

English Encyclopedism and European Manuscript Culture in the Later Middle Ages: Editing the “Iudei” entries in Thomas Gascoigne’s *Liber de veritatibus*

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Who was Thomas Gascoigne?

Thomas Gascoigne (1404-1458) was an English theologian and administrator. He started at Oxford University between 1416 and 1420 and spent most of his life studying and working there, becoming a Doctor of Theology in 1434 and chancellor of the university in 1444.

Gascoigne was, first and foremost, a theological scholar. After completing the usual scholastic course at Oxford, he was converted to a mainly **patristic theology**, and so devoted his attention to the Church Fathers and those who seemed to share their ideas. He was particularly interested in Jerome, Robert Grosseteste, Hugh of St. Cher, Augustine, and Bede. He was also a visible member of an orthodox group of theologians who believed in the importance of regular **preaching**, and who attributed the failings of the church to pluralism (holding more than one ‘cure of souls’ simultaneously) and non-residency (not residing in the parsonage house of the parish in which one has the cure of souls). Gascoigne is commonly thought to have written six named works, of which the *Liber de veritatibus* (or *Dictionarium theologicum*, fig. 2.) is by far the most extensive.

Gascoigne and manuscripts

The *Liber* is a massive Latin-language **theological encyclopedia** that Gascoigne compiled over the course of his lifetime. It is both a collection of excerpts from the theological writings he accessed and an autobiographical work containing Gascoigne’s own thoughts and accounts of 15th-century events.

He frequently documents the process of finding his references, providing unusually accurate and **specific citations** for the works he consulted. The *Liber*, therefore, provides valuable insight into the ways in which a well-connected theologian in England could use the materials and libraries (fig. 1) available to them. The references can often be used to find the **exact manuscript copies** that Gascoigne consulted in the course of his research. This process is aided by the fact that Gascoigne often annotated the books he consulted with semi-autobiographical comments and his distinctive ‘Jesus Maria’ sign (fig. 3.).

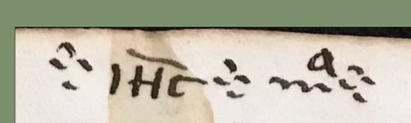


Fig. 3. Gascoigne’s ‘Jesus Maria’ sign

Although there is conclusive evidence that the *Liber* existed in multiple manuscript copies, only one of these remains: an incomplete two-volume copy, now called Oxford, Lincoln College MSS 117 and 118. The “Judei” entries that are the focus of this project are found in **Lincoln MS 117**.

While the *Liber* is structured like a commonplace book with chapters made up of discreet paragraphs, allowing it to grow gradually, its compilation would have nevertheless been facilitated by the use of a **notebook**. One of Gascoigne’s notebooks survives (though there were undoubtedly more) and it provides a glimpse into his encyclopedic process (fig. 4).



Fig. 1. Duke Humfrey’s Library, Oxford. Gascoigne consulted manuscripts here, as well as in many other 15th century libraries. Photo by the Bodleian Library.

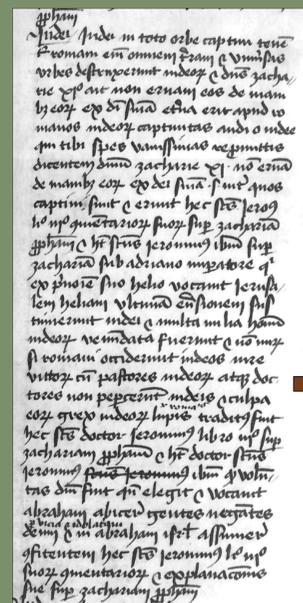


Fig. 2. The first page of the *Liber de veritatibus*, Lincoln College MS 117. Photo by Michael Van Dussen.

Methods: editing Lincoln College MS Lat. 117 (*Liber de veritatibus*, vol. i)

Editing a manuscript involves producing a typed edition that emulates the original hand-written book. This often involves processes such as:

- Typing out the text so that it is legible.
- Correctly **expanding the abbreviations** used by scribes. Scribes writing in medieval Latin used a variety of common abbreviations to conserve time, energy, and space on the page.
- Formatting the **punctuation** to meet modern standards; this usually involves adding punctuation where there is none in the manuscript and is often a matter of interpretation.
- **Comparing** multiple manuscript copies of the same text against the chosen version to find and examine variants (collation) and indicating these variants in your edition. We did not do collation for the *Liber* because it only exists in one manuscript.
- Amending **scribal errors** that appear in the text and clearly indicating how the error was amended. Editorial transparency is very important when changing any aspect of the text.
- **Annotating** the text to provide the reader with the basic information necessary to understand the text. In the example below, this involves providing a **critical apparatus** at the bottom of the page to indicate where the scribe has inserted or deleted text.



An example of how one entry from the *Liber* (left) could look when made into a modern edition (below).

Iudei. Iudei in toto orbe captiui tenentur. Romani enim omnem terram et vniuersas vrbes destruxerunt Iudeorum. Et Dominus Zacharie xi^o ait, ‘non eruum eos de manibus eorum’, ex Dei sententia. Eterna erit apud Romanos Iudeorum captiuitas. Audi, O Iudee, qui tibi spes vanissimas reprobittis! Dicentem dominum Zacharie xi, ‘non eruum de manibus eorum’, ex Dei sententia, scilicet, inter quos captiui sunt et erunt: hec Sanctus Ieronimus, libro iii^o commentariorum suorum Super Zachariam prophetam. Et habet Sanctus Ieronimus ibidem Super Zachariam: sub Adriano imperatore, qui ex prenomine suo, ‘Helio’, vocauit Ierusalem, ‘Heliam’, vltimam euersionem sustinuerunt Iudei et multa milia hominum Iudeorum venundata fuerunt. Et non mirum si Romani occiderunt Iudeos iure victorum, cum pastores Iudeorum atque doctores non pepererunt Iudeis et culpa eorum grex Iudeorum lupis, \id est, Romanis/ traditus fuit: hec Sanctus doctor Ieronimus, libro iii^o Super Zachariam prophetam. Et habet doctor Sanctus Ieronimus ibidem quod voluntas Domini fuit quando elegit et vocauit Abraham abicere gentes negantes Deum \per vicia et idolatriam/, et in Abraham Israel assumere confidentem: hec Sanctus Ieronimus, libro iii^o suorum commentariorum et explanationis sue Super Zachariam prophetam.

9 id est, Romanis] superl. insert. 10 Sanctus Ieronimus] twice, second del. 11 per...idolatriam (12)] superl. insert.

Some thoughts on editing

The job of the editor is to transfer the manuscript into a form that is accessible to **modern readers**, while still aiming to preserve and document the textual features that make each manuscript unique. The needs of modern readers and publishers are often difficult to reconcile with the many possibilities for **variation** and **corruption** that arise in texts that are copied out by hand (see Fig. 5, for example).

Since medieval manuscripts were produced on a single-copy basis, they often reflect the personalities of their readers, scribes, and authors in ways that are difficult to convey in modern printed books.

While the tasks of the medieval scribe and the modern editor are clearly quite different, they nevertheless have elements in common. It is vital that the editor acknowledge the impossibility of creating a wholly uncorrupted version of the text—a version just as the author intended it. Even the modern process of editing adds a **further layer of mediation** to the manuscript text, foisting on it another set of **interpretive decisions** made by someone other than the author. It is also humbling to realize that, even with modern technology, editors are often subject to the same errors made by medieval scribes.

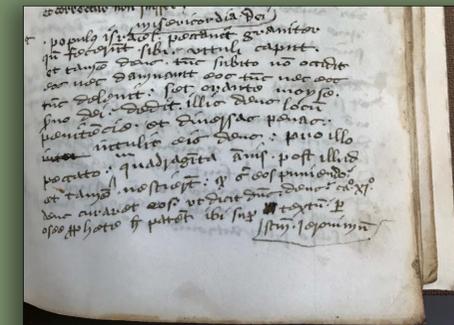


Fig. 4. A page of Gascoigne’s notebook showing his notes taken from a manuscript he was consulting. He organizes them under the heading “Misericordia Dei” (Mercy of God). Bodleian Lat. th. e 33. Photo by Michael Van Dussen.

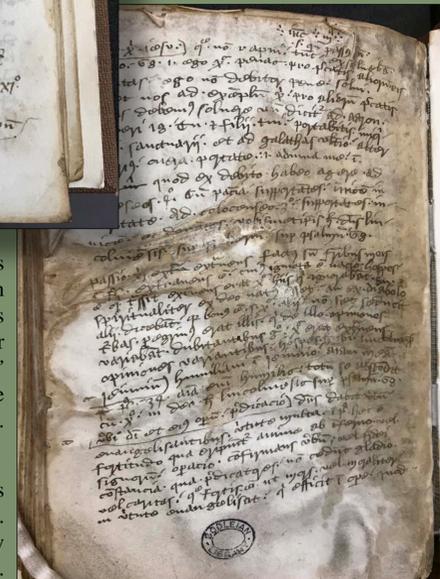


Fig. 5. A page of Gascoigne’s notebook with water damage. Bodleian Lat. th. e 33. Photo by Michael Van Dussen.

References

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