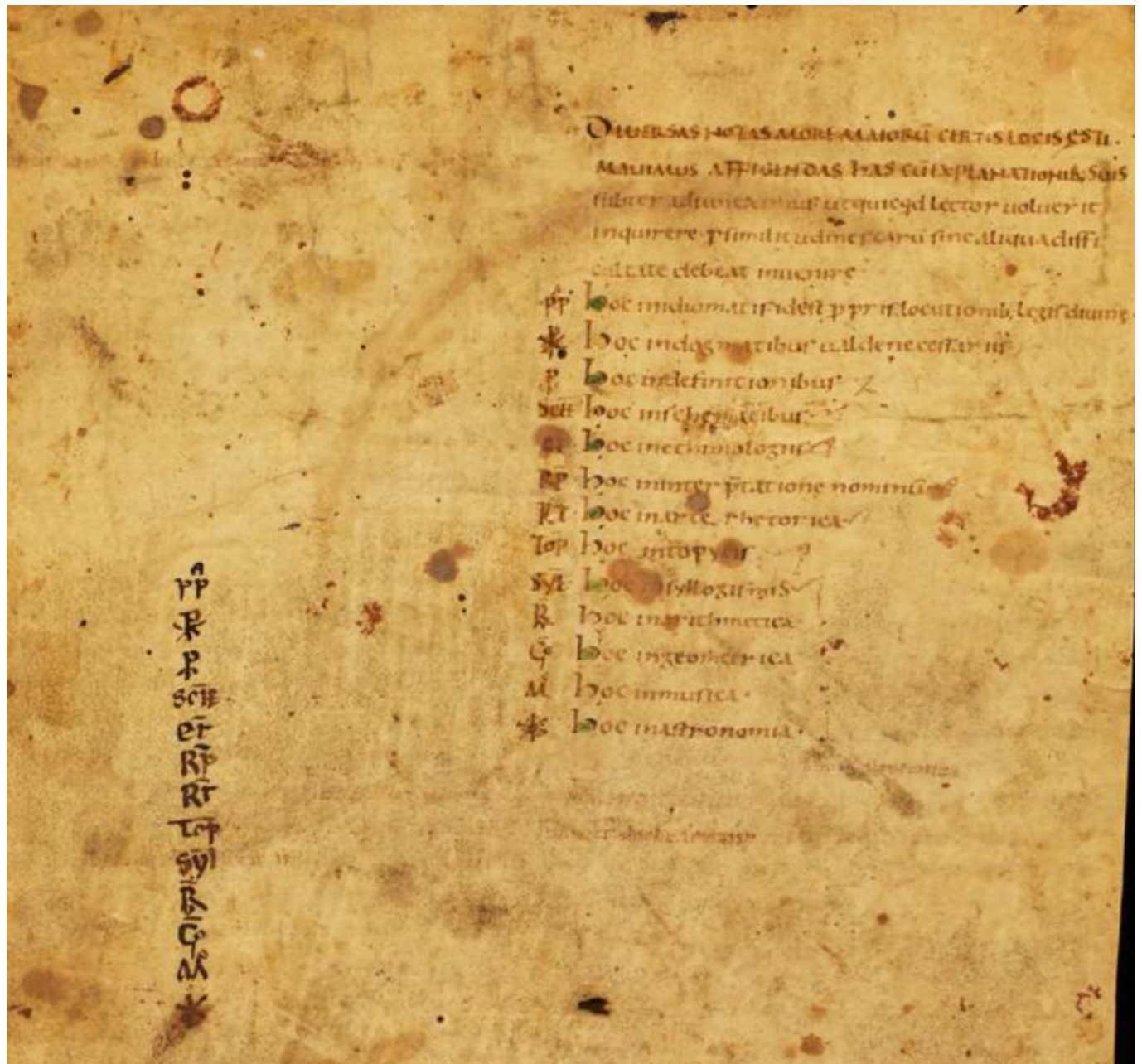
Hoc in musica. (*music*)

Hoc in astronomia. (*astronomy*)

Examples of the use of these notae/symbols appear in the same manuscript, starting on the

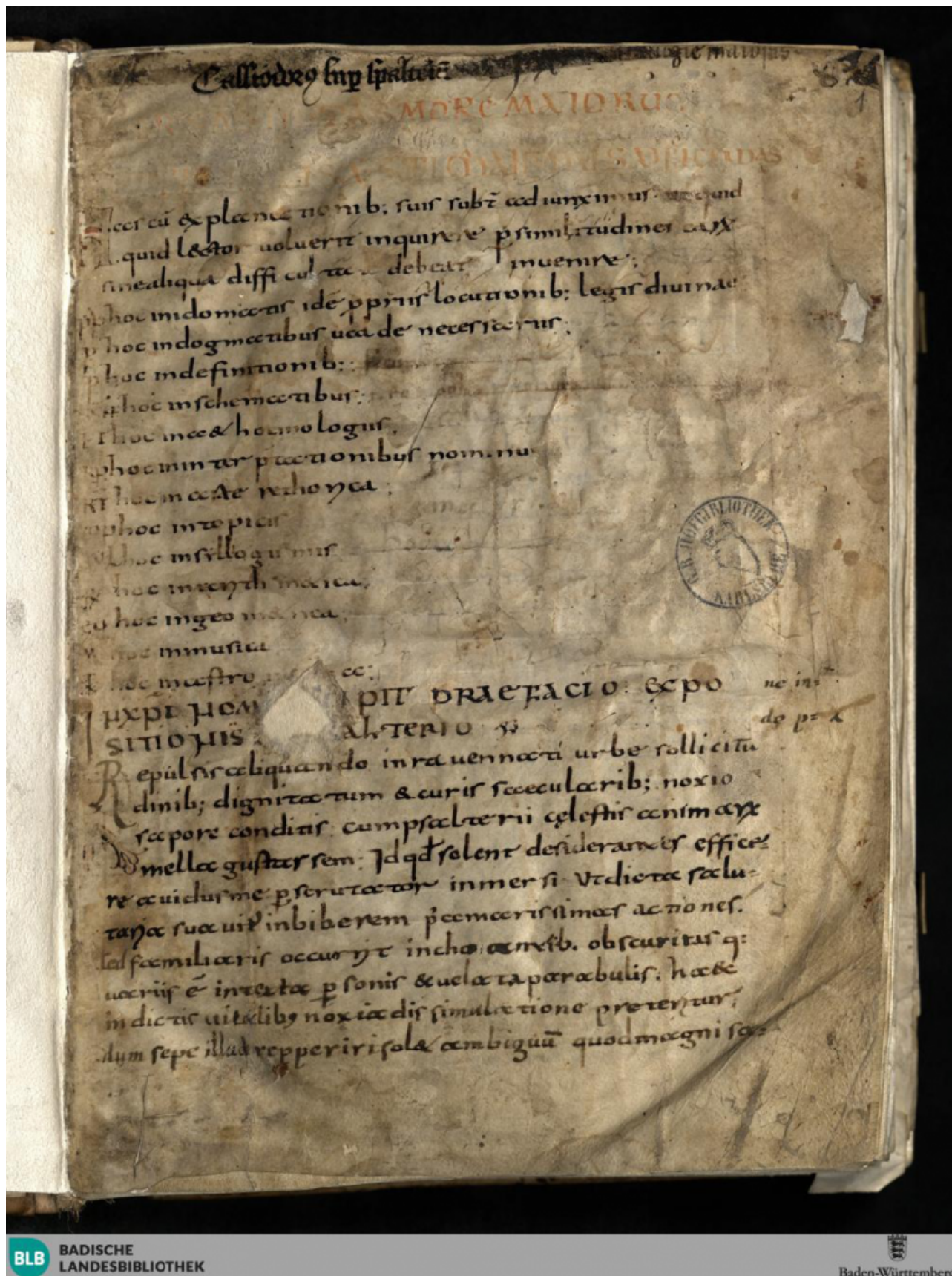
page facing the list of symbols.

In the 10th century Bamberg manuscript, Staatsbibliothek Bamberg Msc.Bibl.56 (online [here](#)) we have the first page with this:



I would have made this larger, but I could see no way to download the image; only warnings about the (non-existent) copyright claimed by the German state on the image.

The 9th century [Karlsruhe manuscript, Aug. perg. 155](#), sadly has suffered damage:



Also online is [British Library Additional 16962](#), also 9th century, which is indeed a volume of the work, but of the third volumes: psalms 101-150.

It's very interesting to see such a scholarly help, I must say.

1. ^[1]Halporn, "Mss", p.388.↩
