Chrne
A Ninth-Century Script Font

The Book of Chrne (Cambridge University Library, MS Ll. 1. 10), a prayerbook from ninth-century England, is counted among the great books produced in England before the Norman Conquest. No small part of this book's artistic triumph is its script, an especially fine example of the hand that paleographers call "pointed Insular Minuscule."

The principal scribe of the Book of Chrne was especially fond of color, filling or shadowing most capitals (which are modest in size and often lowercase in shape), and also, quite frequently, punctuation marks, accents, and lowercase letters. It thus is appropriate that the Chrne font should be a color font, with colors based on those of the book itself, from the rich brown of its ink to the muted red, blue, green and yellow washes used for fill and shadow. OpenType features can be used to add, omit or vary colors: these are listed below, after a brief demonstration of the font's "historic mode," which approximates the look of the original script.

As the x-height of Chrne is small (or, to put it another way, letters like b and p have very tall ascenders and long descenders), it must be set large to harmonized with surrounding text or simply to preserve legibility. It can be set "solid," that is, with line spacing equal to the point size of the type. Here, for example, text is set in 28pt and line spacing is also 28pt.

From Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*:

Brittania Oceani insula, cui quondam Albion nomen fuit, inter septentrionem et occidentem locata est, Germaniae, Galliae, Hispaniae, maximis Europae partibus, multo intervallo aduersa. Quae per miliapassuum .dccc. in boream longa, latitudinis habet milia .cc, exceptis dumtaxat prolixioribus diuersorum promontoriorum tractibus, quibus efficitur, ut circuitus eius quadragies octies .lxxv. milia compleat. Habet a meridie Galliam belgicam, cuius proximum litus transmeantibus aperit ciuitas, quae dicitur Rutubi portus, a gente Anglorum nunc corrupte Reptacaestir uocata, interposito mari a Gessoriaco Morynorum gentis litore proximo, traiectu milium .l., siue, ut quidam scripsere, stadiorum .ccc. A tergo autem, unde Oceano infinito patet, Orcadas insulas habet.

OpenType Features

A. Required features.

The following features should always be on. In most programs they will be on by default, but in Microsoft Word they must be explicitly enabled: **kern** (which in Word enables the use of all other features), **ccmp** (Glyph Composition/Decomposition), **calt** (Contextual Alternates), **liga** (Standard Ligatures).

B. Historic mode

Use **hist** (Historical Forms) or **ss16** (Stylistic Set 16) to turn on Historic Mode, which substitutes old letter-shapes for modern ones. (These features are used for the same purpose in the designer's Eadui and Cissanthemos fonts.)

C. Color of capital letters

The default color scheme will produce a variety of colors in any stretch of text. Use **ss02** (Stylistic Set 2) for a different color scheme, or to vary colors within a single stretch of text (for example, if the letter **B** occurs twice in the same sentence and you want a different color for each occurrence).

To turn off color for all capitals (but the text color remains), use **ss03** (Stylistic Set 3).

West Seaxe   West Seaxe   West Seaxe

D. Color of punctuation and accents

Use **cv48** (Character Variant 48) to turn on a red wash for accents. This feature also works with precomposed letter + accent combinations like **á** and **ē**. Use **cv79** for punctuation. In this sequence, both features have been applied:

ōm omnríp . ꝼui in

E. Color of lowercase letters

By default, color is not applied to lowercase letters. Rather than a single feature to turn on color, one feature is suppied for every letter of the alphabet, and also the Tironian and "et" abbreviation signs, as follows:

cv01	a	cv12	h	cv21	o	cv28	v
cv03	b	cv13	i	cv22	p	cv29	w
cv04	c	cv14	j	cv23	q	cv30	x
cv05	d	cv15	k	cv24	r	cv31	y
cv07	e	cv16	l	cv25	s	cv32	z
cv09	f	cv18	m	cv26	t	cv35	æ
cv10	g	cv19	n	cv27	u	cv40	& ꝛ
						cv42	ꝣ

These match the mapping of letters to features in the designer's <u>JuniusX</u> Font. As some letters have many variants, including ligatures (only a single element of which is usually colored), these **cvXX** features may not affect every instance of the letters they apply to.

It will rarely work well to apply these features to entire texts: apply them to individual words instead. If you need to apply the feature to only part of a word (for example, because there are two instances of a letter and you only want one highlighted), try to make sure the boundaries of the sequence you apply it to don't fall between characters that are ligatured or kerned—such boundaries will separate ligatured elements and disrupt the spacing of kerned elements. For example, if you want to highlight the initial but not the last letter of

ꝛoꝛo
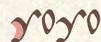
you should not apply the feature **cv31** to only the initial **y**, since that is kerned with the following **o** (as you'll see if you try it), but rather to the initial **yo** sequence, since **o** is not kerned with the following **y**. The difference in the case of "yoyo" would be subtle, but consider this word:

taught

Here the feature **cv26** has been applied to the sequence **ta**, which has a special form of **t** that ligatures with the following **a**. If you applied the feature only to the initial **t**, the boundary of that one-letter sequence would fall between the **t** and the **a**, breaking the ligature:

taught

This is not a consideration in MS Word, which provides no access to these lowercase variants. In Adobe InDesign, you choose variants from a palette instead of by applying a feature, so you needn't worry about feature boundaries in that program either.

F. Further reading

The contents of the manuscript were printed in A. B. Kuypers, *The Prayer Book of Aedeluald the Bishop, Commonly Called the Book of Cerne* (Cambridge 1902). For detailed commentary, see Michelle Brown, *The Book of Cerne: Prayer, Patronage and Power in Ninth-Century England* (London and Toronto, 1996). The whole manuscript is available online through the Cambridge University Library.

The Cerne font
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Download it here: https://github.com/psb1558/Cerne-font