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Codex and Room. The St Albans Psalter

Research into a book's utilization can often provide vital clues for the conservator's tasks of documentation. Herein the Psalter of the St Albans Abbey serves as vivid example. The references to the liturgy of St Albans Abbey reveal an interesting new perspective. The hermit Alexius, whose legend is part of the manuscript, was the patron of an altar located in the Lady Chapel of the abbey. This altar had been consecrated on the occasion of the abbey's reconstruction in 1014. At this time the abbey was comprehensively renewed in the spirit of the Cluny reform. The Lady Chapel with the Alexius altar situated close to the passageway from the monks' choir to the cloister, was the site of congregational worship. The spiritual practice of feeding the poor offers an explanation for the particularities in the program of text and pictures. The feeding of the poor hosted at the cloister culminated in the festival week of the abbey's patron St Alban. The special indulgence that was granted on the occasion of this festival was conditionally bound to the attendance of the mass in which the 200 psalms were recited. Consequently, this special recital of psalms is likely to be the motive for the commission of the lavishly decorated Psalter. It can be concluded that this book was not conceived for the purpose of private utilisation but for the abbey's Divine Office and congregational worship.

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"Bernhard Gallistl studied in Freiburg i. Br. and Würzburg and holds a Dr. phil. of the the University of Zurich. After his work in the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel he became manuscript librarian of the Dombibliothek (Cathedral Library) Hildesheim. Contract lecturer on the HAWK (University of Applied Sciences and Arts Studies) Hildesheim. Studies in Greek religion, World culture heritage of Hildesheim, codicology."