

PETRUS COMESTOR, *Historia Scholastica*
In Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment
Northwestern Italy, Genoa, dated 1303

ff. iii (modern parchment) + i (parchment, lifted pastedown) + 274 + iii (modern parchment) on parchment (well-prepared, smooth and even, but with use of offcuts in some quires), modern foliation in pencil top outer corner recto, complete (collation i-xi¹² xii¹⁰ xiii-xxiii¹²), decorated horizontal catchwords lower margin, leaf and quires signatures with a letter designating the quire and a roman numeral the leaf, most quires also signed by the corrector ("cor"), ruled in lead with single vertical bounding lines inside and outside of each column extending not quite the length of the page, occasional prickings top and bottom margins (justification 200-202 x 135-137 mm.), written in a very formal rounded southern gothic bookhand in two columns of 40 lines (with some columns subdivided into two), majuscules stroked in red, red rubrics, red and blue paragraph marks and running titles, guide letters for running titles often visible, many appear to have been erased and re-written while the volume was being made, decorative column divisions in red and blue, two- to three-line alternately red and blue initials (placed in the outer margins and between the columns), thirteen- to four-line parted red and blue initials with red and blue pen decoration, on f. 1, extending to frame the page in the top and bottom margins and between the columns, occasional minor soiling, and minor worming mainly to first few leaves, vellum slightly cockled, but overall in excellent condition. Bound in 1880-81 in brown paneled morocco, spine with four raised bands and gold-tooled title ("Petri/ Comestoris/ Historia/ Scholastica./ Codex/ Saec. xiv"), minor scuffing to covers and spine, size of the leaves in the first three quires slightly smaller (probably original; the memorandum from Sothoran, f. i verso, notes that leaves were not trimmed at time of 1880-81 rebinding). Dimensions, quires 1-3, ff. 1-56v, 300 x 217 mm., remaining leaves 315 x 225 mm.

A beautiful copy of one of the most important works on the Bible from the twelfth century, signed and dated by its scribe in 1303. This is a large book, with wide margins, beautiful script, parchment that is compelling in both its quality and animal presence (uneven edges of the skin, hair follicles), and lovely pen decoration throughout. Neither its transmission in later copies, nor its circulation in Italy has ever been studied, and the text and formal marginal glosses in this copy will certainly repay close study. Despite the numerous extant manuscripts, this is not a common text on the market.

PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript was copied by the scribe, master Luca of Genoa in 1303, who signed and dated it on the last page: "Expliciunt ystorie scolastice scripte per manus magistri luce de ianua sub annis domino m ccc iii" (Here ends the School History written by the hand of master Luca of Genoa in 1303). The evidence of the script and the decoration make it quite certain that this was in fact copied in Genoa (the style of the pen initials shows significant similarity with the examples discussed in Gousset, 1988). Genoa was an important center of book production in the second half of the thirteenth and early fourteenth century, and home to a Dominican convent, producing small pocket Bibles, as well as a number of illuminated vernacular romances (Avril, Gousset, et al., 1984, 2005).

"Luca" was a common name in Italy, and we have not been able to identify "master Luca of Genoa" with any of the other published scribes with that name in the major

repertoires of medieval colophons (Bénédictins du Bouveret, 1965-1982; Krämer, Online resources).

Contemporary formal corrections throughout; the person in charge of the corrections signed each quire at the end, "cor" to indicate that the text had been corrected. The text is accompanied by a formal marginal apparatus, copied by the main scribe, often on ruled lines added for this purpose. Many notes begin with a letter, placed in the margin alongside the passage (see for example, 'a', 'b', in the outer margin of f. 57, and the short passages marked 'a' and 'b' in the lower margin (also discussed below, in Text).

2. Very few later marginal notes, but there is a later "nota" mark on f. 34v, and there are frequent, and expressive *maniculae* (pointing hands) throughout the volume (usually with a very long pointing finger, that includes a fingernail, with the other fingers shown as very short, and part of sleeve and cuff; f. 11v, with scalloped bottom edge).
3. Two inscriptions on the parchment flyleaf, f. ii verso (a lifted pastedown preserved from a previous binding): the first, a bibliographic note in an eighteenth-century hand, "Petri Comestoris Historia Scholastica. Impressum fecit primo hoc opus Reutlinger 1473, postremo Venetiis 1728. Inter haec tempora a libi [sic] U. Fab. Biblioteca medii aevi latina, p. 404"; below, a note beginning with a notary's mark in a fourteenth-century Italian hand, that begins, "Ego Dontavite imperialis auctoritatis notarius omnibus expensis in isto quaterno contrafactis interfui ..." (I, Dontavite, a notary by the authority of the empire, underwrote all the expenses incurred in this quire). The few words remaining in the inscription are difficult to interpret, but it does not appear to include a date (April may be mentioned, and the word "asked" is clear). The script seems somewhat later than the manuscript, so this may be a record of expenses from when the volume was bound early in its history.
4. Belonged to Thomas Holden of Bolton, England; Greenwood, discussing the public library at Bolton, describes this manuscript as one "found in an old Piedmontese monastery in the present [i.e. 19th] century" (Greenwood, 1890, p. 91). Correspondence glued to front flyleaf, f. i verso, Memorandum, H. Sotheran and Co. to Thomas Holden, Esq. of Bolton, 5 January 1881, and f. ii, H. Sotheran and Co. to Thomas Holden [unspecified, addressed as sir], dated 31 August 1880, describe the manuscript, and discuss the new binding made for Holden at this time.
5. Holden's gift to the Bolton Public Library, purple library stamp, "Public Library/ Bolton," inside front cover, on the correspondence attached to front flyleaf f. i verso and f. ii, on original parchment pastedown, on f. 1, and on some 30 other leaves throughout the book; bookplate, inside back cover, "Presented to the Bolton Public Library and Museum by the Family of the late Thomas Holden Esq."
6. In pencil, inside back cover, "m265"; in pencil, front flyleaf, f. i: "17316"; "5378"; price code, "WEJLLLW/D"; C-544/6 and "C-XI"; and in ink, front flyleaf f. i verso, "091/9298."

7. Sold at Bonham's, May 6, 2004, lot 50; Quaritch, June, 2004, no. 61; October 2006, no. 10.

TEXT

ff. 1-274v, [prologue], *Incipit epistola magistri petri in ystoria scolastica*, incipit, Reuerendo patri et domino suo Gulielmo dei gratia senonensi archiepiscopo ...; [f. 1, preface], *Prephatio in hystoria scolastica*, incipit, "Imperatorie maiestatis est"; [f. 1, Genesis], *De creatione empirei celi et quatuor elementorum*, incipit, "In principio erat uerbum [Genesis 1:1], et uerbum erat principium ... f. 243v, *Incipit hystoria actuum apostolorum*. *Quotiens apparuit dominus discipulis infra xl dies*, incipit, "Anno nonodecimo imperii ... scilicet in cathacumbis," *Expliciunt ystorie scolastice scripte per manus magisti luce de ianua sub annis domini m ccc iii. Finitus est liber*.

Peter Comestor, *Historia scholastica*; major divisions of the text correspond to the historical narrative of the following books of the Bible: f. 1, Genesis; f. 38, Exodus; f. 60, Leviticus; f. 68v, Numbers; f. 81, Deuteronomy; f. 86, Joshua; f. 91, Judges (with Ruth copied as the final chapter of Judges, ff. 100v-101v); f. 101v, 1 Kings; f. 123v, 3 Kings; f. 158, Tobit (with Ezekiel beginning on f. 162, and Daniel on f. 163v, but both copied as chapters of Tobit); f. 175, Judith; f. 180v, Esther; f. 195 (with 1 Maccabees beginning f. 186v, and 2 Maccabees, f. 93v); Gospels; and f. 243v, Acts. Judith, f. 175, and Esther, f. 180v, begin with chapter lists (the chapter lists for Esther including 1 and 2 Maccabees).

Our knowledge of Peter Comestor's (c. 1100-c. 1179) biography is surprising slight. His name, Peter Comester or Peter Manducator (literally "Peter the Eater"), is often explained as reflecting his voracious appetite for knowledge, or from the fact that he had "eaten" all of the Bible and thus produced his great work, the *Histories*. He was almost certainly born at Troyes, and became dean of the cathedral there in or before 1147. We know he studied with Peter Lombard in Paris, and therefore (while still a dean of Troyes) he went to Paris sometime before the end of the Lombard's teaching career in 1158-1160. In Paris he served as the chancellor of Notre Dame (probably c. 1164) and dean of the cathedral school, and taught at the university. Clark argues that the idea that he retired to the monastery of Saint-Victor in Paris in 1169 is contradicted by the evidence; he may still have been teaching until his death, which is traditionally, but not certainly, dated c. 1178/1179 (Clark, 2015). He was the author of numerous sermons and a commentary on the four Gospels. The *Historia scholastica* was certainly his greatest achievement, and he became known as the "Magister historiarum" (the master of histories).

The *Historia scholastica* is a summary of biblical history from Genesis through Acts, ending with the Ascension. It was without a doubt one of the bestsellers of the Middle Ages, and very soon after it was written, and for centuries after, it was a basic school text for all students studying the Bible. The medieval legend that Peter Lombard (d. 1160), author of the *Sentences*, the major theology text book, Gratian (d. c. 1160), author of the *Decretum*, the standard text book for canon law, and Peter Comestor, were brothers, is false, but underlines the fundamental importance of his great work for the study of the Bible, and its place in the medieval classroom. It was itself the subject of lectures and commentaries from the time of Stephen Langton (d. 1228). It was dedicated to William of Champagne, Archbishop of Sens, sometime between 1168/1169 and 1173. And although this is traditionally regarded as the date of the work, recently Clark has argued that it existed earlier, and, importantly continued to evolve in the

following decades, through collaboration between Peter and his student Stephen Langton (Clark, 2015).

In his prologue, Peter explains that he composed his history in response to urgent requests for a convenient compendium – a handbook – of biblical history, which would bring together information found scattered throughout the Bible and its glosses. He aimed chiefly to teach his students how to interpret the literal sense of the biblical text, emphasizing the importance of understanding grammar and etymology, along with knowledge of geography and history. He writes in the tradition of the masters of the school of Saint-Victor in Paris, in particular Andrew of Saint-Victor, who was an accomplished Hebraist, and he was familiar with the literal commentaries by Rabbi Shlomo ben Isaac, or Rashi (d. 1105). It provided a continuous history from creation until the Ascension, based on the Bible itself, but also on the teachings of the Fathers (especially as presented in the *Glossa ordinaria*), and authors from classical antiquity. Like the *Ordinary Gloss*, the *School History* was itself the subject of university lectures and commentaries.

There is a modern edition of Genesis only (Sylwan, 2005); Stegmüller, 1950-1980, nos. 6543-6565 lists 231 manuscripts, but its modern editor has identified more than 800 manuscripts, dating from the twelfth through the fifteenth century across Europe (of 799 manuscripts, 135 are from Italy, compared with 263 from France and 255 from England) (Sylwan, 2000, 2005). The *editio princeps* was published in 1473 by Günther Zainer in Augsburg, and between 1473 and 1543 there were more than twenty printed editions. The commonly cited text published in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, 198, cols 1053-1722 reproduces the Madrid 1699 edition by Emanuel Navarrus, and it is an inaccurate representation of the manuscript tradition. A new edition of the text, with translation, has been announced by Mark Clark, whose editorial approach differs in very significant ways from that adopted by Sylwan (Clark, 2015).

One of the most interesting features of manuscript copies of the *Historia scholastica* are the numerous passages that have been called “additions” or “notes” by modern scholars. They were treated in various ways by scribes who copied the text, and can be found in the margins, or within the text itself, sometimes copied by dividing a single column into two. In the printed edition of the *Patrologia latina*, they are labelled *additio* (addition), and printed at the end of chapters (in the online version of the text, they are foot-noted, and appear in a separate window). These passages are a unique feature of this particular text, but they are in no way standard, and vary from manuscript to manuscript, as well as in the various printed editions. They are not, however, all late interpolations (although certainly some of them are). Many are found in the earliest manuscripts of the text, and probably reflect additions made by the author himself, or others in his close circle, in particular Stephen Langton (d. 1228) (Sylwan, 2000, 362-364; and 2005; Clark, 2015; see also Sherwood-Smith, 2000).

Modern scholars have focused their attention on studying the transmission of this text in twelfth-century manuscripts. Later manuscripts have never been studied. Even a quick examination of the text in this manuscript, however, clearly shows that late copies are also of interest. This manuscript includes both “added” passages, and a sophisticated marginal apparatus, both of which may reflect how this text was studied in the thirteenth century in Italy.

This manuscript includes many "additions," most of which are labelled "incidentia" and copied either in the same format as the rest of the text, or within a divided single column. Comparing these passages with the most widely available, if poor, text in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, is interesting. Some passages are found both in the manuscript and in this printed edition: the text on f. 92rv (copied within a full column), is found in PL 198, col. 1274D, at the end of Numbers, ch. 5; the passage on f. 93v is found in PL 198, col. 1277D, at the end of Numbers 7; and the text on f. 69v, at the end of Numbers, ch. 4, is found in PL 198, col. 1219A. But many of the passages labelled "incidentia" in this manuscript are not present in the Migne edition: for example, f. 69, at the end of chapter 3; and f. 239rv, where there are six passages marked "incidentia" and copied in a split column, none of which are included in the printed edition, ch. 178, "De signis in morte domini," col. 1633A in Migne.

In addition, this manuscript includes a formal marginal apparatus, copied by the scribe, often on ruled lines added for this purpose. Some of the passages in the margins are very short explanatory comments, explaining words or giving etymologies. These can at times be quite picky. For example, alongside Peter's discussion of Leviticus 8:14 on f. 65, which states that in the process of cleansing from leprosy, a man must shave all the hair from his body ("radebat omnes pillos corporis"), in the margin, the note adds "non capitis" (not from the head) (which the text goes on to describe is shaved on the next day of the purification). Others are longer, for example, f. 64v, alongside the chapter "On the recognition of leprosy," the notes states (in translation), "This chapter is not very useful or very understandable, since these types of leprosy are unknown to us," concluding therefore that the chapter should be understood according to its allegorical, rather than literal sense. It is possible that these notes were taken from commentaries on the *Historia scholastica*, or they may be unique to this copy.

The influence of the text extended far beyond the learned Latin-speaking world of the medieval university. It was translated into many vernacular languages (Castilian, Catalan, Czech, Dutch, English, French, German, Old Norse, Portuguese, and Saxon), and was incorporated into many other works including chronicles. Guiart de Moulins's *Bible historique*, to cite one very well-known example, is to a large extent a French translation and adaptation of the *Historia scholastica* (Lobrichon, 2013).

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<http://webserver.erwin-rauner.de/#scriptores>

Repertorium biblicum medii aevi (digital version of Stegmüller)
<http://repbib.uni-trier.de/cgi-bin/rebihome.tcl>

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