THE CODE AND CONTEXT OF MONASTERIALES INDICIA:
A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF LATE ANGLO-SAXON
MONASTIC SIGN LANGUAGE

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1. Introduction. The manuscript and Benedictine contexts of Monasteriales Indicia

Monasteriales Indicia is an Old English description of the sign language used by
the Benedictine community at Christchurch, Canterbury, and possibly at other
monastic establishments of late Anglo-Saxon England. The text is preserved in
folios 97v-101v of the mid-eleventh century manuscript Cotton Tiberius A.iii,
now at the British Library. The manuscript also contains a glossed copy of
Ælfric's Colloquy and Latin versions of the Regula Sancti Benedicti as well as
some of its adaptations in the Carolingian and Anglo-Saxon worlds: the Memoriale Qualiter, the Collectio Capitularis and, especially, the late-tenth century
native consuetudinary, the Regularis Concordia, with an Old English gloss.¹

¹ The sixth-century Regula Sancti Benedicti was enacted as the authority over the spiritual,
liturgical and everyday aspects of early medieval monastic communities by Benedict of Aniane in the
Capitula of Aachen (816-817), and was later enforced by a diversity of consuetudinaries which
adapted its contents to the particular circumstances of the different Cluniac monasteries. The Rule of
St. Benedict was introduced in England in the second half of the seventh century by bishop Wilfrid,
when he returned from Rome in the company of Benedict Biscop and Theodore. Throughout the
Anglo-Saxon period, the Rule must have been a key religious text, as attested by its preservation in
seven manuscripts from the eighth to the eleventh centuries (Dumville 1993: 7-15) and by a complete
prose translation into Old English attributed to bishop Æthelwold (c. 970) (Gretsch 1973; 1974:
61-87). The Regularis Concordia Anglicae Nationis Monachorum Sanctimonialiumque was the
consuetudinary promulgated by archbishop Dunstan and bishop Æthelwold and sanctioned by the
Anglo-Saxon abbots and abbesses at the Council of Winchester (c. 970). It was highly inspired by the
Carolingian texts of the Benedictine reformation (the Capitula of Aachen, the Memoriale Qualiter,
etc.) and, as the complete title indicates, was enforced throughout the Anglo-Saxon monastic world.
gathering together of key writings on the reformation of English monasticism, like the Rule of St. Benedict and the Regularis Concordia, and practical or educational texts, like Ælfric’s Colloquy and the Indicia, makes it possible that the manuscript was compiled with a didactic intention. It is well-known that novices were read the Rule several times during their first year at the cella novitiorum and throughout this preparatory period they may have also been taught Latin, by means of the Colloquy, and the signs prevalent at each monastery, with the help of Monasteriales Indicia (Porter 1994). As Banham suggests, this manuscript context may imply that the aim of Cotton Tiberius A.iii was to make the reform and its basic texts comprehensible to English speakers (1997). In fact, the similarity between the Anglo-Saxon list and contemporary continental codices written in Latin – like the one included in William of Hirnsau’s Constitutiones (late eleventh century) and the lists by Bernhard (1075) and Udalrich (1083) (Jarecki 1981) – may point to a common Latin source, which was possibly compiled at Cluny and extended geographically with the reform movement. Indeed, the fact that the Anglo-Saxon Indicia is the only list translated into the vernacular may also point to the didactic aim of the manuscript: the original Latin text may have been translated so that the novices who did not have an adequate command of Latin could learn the signs, possibly because this language was harder to acquire by the Anglo-Saxons than by their continental French contemporaries (Banham 1991: 11).  

Despite its obvious interest for comprehending the characteristics of reformed monastic life in England, not much attention has been given to this text. The exceptions are an early edition by Klüge (1885) and the textual notes by Logeman (1899) and Swain (1920). A recent description and translation of the system by Sherlock (1989), the semiotic discussion by Barley (1974) and the latest edition by Banham (1991) have all contributed to revive scholarly interest in the sources and functions of this medieval system of non-verbal communication.

Two Latin copies have been preserved in mid-eleventh century manuscripts from Christchurch, Canterbury (BL, Cotton Faustina B.iii and BL, Cotton Tiberius A.iii, the latter including an interlinear gloss) as well as a complete translation into the vernacular (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 201) (Hill 1991; Kornexl 1993; 1995: 95-130).

In addition to Monasteriales Indicia four other English descriptions of monastic sign language have been preserved: two fourteenth-century lists from Bury St. Edmunds (Jarecki 1981; Sherlock – Zajac 1988), one from Ely Cathedral library and another from the fifteenth century Bridgetine nunnery at Syon (Aungier 1840). See Banham (1991: 12) for further details on these texts. Kornexl (1995: 95-130) accepts the proposal that parts of manuscript BL, Cotton Tiberius A.iii may have been useful to novices who were not at home with Latin; this may have been the reason for the interlinear glosses in Ælfric’s Colloquy and the Regularis Concordia. Nevertheless, she believes that the complete manuscript was not really used as a class-book, but rather was a library copy or a book of reference, containing standard Benedictine texts.

In this paper I intend to explore some aspects of the Old English text which may be of interest for the interpretation of late Anglo-Saxon monastic culture. Firstly, a review of the contents of the Indicia and the comparison with contemporary Cluniac sign lists may provide evidence on everyday details of Anglo-Saxon monastic life. Secondly, the application of modern semiotics to this code of communication may allow us to observe the different procedures used for the construction of these signs, in order to reach conclusions on how the surrounding world was viewed and represented by the members of these religious communities.

2. The monastic context of Monasteriales Indicia

The Rule of St. Benedict supplies the immediate cultural context which induced the compilation of sign lists like Monasteriales Indicia. The Rule considered silence indispensable for divine contemplation – both as an instrumentum bonorum operum (4: 51-54) and a means of achieving humilitatis gradum (8: 56-58) – as well as necessary for the regulation of religious life. Consequently, monks were exhorted to minimize the use of words; “perfectis discipulis ... rara loquendi concedat licentia” (6: 3) [‘perfect disciples ... seldom will be given licence to talk’]. Silence was especially prescribed – after regoles beboede, as the introduction to the Indicia states – on several occasions of a monk’s daily life: a) in church and related monastic dependencies where religious duties were attended, b) at the refectory, where a summum silentium was required so that only the voice of the reader was heard (“ut nullius musitatio vel vox nisi solius legentis ibi audior”, 38: 5), and c) in the dormitory, during the nocturnal hours following compline, when any breach of this precept carried with it severe punishment (“Quod si inventus fuerit quisquam praevaricare hanc taciturnitas regulam, gravi vindictae subiecat”, 42: 8-9). At first, the substitution of words for signs was allowed by the Rule only in case of utmost necessity at the Refectory: “Si quid tamen opus fuerit, sonitu cuiuscumque signi potius petatur quam voce” (38: 7) [‘If however there shall be any need, let the thing be asked for by means of signs rather than by speech’]. As the use of signs became widespread in this and other dependencies, the need to codify them in writing must have been felt, and the first nomenclatures started to appear, particularly among the Cluniac monks of the tenth century, where silence was strongly enforced (Southern 1980: 135; Lawrence 1984: 148).

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2 Quotations from Monasteriales Indicia as well as references to this text and translations from it are all drawn from the edition by Banham (1991). References to the Rule of St. Benedict are from the Latin/ Spanish edition by García Colombas – Sanseggundo – Cunill (1954). Translations into English of this text are my own. A recent translation of the Rule into English is supplied by Kardong (1997).
The Old English *Monasteriales Indicia* comprises 127 signs; most of them common nouns for the persons and objects which a monk was likely to encounter and use during the everyday life at the monastic establishment. In this sense, the indications of the *Rule* on the contexts where silence was to be observed in the monastery may help to classify them. The prescription to keep silence in the church implies that a great number of signs refers to books, utensils and religious vestments used there or in related dependencies, such as the chapter house. In general, each group is preceded by a description of the sign applied to the building itself: *cyrcean* (7) and *capellus* (44). In this particular case, explicit headings also distinguish the signs for books used during divine services – “par boca tacna þe mon on cyrican to god cundun þowdomne notigan sceal,” like *antiphonaria* [8, ‘gradual’], *mæsse boc* [9, ‘sacramentary’], *pistolboc* [10, ‘epistolary’], *troper* [11, ‘troper’] and *langwyrrpe boc* [12, ‘rectangular book’], from the books that were used at matins – “para boca tacna þe mon æt uthsange notian sceal” – *biblióece* [29, ‘bible’], *martirlogium* [30, ‘legendary’], *oper boc... þe god spelles træht on sy* [31, ‘any other book ... in which there is a Gospel text’], *salter* [32, ‘psalter’] and *hymner* [33, ‘hymnal’]. Signs for religious vestments and utensils are interspersed between the two lists of liturgical books: *super numeraler* [13, ‘superhumeral’], *halba* [14, ‘alb’], *gyrdyr* [15, ‘girdle’], *stola* [16, ‘stole’], *massan hæcle* [17, ‘mass vestment’], *handlin* [18, ‘maniple’], *offrung* [19, ‘offering cloth’] are listed in the order in which the priest would put them on. *Catic and disc* [20, ‘challice and paten’], *offlet* [21, ‘mass-bread’], *win* [22, ‘wine’], *winhorn* [23, ‘wine-flask’], *storfæt* [24, ‘censer’], *tapers* [25, ‘taper’], *candel-sticca* [26, ‘candlestick’], *smæl candel* [27, ‘thin candle’] and *candel bord* [28, ‘candle board’] precede the sequence of signs for books used in the church, which is followed by *leohfæt* [34, ‘lamp’], *micel rod* [35, ‘large cross’] *litel rod* [36, ‘small cross’] and *gewæd candel-sticca* [37, ‘small candle stick’]. Only four signs for books and utensils used at the chapter house are included in this list: *gewæd martirlogium* [45, ‘small martyrlogy’], *Regol* [46, ‘the Rule’], *gyrd* [47, ‘rod’] and *swype* [48, ‘scourge’]. They are indicative of the functions of this room, where monks met to discuss daily business, to read the *Rule*, to confess one’s faults to the community and receive penances or punishments accordingly (Lawrence 1984: 143). Prescription of silence in the church may have affected actions, as it is implied in the description of signs referring to sitting down (38 and 40), standing up (39) or rejecting and accepting an offering (41, 42, 43). It is possible, however, that these signs were also used in other dependencies of the monastery, particularly at the refectory. In general, most of these signs coincide with the ones described in contemporary Cluniac lists, and minor differences between them could simply be related to slight liturgical discrepancies. For instance, Banham refers to the inclusion in Hirsau’s *Constitutiones* of a separate sign for a homilyary – combining the signs for book and bishop – and proposes that this may point to the responsibility of the bishop in preaching homilies in medieval Germany (1991: 66).

A description of the sign for the refectory (beodern) – “sete þu þine þry fingras swlice ðu mete to maude ðo” [‘place your three fingers as if you were putting food into your mouth’] – is followed by a long list of gestures referring to utensils and food to be consumed or stored there: *setraegel* [50, ‘seat cover’], *fyldstol* [51, ‘folding stool’], *sceat oppe wape* [52, ‘cloth or napkin’], *disc* [53, ‘dish’], *laf* [54, ‘bread’], *syx* [55, ‘knife’], *sticca* [56, ‘skewer’], *gesedona wyrtla* [57, ‘boiled vegetables’], *grene wyrtla* [58, ‘raw vegetables’], *læces* [59, ‘leeks’], *briw* [60, ‘pottage’], *pipor* [61, ‘pepper’], *beana* [62, ‘beans’], *peesenan* [63, ‘peas’], *cyse* [64, ‘cheese’], *butere oppe smeorau* [65, ‘butter or fat’], *meocel* [66, ‘milk’], *ægera* [67, ‘eggs’], *scaeli* [68, ‘salt’], *hunig* [69, ‘honey’], *fisc* [70, ‘fish’], *æl* [71, ‘eel’], *ostre* [72, ‘oyster’], *æppel* [73, ‘apple’], *peru* [74, ‘pear’], *clyme* [75, ‘plum’], *cyrsen* [76, ‘cherry’], *slæn* [77, ‘sloe’], *sealflæsc* [78, ‘salt meat’], *cuppe oppe institia* [79, ‘cup or measure’], *hild* [80, ‘lid’], *micel bledu* [81, ‘large bowl’], *lytel drencefæt* [82, ‘little drinking vessel’], *gedryt win* [84, ‘dripped wine’], *beor* [85, ‘beer’] and *wyrdrenc* [86, ‘herbal drink’]. All these signs, together with one indicating the action of drinking (83), pertain to the prescription of the *Rule* to keep silence at meals. The complete list of signs for the different kind of food to be consumed at the refectory is useful for diagnosing how everyday life was at late Anglo-Saxon monastic communities. In general, it reflects a spirit of moderation, which, in the absence of references to diet in the native *Regularis Concordia*, agrees with the *Rule* and is contrary to the popular idea that life in the medieval monastery was a hard one. The brief indication in the *Rule* to eat two boiled meals everyday accompanied by bread, but if there are fruits or raw vegetables a third can be added (“duo pulmentaria cocta ... sufficient, et si fuerit unde poma aut nascentia legumini addatur et tertium”, 39: 3) is made explicit by the indications of *Monasteriales Indicia*. Sufficient food – except at times of prescribed fasting – seems to have been provided, and the diet in Anglo-Saxon monasteries may have included boiled and raw vegetables, bread, a pottage of boiled cereals and vegetables, cheese, butter, milk, eggs, honey, fish, eels, oysters, fruits, salt meat,

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4 Editors have proposed different emendations to some items in this section of the manuscript. The original reading *cesena* for sign 63 has been corrected to *pesena* by Banham (1991: 34). Barley (1977: 326) proposes the correction of *wicelre* to *micelre* in the text for sign 81, which is also accepted by Sherlock (1989: 21) and Banham (1991: 38). Finally, the original word in the manuscript for sign 86 is *juburhrestre*, whose meaning remains unknown. Barley replaces it for *beordrest* which he interprets in relation to the preview sign (beor) as ‘dregs of beer’ (1977: 227). Banham believes that this is a compound sign, which combines one indicating herb and another mimicking the action of drinking, thus she proposes wyrdrenc, ‘herbal drink’, as a more appropriate heading (1991: 77).
The references to cels, salt meat and wine deserve a special commentary. The former should not be taken as an indication that monks and novices at English monasteries indulged in a luxurious life. They were common food in medieval England, as proved by references in *Domestic Book* to fisheries and marshes sometimes paying their rents in this fish (Banham 1991: 73). The sign for salt meat (78) is qualified by the phrase for *hwylcere neode* ['for any reason'] which does not disagree with the description of the Rule that everyone should abstain from eating meat of four-footed animals ("carnium ... quadrapedum omnimodo ab omnibus abstineatur comestio", 39: 11; 36: 9). Abstinence from meat seems to have been general throughout English monasteries in the Anglo-Saxon period (Hagen 1992: 99) except, in accordance with the Rule, by monks who were very sick ("praeter omnimo debiles aegerutos") and, if we adhered to Ælfric’s *Colloquy*, little children under the care of the monastery, who might have had it daily. Finally, the inclusion of the sign for wine (22) among those to be used in the church may imply that it was restricted in England to sacramental uses. If we follow the Rule, only a kind of dripped wine was consumed at the refectory, either by the weekly lector who was allowed to drink before he started reading ("Fraer autem lector ebdomadarius accipiat mixtum prius quam incipiat legere", 38: 10), or by any mature member of the community, since the Rule did not forbid it, but only recommended moderation and a special control whenever the brotherhood was settled in a region where wine was not produced and importing it would be prohibitive (40: 3–4). This seems to have been the case of Anglo-Saxon England where, as Ælfric’s *Colloquy* indicates, the expensive price of wine made beer and water the commonest drinks in monastic establishments:

And hwæt drincst þu? Ealu, gif ic hæbbe, opin wæter gif hæbbe ealu. Ne drincst þu win? Ic ne eom swa spedig þæt ic maeghe bicgean me win; and win nys drenc cilda ne dysegra, ac eala and pisra (Garmonsway 1981: 47).

‘And what do you drink? Ale if I have it, or water if I have no ale. Don’t you drink wine? I am not rich enough to buy myself wine, and wine isn’t a drink for children or the foolish, but for the old and wise.’

The prohibition to speak during the nocturnal hours explains the inclusion in *Monasteriales Indicia* of signs to describe objects and actions used or performed in dependencies related to this period: the dormitory (87, *slaperin*) and the bath-house (95, *bedern*). A brief description of the sign applied to the building is followed in each case by explicit indications on how to signal: *bleceor* [88, ‘lamp’], *bedreaf* [89, ‘bedcover’], *pyle* [90, ‘pillow’], *swytflera* [91, ‘slippers’], *socca* [92, ‘socks’], *secona* [93, ‘shoes’], *headod þwean* [96, ‘wash one’s head’], *wæter* [97, ‘water’], *sape* [98, ‘soap’], *nægelsex* [99, ‘nail knife’], *camb* [100, ‘comb’], *hempe* [101, ‘shirt’], *bræc* [102, ‘underpants’], *wymnga* [103, ‘leg bands’], *hosu* [104, ‘stockings’], *pylece* [105, ‘pelisse’], *cugle* [106, ‘cowl’], *scapular* [107, ‘scapular’], *glofa* [108, ‘glove’], *secra* [109, ‘scissors’] and *nede* [110, ‘needle’]. A similar spirit of moderation is derived from the signs applied to utensils and clothes used in the dormitory. In contrast to Cluniac codes and the Rule which allowed mat, bedcover, blanket and pillow for the dressing of beds ("stramenta autem lectorum sufficiant magta, saugam et lena et capitale", 55: 15), the Anglo-Saxon list has only signs for bedcover (bedreaf, 89) and pillow (pyle, 90), which may point to a less comfortable way of life in English monasteries, compared to continental ones. Clothes – listed in the order in which the monk would put them on: shirt, underpants, legbands, stockings, pelisse, cowl and scapular – were suitable to English climate contingencies, and therefore agree with the indication in the Rule of St. Benedict to give monks clothes according to the nature of the places they live in ("vestimenta fratibus secundum locorum qualitatem ubi habitant ... dentur", 55: 1). The inclusion of signs indicating articles and utensils used at the bath house – like water, soap, nail knife or the action of washing one’s head – may point to a certain concern about hygienic customs in Anglo-Saxon England. In fact, neither the sign for bathouse, nor that for washing one’s head appear in contemporary continental sign lists, which only refer explicitly to the action of washing the feet in church, as an act of Christian charity (Banham 1991: 80). In fact, continental practices accord with the spirit of the Rule which does not encourage hygienic practices except for monks who were sick; as some consuetudinaries attest, exception made of the washing of one’s hands and face in the cloister after teritia, complete baths were only taken voluntarily three times a year: at Christmas, Easter and Whitsunday (Lawrence 1984: 149).

References to buildings and dependencies of the monastery are completed with the signs for privy (94, *tun*) and bake house (111, *bacern*). The former – "sette þinne swyðran hand brad linga ofer þinne innoð and þu be þam tace þe leafe scealt æt þinum caldre abyðdan gyf þe hyder lyst" ["put your right hand flat over your belly and by this sign you must ask permission of your superior, if you want to go there"] – is not necessarily related to the nocturnal period, but simply indicates the action of requesting permission from a superior in case of
utter necessity. The association of the activities performed in the bake-house to this nocturnal period of monastic life is possible, given the analogy with modern times when baking usually takes place at night; the absence of explicit signs for utensils and tools used in the premises may imply that the imposition of silence did not extend to this dependency, although the fourth century Rule of St. Pachomius encouraged silence in the place. Even though the Rule of St. Benedict did not prescribe silence at the Scriptorium it is obvious that the intellectual or artistic activities performed in the cloister also required quietness. Thus signs are given for several instruments applied to copying and illuminating manuscripts: graef [112, ‘stylus’], weax bred [113, 114, ‘wax tablet’], reogol-sticca [115, ‘ruler’], blec horn [116, ‘inkwell’] and fifer [117, ‘quill’].

Finally, these lists of signs for utensils, food and actions connected to the basic instances and dependencies where silence was prescribed by the Rule, are accompanied by signs applied to designate members of the abbey – abbud [1, ‘abbot’], diacon [2, ‘dean’], profost [3, ‘prior’], hordere [4, ‘cellarer’], magister [5, ‘master’], cryceweard [6, ‘sacrist’], munec [121, ‘any monk’] – and people outside, whether they are clerics or not: cyning [118, ‘king’], cyninges wife [119, ‘king’s wife’], biseep [120, ‘bishop’], mynecenu [122, ‘nun’], morsespeost [123, ‘priest’], diacon [124, ‘deacon’], mædenneshad preost [125, ‘celibate priest’], ladanman [126, ‘layman’] and ungeladad wif [127, ‘laywoman’]. It is interesting to observe that both sequences are arranged in order of principality, and that references to the everyday life of late Anglo-Saxon monastic communities can be traced behind them. For instance, as Banham points out, the indication to hold one’s hair in the sign for abbot – “mon his twegen fingras to his heafele asette, and his feax mild genime” [‘one puts one’s two fingers to one’s head, and takes hold of one’s hair with them’] – suggests that haircuts were not excessively short, apart from the compulsory tonsure, and the inclusion of the sign for a celibate priest (125) may imply that they were not always celibate at the time, in spite of the exhortations by the ecclesiastical hierarchy (Banham 1991: 57, 84). Some of these signs may also point to specific aspects of English monastic reform. In this sense, the appearance in this list of signs for the king (118) and the queen (119) may be related to the special role conferred on the Anglo-Saxon royalty by the Regularis Concordia. The native consuetudinary differs from Cluniac ones in emphasizing the mutual contribution of clerics and lay power in the governance of the kingdom, and in promoting the king as protector of monasteries, in contrast to the independence from secular power sought by St. Benedict and the Carolingians. This may simply refer to the role of king Edgar (943/944-975) in the Council of Winchester, but it may also point to the actual contributions of the Monarchy to the reformation, particularly granting land to monastic communities or allowing them certain privileges, franchises and duty exemptions. In exchange, monks were obliged to pray for the king and

queen after all liturgical offices, except prima, and bestowed on the monarch the authority to control the appointment of abbots (Knowles 1966: 44-45; Lawrence 1984: 135-136/166; Deshman 1988).

3. The semiotic context of Anglo-Saxon monastic sign language

The semiotic interpretation of medieval monastic sign language falls within the general scope of kinesics, a subject which deals with the processes whereby body movements and gestures convey meaning non-verbally. Poyatos (forthc.) supplies a complete definition of the discipline in Nonverbal communication across disciplines:

Conscious and unconscious psychomuscularly-based body movements and intervening or resulting still positions, either learned or somatogenetic, of visual, visual-acoustic and tactile or kinesthetic perception, which, whether isolated or combined with the linguistic and paralinguistic structures and with other somatic and objectual behavioral systems, possess intended or unintended communicative value.

Monastic sign language, however, shows certain peculiarities which preclude the strict application of this definition. It is an artificial system of communication used in direct interaction when the usual channels of communication are deliberately closed, or fade into the background as a result of cultural or environmental factors, either conventionally determined or imposed and consciously learned (Barley 1974: 227; Poyatos 1977: 204-205; 1994, 1: 27, 125). This means that we are not concerned here with the application of kinesics as part of the Basic Triple Structure of Human Communicative Behaviour, where gestures and body motion are simultaneous with verbal language and paralanguage. On the contrary, we are dealing with kinesics as an independent system, in which gestures are used autonomously as the functional equivalent of a complete speech act (Kendon 1986: 23). A final restriction imposes on the complete application of the above definition of kinesics to medieval sign language; the gestures included in Monasteriales Indicia can only be analysed in the written medium where they have been preserved, and this hinders the complementary analysis of the manners – “body attitudes that ... are mainly learned and socially prescribed according to specific situations” – and postures – “conscious or unconscious ... positions of the body, ... learned or somatogenetic, ... modified by social norms ... and used less as a communicative tool” (Poyatos 1977: 206, 207-208) – which, either in connection with the ‘uttering’ of these signs or independently from them, prevailed in the monastic communities of late Anglo-Saxon England.

The peculiar characteristics of monastic sign language imply that gestures within this system are of a special kinesic kind: consciously learned body move-
ments, made mainly with the head, the face, the hands and the limbs, and serving as a primary and prescribed communicative tool, instead of having a merely informative or idiosyncratic function (Poyatos 1977: 205-206). For methodological purposes, the dimensions of semiosis formulated by Morris (1938: 1-13), widely accepted in this field of studies, will be applied in the semiotic analysis of these signs. Firstly, within the syntactic dimension, the construction of gestures and their formal interrelationships will be observed. Secondly, within a semantic framework, each gesture will be considered as a communicative act and the relationship of the signs with the objects they are applied to will be traced with the aim of noticing how they encode meaning, in correspondence with a referent in the world of the monastery. The impossibility of reconstructing completely the cultural context where this system would have been used makes it difficult to deal accurately with the pragmatic dimension of this sign system – with the psychological, biological and sociological processes that pertain to it –, although the contextual analysis offered in sections one and two above may be considered part of this field.

3.1. The syntactic dimension

A first distinction within the syntactic level of analysis is that between simple and compound signs. The former are made up of one gesture, while two separate gestures are combined together in the latter. For example, the sign for dean (2) is a simple one:

Dæs diacanes tacen is þæt mon mid hangiendre hande do swilce he gehwæde bellan cnyllan wille.

‘The sign for the dean is that one makes as if one were ringing a small bell, with one’s hand hanging down.’

The sign for master (5), being made up of two gestures, is a compound one:

Dæs magistres taccen is þæt ha cild bewat þæt man set his twegen fingras on his twa eagan and hebbe up his litlan finga.

‘The sign for the master, who looks after the children, is that one puts one’s two fingers to one’s eyes, and holds up one’s little finger.’

The restricted input of this system of communication implies that most signs in the list are compound ones. It is interesting to observe that individual, simple gestures may be linked together, making up compound signs and enlarge the possibilities of this restricted code to designate new objects. By analogy with linguistic theory it is possible to distinguish between the reference to a new object by combining two or more gestures which individually have their own denotata – proper compounds –, from the association of signs which, behaving as affixes in derivation processes, are applied to a new referent by adding specific information to another gesture. An example of the first type is the sign for large bowl (81), which combines the gesture for dish (53) and the one mimicking the action of drinking (83):

Dish (53): ... hefe þu up pine aþre hand and tospæd þine fingras.

‘... lift up your other hand and spread your fingers.’

Drinking (83): ... lege þu þinne sceate fingere and lang þines müþes.

‘... lay your index finger along your mouth’.

Large bowl (81): ... þu arære up þine swyrpan hand and to spæd þine fingras and lege þypan þinne sceate fingere to þinum wæterum and raer up þinne puman.

‘... you lift up your right hand and spread out your fingers, and then lay your index finger on your lips and raise your thumb’.

The combination of the sign for book, without independent existence in the list – “wege þu pine swibræn hand” [‘move your right hand’], imitating the use of pages – with other markers which, as iconic references to function, may help to specify a particular kind, is a good example of derivation. Thus, a gradual (8), the book of verses sung by the choir at Mass, or a troper (11), a service book containing musical interpolations, combine the sign for book with others which imitate musical notation: crooking the thumb (“criþ þine þuman forþon he is genotod”), or signalling on the chest (“tyrn mid þinum swyþec sceate fingere ofer þine brest fore weard”). A sacramentary (9), which contained the prayers said by the celebrant at Mass, combines the sign for book with the gesture imitating the act of blessing (“do swilce þu bletse¼e”). An epistolary (10) adds to it the sign of the cross on the front of the head to indicate that it contains the word of God (“wyrce crystelmæl on his heafþe foran mid his þuman”; a martyrology

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7 As mentioned above, syntax does not refer to the textual or verbal constructions used in the written description of the signs. In this respect, three main patterns are generally used in the Monasteriales Indicia: a) a copulative construction whose subject contains a genitive phrase expressing the referent of the sign: “[X genitive] tacen is þæt ...” –; b) a conditional clause normally expressing the context where the sign is required, followed by a sentence in the imperative describing the sign itself: “gytþu mæsse hocs hawwela þonne wege þu þine hand ...” [‘if you want a sacramentary, then move your hand...’]; and c) a time adverb clause with the same function as the conditional one, followed by an imperative sentence: “þone þu stolam hawwela þo mid þinum twam handum...” [‘when you want a stole, put your two hands ...’].
The thumb is used with the same function in the sign for a large book like the epistolary (10) – "mon wege his hand and wyrcr crystelmel on he saffle foran mid his þuman" ["one moves one’s hand and makes the sign of the cross on the front of one’s head with one’s thumb"] – while the little finger is an important component for the signs applied to smaller books like the hymnal (33) – "mon wege bradlinga his hand and rare up his litlan fingar" ["one moves one’s hand sideways and holds up one’s little finger"] – and the small martyrlogy (45): "wege þu þine hande and lege þinne scyfinge fingor ofer þine þrotan and rær up þinne litlan fingar" ["move your hand and lay your index finger over your throat, and raise your little finger"]. The same qualifiers are used to specify the little size of peas (63) – "mon sette his þuman on his litlan fingier fore wereardne" ["one puts one’s thumb on the front of one’s little finger"] – in contrast with the length of beans (62): "sete þu þine scyfte fingier fore wereardne on þines þuman forman lise" ["put your index finger forward on the first joint of your thumb"]. Qualifications regarding size are occasionally represented by situating the right hand at the expected length on the left arm. The signs for rectangular book (12) and large tablet (114) illustrate this practice:

Rectangular book (12): ... strece þu þine wynstran hand and wege hi and sete þine swyðran ofer þine wynstran earm be þære boce lencge.

'... stretch your left hand, and move it about, and put your right over your left arm at the length of the book'.

Large tablet (114):

... strie þu mid þinum twam fingrian on þine breost fore weardne swlice þu dylige and strece þinne earm and sete þine hand on þines wynstran earmes byge.

'... stroke with your two fingers in front of your chest, as if you were erasing, and stroke your arm, and put your hand on the elbow of your left arm'.

A final distinction within the syntactic level of analysis is that between free and bound gestures. Poyatos defines the former as "a kinetic act or position performed by one or more parts of the body or limbs in space, that is, by themselves, without contacting other parts or assisting themselves of any props provided by the objectual world". The latter are "any movement or position in which the hands come in contact with other parts of the body or with each other, or in which any part of it comes in contact with other bodies, or, mainly, with objects" (1977: 211-212; 1994, 2: 202). Both types are extensively used in Monasteriales Indicia and freely combine to make up compound signs, as the one for sacrificist illustrates (6): "mon sette his twegen fingras on his twa eagan and do mid his handa swylene he willie ane hangigenedell teon" ["one puts one’s two fingers to one’s two eyes, and makes with one’s hand as if one were to pull

8 It is interesting to observe that monastic sign language is not free from polysemy. This is illustrated by the sign "stryce mid þinum scyfte fyngre andlang þine wynstran hands swylce þu regeolige" ["move your hand and stroke with your index finger along your left hand as if you were ruling"] which is used for both the ruler used at the Scriptorium (115) and the book of the Rule read at the chapter house (46). Obviously, the context would ensure an adequate comprehension in each case.
a hanging bell’]. Bound signs may be further subdivided into ‘self-adaptors’, when contact is established between the speaker’s hand and any other part of his or her own body, ‘after-adaptors’, when it is established with another person’s body, ‘body-adaptors’, in which case contact takes place with objects or substances related to the action of feeding and caring the body, and ‘object-adaptors’, when contact involves elements or utensils in the surrounding world (Poyatos 1994, 2: 202-203). Only ‘self-adaptors’ and ‘body-adaptors’ are represented in this list.

‘Self-adaptors’ involve most parts of the body, whether they act as active elements in the construction of the gesture – left and right hands, small, middle fingers and thumb – or as passive ones: head, hair, eyes, ear, mouth, tongue, cheek, chin, neck, throat, shoulders, elbow, arms, chest, belly, hips, thigh, shin and foot. It is interesting to observe that in the minute description of gestures in this list, the index finger (scythe finger) and the right hand (swíðran hand) are privileged. The reason, in the case of the former, is obviously its universal deictic function. An explanation for the special use of the right hand over the left has to be looked for within contextual or pragmatic circumstances. The right hand is privileged in the Bible, and must have been given a prominent role by the ecclesiastical hierarchy when, after a period when all secular gestures had been rejected as sinful expressions of the body, they came to be separated from gesticulation and accepted as a means to achieve salvation; particularly when they expressed feelings and moral values: the inner movements of the soul, like charity, penance and piety (Schmitt 1991: 64-67; Le Goff 1994: 40-64). ‘Body-adaptors’ are used in Monasteriales Indicia with a deictic function. For instance, one of the gestures usually involved in the signs describing clothes and objects with a textile component is the action of moving one’s own clothes with the hand (‘... wege þu medemlice þin reaf mid þine handa’) – as in alb (14), offering cloth (19), seat-cover (50), bedcover (89) – or touching the appropriate part of one’s own clothes: the sleeve to indicate shirt (101) (‘nim þu sylfan þe on hand’), the left cuff for a pelisse (105) (‘streece forð þin wenstre hand stoc’), or moving sleeve and hood to refer to the cowl (106) (‘wege þu þinne earmellan and foh to þinum hode’). Other ‘body-adaptors’ appear in the sign for any monk at the monastery (121) which requires the action of touching one’s hood (‘nim þe þe be þinum hode’) and in the signs for scissors (109) and needle (110) which mix the actions of taking hold of one’s clothes and imitating the practices of cutting or sewing them:

Scissors (109):

... wege þinne scyte finger and þone midemistan on þinre swíðran hande to somum clade swilce þu hine mid scearar ceorfan wille.

‘... move your index finger and the middle one on your right hand on some cloth as if you were going to cut with scissors’.

Needle (110):

... feald þu mid þinne swíðran hande þane hem þines wynstran earn stoces ofer þinne wynstran scyte finger and do þær ofer mid þrom fingrum swilce þu sweonian wille.

‘... fold the hem of your left sleeve over your left index finger with your right hand and do over it with your three fingers as if you were sewing’.

3.2. The semantic dimension

The semantic analysis of this system of non-verbal communication is mainly concerned with the way each sign encodes meaning in connection with a specific object, person or action within the context of the monastery. The exclusive dependency of this nomenclature on the context of the monastery implies that all the gestures in Monasteriales Indicia are extrinsic or externally motivated ones.9 The methodological distinction of the ‘base’ from the ‘referent’ of each gesture is useful for the semantic classification of signs. The base of the gesture is ‘... the object, action or abstract entity that the gestural form may be regarded as being modeled upon’, while the referent is ‘... whatever the gesture is used to refer to’ (Kendon 1981: 152). In this sense, a universal kind of gesture is the iconically motivated one, which represents the referent by the mimetic imitation of some or all of its attributes. This means that the base of the gesture represents the referent ‘all at once ... in a global-synthetic manner ... like a holistic depiction, a picture or an enactment of content, presented in a single moment of time’ (Kendon 1988: 132). Iconically motivated gestures, like the majority of the signs represented in Monasteriales Indicia, are also called ‘mimic gestures’ (Morris et al. 1979: 20-21), and correspond, in broad terms, to the characterization of ‘icons’ established by classical semiotics: signs showing a topological similarity between a signifier and its denotata, which, as a result, carry the clue to their decoding in their own appearance (Peirce 1935-1966, 1: 313, 383, 502; Ekman – Friesen 1969: 60; Sebeok 1994: 28). Within this type of gestures a general distinction is established between ‘primary’ and ‘derived’ iconicity. In primary iconicity the association of base with referent is direct, either because an object is deictically pointed, or because the base is pictorial and encodes meaning by simulating the drawing of an event, object or person, or it is kinetic and executes all or part of an action performance (Ekman – Friesen 1969: 61-62). Gestures based on derived iconicity, also called “metaphorical gestur-

9 In addition to extrinsic gestures, a class of intrinsic gestures is recognized when the action performed does not resemble or stands for its signification, but it is its own signification. An illuminating example is the expression of ‘aggression’ by means of a fist blow, instead of by merely showing a menacing fist (Ekman – Friesen 1969: 60; Poyatos 1994, 1: 81-82).
ting”, tend to present in imaginistic form aspects of more abstract meanings and the relationship between base and referent is deferred by synecdoche, metonymy or metaphor.

3.2.1. Primary iconicity

Indexicality – the human action of pointing deictically to objects, persons or events in the world – is recognized as one of the most important categories within semiotics (Sebeok 1994: 61-66). Nevertheless, directly pointing to an object or person is not part of any of the gestures compiled in Monasteriales Indicia. We may assume that this universal substitute of verbal communication must have been used in the monastery and that the reason for its absence in the list is the redundancy of its written compilation. As stated above, most signs in this medieval repertoire are iconically motivated and, within this category, some are shaped by deictically pointing to an object related to the gesture referent, i.e. entering into the mimetic imitation of one or all of its attributes: touching one’s own clothes to indicate any object with a textile texture – alb (14), offering cloth (19), seat-cover (50), bedcover (89), shirt (101), pelisse (105) and cowl (106) –, signalling the part of the body where clothes are worn, like the thigh in the case of underpants (102) (“strice mid þinum twam handam up on þin þeáh”), the foot in the case of shoe (93) (“sette forð rihte þinne scete finger upon þinne fot”), and the hands in the case of gloves (108) (“stric þu ða oþre hand mid þære oþre bralinga”), or even pinching one’s own flesh to indicate meat (78) (“twenge þu mid þinne swirðan neoe þeare þinne wynstran þære se lyra þiccoð si”). As the last example suggests, none of these signs is an index in the classical semiotic sense of “a sign which refers to the object it denotes by virtue of being equally affected by that object” (Peirce 1935-1966, 2: 248, 305; Sebeok 1994: 65); pinching one’s own flesh, for instance, does not indicate ‘the monk’s flesh’ but is part of a wider process which iconically leads to the interpretation of this gesture as designating the meat of a four-legged animal.

A number of signs which rely on primary iconicity are pictorial or kinetic. Depicting the sign of the cross (35, 36) by laying one’s left index finger over the right one (“lege þu þinne finger oþer þinne swyðran finger”) is a clear pictorial gesture. Some signs for vestments used in church or articles of clothing in general are created by imitating the action of putting them on, and, therefore, are proper examples of kinetic gestures: moving the fingers from the top of the head downwards along the cheeks and towards the arms (“stryc þu of ufwerðum heafde mid þinum twam scete fingram nyþwærð forð for þine earmas andiang þina hlæora”) is the sign for a superhumeral (13), putting the hands around the neck and moving downwards (“do þu mid þinum twam handum on butan þinne sweoran and stric siðdan ðofde”) stands for a stole (16), striking with the right hand on edge over the left (“stric þu mid þinne swyðran handa ecloinga ofer þine wynstran”) indicates the part of the body where the maniple hangs (18), and striking upwards on the shin with two hands (“stric þu upweard on þinum sceancum mid þinum twam handum”) refers to stockings (104). Pictorial gestures for articles of clothing include, for instance, putting the hands below the navel and striking to one’s two hips (“sette þu þine handa fore wearde wiþeþeðan þinne naðolan and stric to þinum twam hyþum”) to refer to a girdle (15), or putting the index finger on one’s foot and striking the two sides of it for slippers (91): “… sete þu þinne scyte finger upon þinne fot and stric on twa healfa þines fot”. Signs based on primary iconicity also designate the different food consumed at the refectory and the utensils used for it. In any of these cases, they kinetically imitate the action performed with the object in question, like closing the cup for a lid (80) – “hafa þu þine wynstran hand sam locene and ecæ swa swa þa swyþran and hwylf hy syþþan ofer þa wynstran” ['lift up your left hand half closed and likewise the right, and curve it over the left'] –, or pictorially, they tend to draw the shape of the object, as the sign for bread (54) illustrates: “sete þu þine twegen þuman to gædere and þine twegen scyte fingras æðerne foran ongean operne” ['put your two thumbs together, and your two index fingers one against the other in front'].

3.2.2. Derived iconicity

Signs based on derived iconicity do not connect their base and referent in direct imitative terms – deictically, kinetically or pictorially – but link them indirectly by means of synecdoche, metonymy and metaphor. In the case of gestures constructed indirectly on the basis of synecdoche, the referent is replaced by the depiction or drawing of a single part of it. Wine (22), for instance, is represented by kinetically drawing with the finger the action of undoing the tap of a cask ("do þu mid þinum twam fingrum swilce þu tæppan of tunnan onteon wille"), and pillow (90) by pictorially depicting a feather inside the left hand (“… mid þinum scyte fingre sume feþer tacnum ge strice on þyne wynstran hand ...”). Regarding metonymy, the referent is expressed by reproducing iconically an aspect continguously related to it. Here are some examples of the use of metonymy to encode the meaning of certain gestures in Monasteriales Indicia:

a) Members of the monastery or people outside are sometimes designated by pointing to an object metonymically associated with them: common monks (121), for instance, by taking hold of one’s hood (“nim þu be þinum hode”). Occasionally they are referred to by drawing with the fingers a prototypical article of clothing or any other characteristic feature: picturing a veil indicates a nun (122) (“stricce ... adun onðling þina hleor on þes hæal ryfes tacnume”), drawing a beard stands for a layman (126) (“mid ealhe hande be þinum cyme nime swilce þu þe be bearde niman wille”), a headband represents a laywoman (127) (“mid fore weardum fingrum þin fore wearde heafod fram þam anum
earan to þon oþrum on bindan tæcne"), and a crown, the king (118) ("callum fingrum on cynhelmes tæcne").

b) Most signs designating acts in the different dependencies of the monastery also rely on derived iconicity and, particularly, they connect their base and referent through a metonymic process in which the object is replaced by the action performed with it. A pantomimic depiction of the action of hitting ("wege þine fost swilce þu swingan wille") indicates the implements used to inflict physical punishment at the chapter house: the rod (47) and the scourge (48). Imitating the action of censing by turning the hand downwards and moving it stands for a censer (24): "wenc þu þine hand of dunc and wege hi"; the act of slicing represents a knife (55): "snid þu mid þinum fingere ofer þonne ðonne"; cutting - "þu mid þinum scete fingere do ofer þinne ðonne swilce þu ceorfan wille" - and shaving - "straca ... on þin leor mid þinum fingere swilce þu scearan wille" - indicate a nail-knife or razor (99); the action of washing one’s hands by rubbing them together stands for soap (98): "gnið þu þine handa togedere"; a simulated kinetic act of combing by striking downwards on the hair with the fingers represents a comb (100): "stric þu mid þinum fingrum on þin feax nyber weard"; an ink-well (116) is kinetically designated by imitating the action of dipping the pen - "hafa þu þine þri fingras swilce þu dypan wille" - and a quill (117) or a stylus (112) by mimicking the action of writing: "styre þine fingras swilce þu writan wille"; finally, the action of washing one’s hands stands for water (97) - "do þu swilce þu þine handa þwesan wille" - and mashing by rubbing one hand on the other represents beer (85): "þu gnide þine hand on þa ðpre"

c) Metonymy is extensively used in the coding of signs applied to the different food consumed by monks. In this case, the referent is replaced by the simulated drawing of the way of cooking or preparing it, or by any other related operation. Imitating the action of shredding vegetables by moving the hand downwards by the side stands for boiled vegetables (57): "do mid þinre oðre handa nyber weard be þære sidan swilce þu wyrtan scearflæn wille", mimicking the act of stirring indicates potage (60): "wege þe ðyne fest swilce þu briðwreøre"; the action of pressing by putting the two hands together flat - "sete ... þine twa handa togedere bralinga" - represents cheese (64); the process of milking by striking the left finger with the right hand stands for milk (66): "strocþa þu þinæ wynstrae finger mid þinne swybrœn hanæ"; peeling, by scraping with the finger up the left thumb - "scrapa þu mid þinum fingere up on þinne wynstræ þuman" - represents an egg (67); the action of opening an oyster with the fingers stands for this shellfish (72): "do ... mid fingere swilce þu ostran scenan wylle"; the process of crushing herbs represents a herbal drink (86): "wege þu þine fest swilce þu wyrtæ cnocian wille"; imitating the action of grinding pepper by knocking with one index finger on the other - "cwoca þu mid þinum sceyte finger ofer

omez" - stands for this spice (61), and that of salting by shaking the hand with the three fingers together stands for salt (68): "geþœodum þinum þrim fingrum hryse þine hand".

d) Finally, metonymy is also applied to the coding of the signs naming the different dependencies of the monastery. Each particular place is represented by mimicking a prototypical action performed there. The sign for church (7), for instance, involves, among other components, imitating with the hands the action of ringing a bell ("þu mid þinum twan handum swilce þu bellan ringe"), the chapter house (44) is depicted by bowing, as if asking forgiveness ("sete þu þine hand on þin heafod foran and hþon hniwa swilce þu þe for gyfenesse bidde"), the privy (94) by graphically laying the hand flat over the belly ("sete þinne swyþran hand brad linga ofer þinne innod"), the bath house (95) by depicting the action of washing one’s chest and belly ("stric þu mid þinne swyþran hande bralinga ofer þine breost and ofer þinne innod swilce þu þe þwesan wille"), and the bake-house (111) by reproducing the process of kneading dough with both half-closed hands together ("mon mid bam sam locone handum to geedere swilce þu dah brædan wille"

In contrast with the profusion of signs constructed on the basis of metonymy, there is just a handful whose derived iconicity relies on metaphor. This is the case of the gestures applied to the superior members of the monastery: the abbot (1) and the prior (3), who dealt with the day to day running of the monastery and its states. Both involve a movement of the fingers to the head: one finger to indicate prior - "þær þu þine scytefinger ofer þin headod" - and two to designate the abbot: "... mon his twegen fingras to his heafe asette, and his feax mid genime". Obviously, the head, as superior part of the body, is expected to be metaphorically interpreted as an indication of their principality. The origins of this orientational metaphor whereby the upper position is privileged over the lower one must also be seen within a Christian context. The upper position was possibly granted this basic role in view of its connection with the aim of ascending towards God, whose realm, in the Bible and related religious texts, is always situated above (Schmitt 1991: 64-67). In this sense, it is expected that in the context of Monasteriales Indicia, the upper position of the body designates superiority and the principals of the monastic community.

Other signs applied to members of the monastery connect their base and referent indirectly by means of metaphor. The dean (2) is portrayed by depicting the action of ringing a small bell: "... mon mid hangiendre hande do swilce he gehweæde bellan cyanllan wille". This was not a function of deans, who were concerned with the direction and care of groups of ten monks, but can only be understood as a metaphorical representation of his capacity for ruling. Similarly, the cellarer (4), who was in charge of the properties and economy of the com-
munity, is metaphorically designated by mimicking the process of unlocking a
lock: "... mon wæncæ mid is hande swicew he willeloc hunlucan".

Metaphor is also used in the construction of signs applied to various objects
used in the monastery. The gesture representing sleeping, putting the hand flat
against the cheeks, ("sete þine hand brad linge to þinum leore") is combined
with the imitation of the use of pages ("wege þu þine hand") to form compound
signs for the books used at matins: the Bible (29), the legendary (30) or the
Gospel text (31). This may be interpreted as a metaphorical indication that they were
used in the service between midnight and dawn. The base of signs for books
used in the church may also involve a gesture which only metaphorically can be
related to its referent. Mimicking the act of blessing - "wege þu þine hand do
swicel þu bletige" - stands for the sacramentary (9), which contained the
prayers and texts said or read by the celebrant at Mass, just as the sign of the
cross on the forehead ("... mon wege his hand and wyrc crystmæl on his
heafde foran"), metaphorically introducing the word of God in the Christian lit-
urgy, indicates the epistolary (10) and the Gospel (31). The sign of the cross on
the forehead is also used for deacon (124) ("wyrc criestes mæl on þin head
foran on þæs halgan godspilnes getacunnen"), the cleric official who assisted the
priest at mass, possibly by reading the Gospel. Metaphor and metonymy are
clearly combined in the coding of this gesture: the former applies to the relation-
ship between the sign of the cross and the Gospel text, and the latter connects
the person with one of the functions he performs in church.

There are, finally, some special cases of synaesthetic metaphor in the signs
for leeks (59), cherries (76) and honey (69). In the first one, the special smell of
this vegetable is the base of the gesture, represented by placing the hand flat
to one's nose: "do þu mid þinum fingre swicew þu borgie inn on þine hand and
do bralinga þine hand to þine nason swicew þu hwat gestinne". In the second, the
action of pinching the top of the little finger ("sete þirae winstran þuman on
þines lytlan fingres līð and twenge hine siððan mid þara swīpur hande") makes it
acquire a reddish colour, which is associated with the colour of this fruit.
Finally, taste, represented by placing the finger on the tongue ("sete þinne
finger on þine tungan") is taken as a prototypical characteristic of honey and meta-
phorically stands for it.

3.2.3. Emblems

Some specific emblems can also be traced in Monasteriales Indicia. In classical
semiotics, emblems are a type of symbolic signs with only a conventional link
between the signifier and the denotata (Peirce 1935-1966, I: 588; Sebeok 1994:
33). As such, emblems are symbolic gestures (Morris et al. 1979: 20-21) which
function as complete utterances in themselves and can be given a verbal gloss
with a certain ease. In this sense, they are established coded forms within a
group or a community, for whose members the gesture stands by itself as a sin-
gle and complete act of communication (Efron 1941; Ekman - Friesen 1969:
63-64; Kendon 1981: 135; 1988: 134; Poyatos 1994, I: 82). It is interesting to
observe the process whereby some gestures become emblems since it may help
to clarify the reason why some of these signs were included in this medieval
repertoire. Emblematic gestures originate in gestural actions which are
iconically related to a pattern of action or to the appearance of an object. The
process leading from iconic gestures to emblems has been equated by Kendon to
lexicalization: when a closed community of users - like medieval Benedictine
groups of monks - hinder the availability of spoken language, so that gestures
can entirely and on a routine basis be used to refer to units of meaning, then
repeated use may eventually reduce the original iconic signs, in a process of
stylization, whereby gestures become apparently quite arbitrary in form. Freed
from the requirement of picturing an object or an event, the gesture now may
take on a general meaning or be combined with others, participating in com-

In fact, this process may explain that a number of signs in this list are appar-
tently incomprehensible, like raw vegetables (58) - "sete þu þinne finger on þine
wenstran hande" ['put your finger on your left hand'] - or butter (65) - "stric
mid þirim fringrum on þine innenweard hand" ['stroke with three fingers on the
inside of your hand'] - the reason may be that their original iconic reference
had been lost or become unnecessary, so that they functioned as conventional
emblems for the restricted community using them. In the same way, the indica-
tion to strike with the hands over each shoulder and move them down over the
chest ("strīc mid þīnre hande ofer æðere eaxle niperweard ofer þine breosta")
(120) may be a stylized and almost arbitrary version of what originally was the
proper depiction of the influtæ or twin tabs on a bishop's mitre, just as the action
of putting one's two fingers to one's eyes ("mo nētse his twegen fingres on his
twa eogan"), in the signs for master (5) and saecrist (6), may be a cultural em-
blem suggesting by agreement the actions of being in charge of someone, or
looking after something.

The process of simplification and stylization which contributes to the cre-
ation of emblems can be seen at work when the compound sign for king's wife
(119) is compared to the two simple signs combined in its construction: king
(118) and laywoman (127). The careful depiction of a crown on the top of one's
head in the sign for king - "wende þine hand aude and be foh þine heofod
ufweard eallum fingrum on cynnelmes tæce" ['turn your hand downwards and
hold the top of your head with all your fingers in the sign of the crown'] - is
reduced to the mere action of placing the hand on top of the head in king's wife:
"sete þine hand bufon þin heofod"; in the same way, the precise 'drawing' of a
headband which stands for laywoman (127) - "þu mid fore weardum fingrum
4. Conclusion

As a conclusion, it is necessary to point to the significance of the preceding two-fold analysis of Monasteriales Indicia. Firstly, the review of its contents within a Benedictine context has afforded a very realistic picture of everyday life conditions at reformed monastic communities: in general, customs agreed with the prescriptions and instructions included in the Rule of St. Benedict and in the Regularis Concordia. Additionally, this review has confirmed some specific aspects of monastic life in Anglo-Saxon England, like dietary habits or dressing and hygiene practices, as well as some characteristics peculiar to the reformation in this country, like the special function of the king as protector of reformed houses. Secondly, the semiotic analysis of this sign system suggests different ways how Benedictine monastic communities represented the world kinesically. The study of the syntactic and semantic processes involved in the construction of these gestures points to some universal means of creating sign language, particularly relying on the establishment of an iconic relation between the base and referent of each gesture. A special attention should be given, within the semantic field, to the gestures whose referent is "mapped" into the base indirectly, by means of metonymy and metaphor, as well as to certain symbolic, conventional gestures known as cultural emblems. The former are widely used in Monasteriales Indicia, in view of the restricted input of this system of communication, and their analysis sanctions the special function of metonymy within the cognitive system that lay behind many of these signs; in addition it allows us to trace some early instances of "orientational metaphors", like "up is superior" or "up indicates a higher status", which, possibly promoted by the ecclesiastical worldview, are now prevalent throughout the western world. Finally, as regards emblematic gestures, it is possible to assume that some of them, like the signs for silence, eating, drinking, sleeping, etc., may have been extensively used outside the walls of Christchurch, by the Anglo-Saxons at large.

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