

# LES ENLUMINURES, LTD

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PETER COMESTOR, *Historia Scholastica*  
In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment  
[England, Rochester, 1190s]

237 + iii + iv leaves, complete (i<sup>3</sup>, i-iii cancelled blanks, i<sup>10</sup>, ii-vii<sup>8</sup>, viii<sup>8</sup> and a part-folio inserted between ii and iii, ix-xix<sup>8</sup>, xx<sup>7</sup>, vii a singleton, xxi-xxix<sup>8</sup>, xxx<sup>4</sup>, vi, v and vi cancelled blanks, plus four fifteenth-century leaves at end including two lifted pastedowns from a previous binding), written on two columns of 39 lines in dark brown ink in a proto-gothic bookhand on 39 horizontals and bounded by two inner verticals and two outer pairs of verticals ruled in brown, a further vertical in outer margin ruled in plummet (justification 240 x 145 mm), rubrics and running heads in red, gatherings 1-12 with 2- to 8-line initials in red or blue, some of them with flourishing of a contrasting color, gatherings 13-29 with 2- to 7-line initials of green, red or blue, mostly with flourishing of a contrasting color, LARGE ILLUMINATED INITIAL with stave of burnished gold, orange, and blue (page edges darkened, neat marginal tear to five leaves, strip of vellum lost from edge of margin on folio 203, and upper corner of first endleaf. Bound in early nineteenth-century paneled calf, scuffed, worn at extremities, upper cover detached. Dimensions 330 x 230 mm.

Previously unrecorded manuscript from the important post-Conquest Benedictine library of Rochester Cathedral Priory, full of contemporary marginalia yielding new information on the scope of the medieval library and on reader reception there, one of very few manuscripts from the priory located outside the collections of the British Library, where most Rochester volumes are housed today, including a thirteenth-century copy of the same text.

## PROVENANCE:

1. Benedict, Vicar of Sutton, probably Sutton at Hone, in the diocese of Rochester, Kent: on f. 1, the following inscription "Per Benedictu[m] Vicariu[m] de Suthton. Liber Historiar[um] de Claustro Roffen[i]." The manuscript was written by a number of different scribes, some recognizably Rochester hands, and it seems

that it was produced in the scriptorium of the priory at the expense of Benedict. It may always have been intended for the priory's use.

2. Cathedral Priory of St. Andrew, Rochester, Kent: on f. iiiv, inscription as above, and an anathema opening "Qui hunc libru[m] de Claustro Roffens[i] alienav[er]it," both written in a thirteenth-century hand. The inscription on f. 1 is preceded by the number II, perhaps a shelf-mark. Other manuscripts from Rochester have similar notes of gift and anathema written in the same hand. These include another copy of the *Historia Scholastica* (British Library, Royal MS 2 C D). Since the present manuscript is the earlier and is likely to have been written in the Priory in the 1190s, it is reasonable to assume that it was this book which was described as the "Hystoria magistri Petri. in.i. volumine." in the 1202 inventory of books, the *Comune Librarium* of Rochester Cathedral (see Watson, pp. 497-529). The overwhelming majority of manuscripts to survive from Rochester, which are now in the British Library, formed the largest single medieval component of the Westminster collection of King Henry VIII. Carley has suggested that they may have been acquired with the personal library of John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, when his goods were confiscated in 1534, or after his execution in 1535 (Carley, pp. xi-xli). While it is possible that the present manuscript shared this fate and is an escape from the royal library, it is perhaps more likely that it remained in the monastery at least until the house was surrendered in 1540. It was certainly there in the 26<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Henry VIII (1534/35) when William Newton, "boy in the monastery," wrote a dated inscription on the final verso naming Samson Philippot, cellarer, who had been custodian of the store-room under the hall in the days of Master Phillip.
3. Philip Mainwaring Esq. Of Over Peover (d. 1647), Captain of the Light Horse of Chester and Sherrif of Cheshire in 1639: his signature on f.1.4, Sir Henry Mainwaring of Over Peover, Bart (d. 1797): his armorial bookplate inside upper cover. At birth he inherited the baronetcy created for his uncle Thomas in 1660. When Henry died unmarried the baronetcy expired but the estates passed to his uterine brother Thomas Wetenhal who assumed the name and arms of Mainwaring and the baronetcy was recreated for his son Henry in 1804. The Peover Library was sold by R. Winstanley of Manchester for this Sir Henry Mainwaring (1782-1860) on 28 August 1837, and five following days. The present manuscript was lot 49 on the third day, "Commentatio in Vetus Testamentum," the title on the spine.
4. Mr. Beaumont: written in pencil in outer corner of upper cover.
5. Royal Archaeological Institute, 15: circular label inside lower cover. The bulk of the Library of the Royal Archaeological Institute was included in Sotheby's sale of 17-18 December 1901, but the present manuscript does not appear to be included in the catalogue.

6. Warrington Public Library.

## TEXT

ff. 1v-iiiv, List of *Capitula*;

ff. 1-237, Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica*; ff. 204-5 blanks between the end of the Evangelists and the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles (text corresponding to Migne, PL, 198, 1053-1722, although without the “additions” that were made as appendices to individual chapters, and not always with the same chapter divisions as the printed edition).

ff. I, fifteenth-century English manuscript, written in a heavily abbreviated documentary script (incorporated from an earlier binding);

ff. II-IV, leaves from a fifteenth-century English Choir book for the use of Sarum. (incorporated from an earlier binding).

Peter Comestor (literally “Peter the Eater” because of his voracious appetite for knowledge) was first attached to the Church of Notre-Dame at Troyes and became Dean of the Chapter before 1148. Around 1160, he was one of the Chapter of Notre-Dame in Paris and was Chancellor of the University there until he retired to the monastery of St. Victor in 1169. He wrote influential sermons and a gloss on the Gospels but the *Historia Scholastica* can be regarded as his principal work and he became known as the “Magister Historiarum.” The work provided a continuous history from Creation until the end of the Acts of the Apostles and was based upon the narrative books of the Bible, where necessary correlating different accounts of an event and marrying disjointed sequences. In spite of this scriptural primacy, the narrative was rounded out and gaps filled by drawing upon both Church Fathers and authors of classical antiquity. Often literal or allegorical explanations of biblical events were also given.

The Prologue was not included as part of the original text-block, and when the three-folio list of capitula was added, once the main text was completed, the Prologue was written in space remaining at the end of the list and facing the opening folio (f. liiv). In the Prologue Peter Comestor dedicated his work to Guillaume aux Blanches Mains, Bishop of Sens (1169-1176), and explained that he had compiled it at the urging of colleagues who wanted a compact and coherent biblical history that also provided information only briefly alluded to in the Great Gloss. The result was so successful that within a generation the work had itself become the subject of university lectures and was frequently annotated and commented upon.

This copy was made soon after the composition of the work, and its continued currency and use is attested to by the variety of marginal additions, corrections, and interpolations. The glosses are extraordinarily rich. They include a series of learned comments—citing sources, expanding contexts, or providing scholastic distinctions—

written in at least three elegant, if heavily abbreviated, early thirteenth-century hands, one of them surrounded or articulated by decorative pen flourishing. The wide range of authors and/or titles referred to in the side notes includes Horace, Bede, Isidore of Seville, Josephus, Jerome, Cassiodorus, Agustinus, Theophilus of Alexandria, Rabanus Maurus, Origen, Gregory the Great, the Gregorianum, the Life of Alexander the Great, the Lives of the Philosophers, Jordanus, *Historia Judeorum*, Ambrose, etc..

These glosses give us a sort of record of the scope of the library at Rochester around 1200. Many of the authors and titles cited figure in the two twelfth-century lists of the library at Rochester. However, some do not, which suggests either that the library was broader in scope than has previously been thought or that the works are cited second-hand. The present manuscript thus not only expands our knowledge of the extent of the library, but it also offers concrete evidence on the practice of reading and the reception of texts at the priory.

The survival of two twelfth-century catalogues of Rochester Priory library, one from 1124 and the other from 1202, list 98 and 246 items respectively from the library (see Coates and Rye). These records contribute to the study of post-Conquest Benedictine monasticism, addressing issues such as "palaeographic influences and innovations, selection of texts, textual transmission and modification, and the choice and use of vernacular materials" (the fundamental study is Richards, p. xi). They also have helped scholars disentangle the close relationship between Canterbury and Rochester. A large number of items from these two catalogues can be identified with certainty, and the great majority of the books from Rochester Priory library are housed today in the British Library (see Ker, pp. 160-64 for the present location of books from the library). A few are in other libraries in Great Britain (Cambridge, Dublin, Edinburgh, etc.). Evidently, only two manuscripts are in North American collections: the famous "Gundulf" Bible (San Marino, Huntington, HM 62; see Dutschke, pp. 124-130) and a New Testament (Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, W.57), from the eleventh and twelfth centuries respectively.

Another copy of Petrus Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*, now in the British Library, MS Royal 2 C. I, bears the Rochester ex-libris and was a later addition to the library there. Its execution in the thirteenth century, however, postdates the composition of the library inventories.

## LITERATURE

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#### Online Resources

Official site of Rochester Cathedral

<http://www.rochester.anglican.org/cathedral/>