

MANUSCRIPT 120

Comestor, Petrus, d. 1198.  
Historia scholastica.  
MS 120

Germany (in Latin)

Early thirteenth century

MS 120 is a thirteenth century manuscript of the Historia scholastica by the twelfth century French Biblical scholar, Petrus Comestor. The Scholastic History, referred to in contemporary literature as simply "The Histories," is a chronicle of the Biblical period from Genesis through the end of the New Testament book of Acts organized in accordance with the order of the Biblical books themselves. It became the standard work on Biblical history in the late middle ages, remaining in heavy use through the sixteenth century, as the many early printed editions of the work attest. As such, the Scholastic History enjoys a prodigious and variegated manuscript tradition, which has not been studied or classified in modern times. The work was frequently commented on, and the additional notes added alongside individual chapters in this and other manuscripts provide a potentially rich source for the history of Biblical exegesis in the schools from the twelfth through sixteenth centuries.

MS 120 contains only the books corresponding to the Biblical books Genesis through III Kings. The manuscript is nearly complete for that segment of the History, lacking a single folio after folio 121 (text: expl. Migne, P. L. vol. 198, col. 1366D, qua terminata iterum dedica [tio....]; inc.

col. 1369C, [sacrificia et frequenta). The text breaks off at Migne, col. 1374D, after regnasset viginti duobus annis.

The manuscript is written in a thirteenth century Gothic Latin script in ink now faded to a rust color, with bright vermilion chapter titles, sporadic chapter numerals, versals and running heads. That the vermilion rubrics are later in date is suggested by the association of the same vermilion (used for underlinings) with marginal notations written in a later script. Chapter numerals, written formally on original ruled lines extending into the margins at top, middle and bottom of each folio, do not necessarily occur at the beginnings of corresponding texts. Guide notes for the rubricator were written in silver point or the ink of the scribe for the running heads, versals and chapter numerals. Later notes, mostly brief textual corrections or expansions, are written in the margins in several hands ranging in date from nearly contemporary with the text to modern. Of particular interest among the marginal notes are brief texts with musical notation written on staves of four lines on folios 46r-v and 47r in the bottom margin. A staff of five lines with text and musical notation occur in the bottom margin of folio 106r. The music on folios 46-47 may be dated to the thirteenth century on the basis of the musical notation.

The manuscript was formerly owned by Sir Thomas Phillipps (his number 408), who acquired it in 1824 as part of the collection of Leander van Ess. Ess had acquired his manuscripts from various German monasteries after the secularization of

the religious establishments, "in particular from the Carthusian house of St. Barbara at Cologne, suppressed in 1796, from the Benedictine St. Jakobsberg, near Mainz, suppressed in 1802, and from the Premonstratensian monastery at Steinfeld in the Eifel...." (A. N. L. Munby, Portrait, p. 22; see Bibliographical Note.)

17 quires of 8 folios each, except the last (fols. 121-23, deficient), some with original quire signatures and catch words surviving, bottom margin, last folio verso. Flesh sides out, flesh and hair sides matched.

123 folios, 30.0 x 20.0 cm.; 2 columns of 40 lines each, 21.2 x 5.7 cm., 1.0 cm. between cols. Binding blind-stamped leather over wooden boards; marks on back cover where the book was chained. Clasps lost.

Acquired April, 1925; gift of C. L. Ricketts.

Bibliographical Note:

1. Seymour De Ricci and W. J. Wilson, Census of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in The United States and Canada (New York, 1935) p. 167.
2. J. P. Migne, Patrologiae Latinae vol. 198 (Paris, 1855) columns 1050-1722.
3. A. N. L. Munby, Portrait of an Obsession; the Life of Sir Thomas Phillipps, The World's Greatest Book Collector (New York, 1967).
4. B. Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages, (Oxford, 1941) chapters 4-5, passim.

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