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# A Late Medieval Bible in Rugby School Archives

Thomas W. Smith

THE Archives of Rugby School preserve an illuminated Latin manuscript bible that is little known to scholars. The codex—Rugby, Rugby School Archives, MS A2—was once a complete pandect late medieval bible, produced in England or France, between ca. 1230 and ca. 1300.<sup>1</sup> A somewhat mangled example of the genre, it has been heavily damaged by moisture at some point in its exis-

\* I am grateful to the Archivist of Rugby School, Dr. Jonathan Smith, the staff of the Archives, Jenny Hunt and Gary Collins, and the staff of the Temple Reading Room, Jo Outhwaite and Wendy Adams, for their gracious advice and assistance, and to Rugby School Archives for its generous permission to reproduce images from the manuscript here. My thanks also go to the anonymous peer reviewer and Dr. Tim Shaw for helpful suggestions on this note. I am indebted to Kristýna Strnadová and Stephen Spencer for supplying a publication of importance to the present note.

1. The codex is concisely catalogued as “Add. 2” in Neil R. Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1969–2002), 4:227–28.

**Abstract:** This note describes an illuminated Latin bible manuscript in the collection of Rugby School Archives that is little known to scholars. Originally, the codex, Rugby School MS A2, was a pandect late medieval bible, produced in England or France, between ca. 1230 and ca. 1300. A somewhat mangled example of the genre, it has been heavily damaged by moisture at some point in its existence and, at 143 folios, has lost many of its leaves.

**Keywords:** Rugby School Archives, Bible, Illumination, Francis G. Waugh, Medieval Manuscripts.

tence and, at 143 folios, has lost many of its leaves. This note examines the manuscript in detail, which is counted among the corpus of late medieval bibles, a type of book that was extremely widespread and popular in the Middle Ages but which, paradoxically, has been little studied.<sup>2</sup>

Presently stored in the Archives of Rugby School, a small conservation slip tucked into the back of the codex identifies it with the shelfmark “A2” and reveals that it was previously held in the School’s Rare Books section; a pencil note on the bookplate records that it was there located on “Shelf 2:7.” The conservation slip further gives the title of the volume as “Biblia Latina MS Sec XIII,” which also appears on the spine of the binding. To the marble pastedowns is affixed a bookplate belonging to the donor, Francis G. Waugh. His arms on the bookplate depict a hand gripping a wreath, above a circular belt inscribed with the words “Malo mori quam fædari” (“Death rather than dishonour”). Francis Gledstanes Waugh, FRGS (1846–1901), was an Old Rugbeian: he entered the School in October 1860 and left in 1864. After his schooling at Rugby, Waugh went up to Exeter College, Oxford, where he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1871 and Master of Arts in 1873. Some time later, between 1888 and 1891, he served as the vicar of Moulsoford church in Berkshire. This ecclesiastical post, combined with his election as a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and authorship of a number of works on the history of the Athenæum Club in London, may provide the intellectual context to explain Waugh’s interest in this medieval bible, although it is possible that his

2. Eyal Poleg and Laura Light, “Introduction,” in *Form and Function in the Late Medieval Bible*, ed. Eyal Poleg and Laura Light (Leiden, 2013), 1–7 at 1–3. See also Laura Light, “The Thirteenth Century and the Paris Bible,” in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol 2, *From 600 to 1450*, ed. Richard Marsden and E. Ann Matter (Cambridge, 2012), 380–91.

short stint as vicar was a sinecure rather than a vocation.<sup>3</sup> Waugh appears to have been something of a bibliophile and collector; his bookplate appears in a number of other rare books held by Rugby School which constitute part of his donation to the School, and he also published a catalogue of his collection of autographs.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, there is no documentation regarding the accession of Waugh's gift into the School's collection, aside from the bookplate, nor are there any other inscriptions in the codex which could serve as a source of provenance.

A search of the Archives indicates that this bible is the only remaining medieval manuscript in the School's possession, though previously MS A2 took its place among a small number of other medieval manuscript bibles and missals sold at auction at Christie's in December 2018.<sup>5</sup> With the ex-

3. See *Rugby School Register*, vol. 2, *From August, 1842, to January, 1874*, ed. Arthur T. Michell (Rugby, 1902), 198. Available online at [https://rugbyschoolarchives.co.uk/PDFViewer/web/viewer.html?file=%2fFilename.ashx%3ftableName%3dta\\_schoolregisters%26columnName%3dfilename%26recordId%3d2](https://rugbyschoolarchives.co.uk/PDFViewer/web/viewer.html?file=%2fFilename.ashx%3ftableName%3dta_schoolregisters%26columnName%3dfilename%26recordId%3d2).

4. Francis Gledstanes Waugh, *A Catalogue of the Autograph Letters, MSS., etc. Collected by Francis Gledstanes Waugh* (London, [1879]). The "MSS." in the title of this pamphlet refer only to the manuscript autographs collected by Waugh; it does not contain any information on the Rugby bible or any other medieval manuscripts that might have been in Waugh's possession. I am grateful to Renée Prud'Homme, Assistant Librarian at Worcester College Library, University of Oxford, for supplying me with a digital copy of this pamphlet.

5. See the sale catalogue: *Old Masters, New Scholars: Works of Art Sold to Benefit Rugby School*, Tuesday 4 December 2018, Christie's (London, 2018), 136–44, lots 145 (illuminated Latin bible on vellum, produced in England, s.xiii<sup>med</sup>), 146 (decorated Latin bible on vellum, produced in England, s.xiii<sup>med</sup>), 147 (decorated Latin bible on paper, produced in Utrecht, 1463), 148 (illuminated Latin missal on vellum, use of Sarum, produced in England, s.xv<sup>in</sup>), 149 (illuminated Latin missal on vellum in contemporary chemise binding, use of Sarum, produced in England, s.xv<sup>med</sup>), 150 (*The Book of John Mandeville*, decorated manuscript on vellum, England, s.xv<sup>2</sup>), and 151 (illuminated Latin pon-

ception of one of these manuscripts (lot 149), however, all were part of the gift to Rugby School by the noted antiquarian and fellow Old Rugbeian Matthew Holbeche Bloxam.<sup>6</sup> MS A2 is the only manuscript Waugh appears to have given to the School.

The binding of Rugby School MS A2 is a modern light-brown full leather, which is too tight. It features gold edging on the outside and gold tooled decoration around the inside edges and on the spine. The pastedowns are red marbled paper. The appearance of the binding suggests that it probably dates from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, though if Waugh had the book rebound before pasting in his bookplate, then it must date from the late nineteenth century. The binding appears to have had some minor, non-invasive repair work completed relatively recently, judging by the binder's tape affixing the boards to the text block, which appears to date from the twentieth century. This must have been applied before 26 June 2001 when the archival conservation slip records that a leather dressing was applied to the spine only and the rest of the binding was merely cleaned with a "Brush/duster."

Folio numbers have been entered in pencil on the lower left margin of the recto of each leaf, now firmly in the gutter of the book and obscured owing to the tightness of the binding. The folio numbers must have been added either when the codex was unbound or else in a previous, looser binding, since it would have been physically impossible to enter them in the gutter of the book in its present form.

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tifical on vellum, produced in Italy, probably Ferrara, ca. 1460). The catalogue is also available online: <https://www.christies.com/salelanding/index.aspx?intsaleid=28154&sid=db3f58bo-4cc9-4815-bfc4-80bde253c-be2&action=refinecoa&selectedids=8851>.

6. On M. H. Bloxam, see *Old Masters, New Scholars*, 8–12; and Tim Guard, "Editor's Welcome: Matthew Holbeche Bloxam," *Bloxam Project* 1 (2016): 2–4, the latter also available online: <https://www.rugbyschool.co.uk/news-dates/publications1/publications-archive/bloxam-project-vol-1>.

The codex (fols. ii + 143 + ii) consists of 143 parchment folios numbered in pencil, though a number of mistakes were made with foliation. The first medieval parchment flyleaf is not foliated and in the sequence of foliation the number 76 was skipped (i.e., the folio numbers ran 75, 77). As a result, the individual responsible retrospectively labelled folio 75 “75 + 6” as a hasty workaround (also rectifying the missing folio number on the first medieval flyleaf as a result and bringing the final foliation to the correct number of 143, in one fell swoop). Further evidence of the sloppy manner of foliation is furnished by the sequence of folios from 123 to 129 which, curiously, were all foliated as “120” and then corrected retrospectively. Folios 131 to 139 were also foliated incorrectly and have subsequently been overwritten. Collation is not possible on account of the tightness of the binding.

The manuscript now measures approximately 200 x 130 mm. and the writing space 140 x 95 mm. This is not its original size, however, since its leaves have been trimmed before or at the time of its current binding, cutting off the running titles (see, for example, col. pl. 7). In its current state, the overall dimensions (the sum of the height and width) of MS A2 stand at 330 mm. Even allowing for the trimmed material, the codex falls into the category of pocket bibles, which Chiara Ruzzier classifies as having overall dimensions of less than 380 mm., albeit our example was probably at the larger end of the scale originally.<sup>7</sup>

The bible is written in two columns of forty-six lines in black ink in a small, neat gothic bookhand of the thirteenth or early fourteenth century.<sup>8</sup> The writing space is framed in lead; any traces of pricking are absent, the leaves

7. Chiara Ruzzier, “The Miniaturisation of Bible Manuscripts in the Thirteenth Century: A Comparative Study,” in *Form and Function*, 105–25 at 106, 107.

8. Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts*, 4:227 dated the codex to s.xiv<sup>in</sup>.

having been trimmed. The text is written below the top line, which means it probably written after ca. 1230 when it became common for scribes to adopt the practice.<sup>9</sup>

The Rugby School bible is in a rather sorry state, now. The parchment is fine and thin; it is a shame that the leaves are in quite poor condition, having been affected by moisture damage throughout (e.g., fig. 1). Folios 1–27, in particular, have suffered heavy damage and subsequently been repaired by the application of gauze and paper frames (col. pl. 5). The ink has also deteriorated and faded on many folios to the point of illegibility—especially badly affected are folios 59–88 and 100–103. There are a number of tears in the parchment that were stitched together, apparently at the time of production.

The bible is decorated sparingly but relatively finely. It exhibits the standard features of late medieval bibles: rubricated chapter headings, chapter numbers in red and blue Roman numerals, and running titles, also in alternating red and blue, all accompanied by penwork decoration in the same colours (fig. 1). There are five decorated initials (fols. 1r, 21v, 55v, 137v, 139r) and ten historiated initials at book openings (fols. 35r, 62r, two on 63r, 84v, 112v, 113r, 137v, 139r, 139v; see, e.g., col. pls. 6, 7, and 8); all the historiated initials feature economical use of illumination. Similarly, there are several partial borders, some of which are historiated (the latter on fols. 19v, 40v, 95v) and also frugally illuminated (see col. pls. 7 and 8). Judging from the style of the manuscript and its decoration, MS A2 was probably produced in England or France (possibly at Paris if the latter, since this was the main centre of bible production in the thirteenth century), though it is difficult to localise the co-



9. Neil R. Ker, "From 'Above Top Line' to 'Below Top Line': A Change in Scribal Practice," *Celtica* 5 (1960): 13–16.

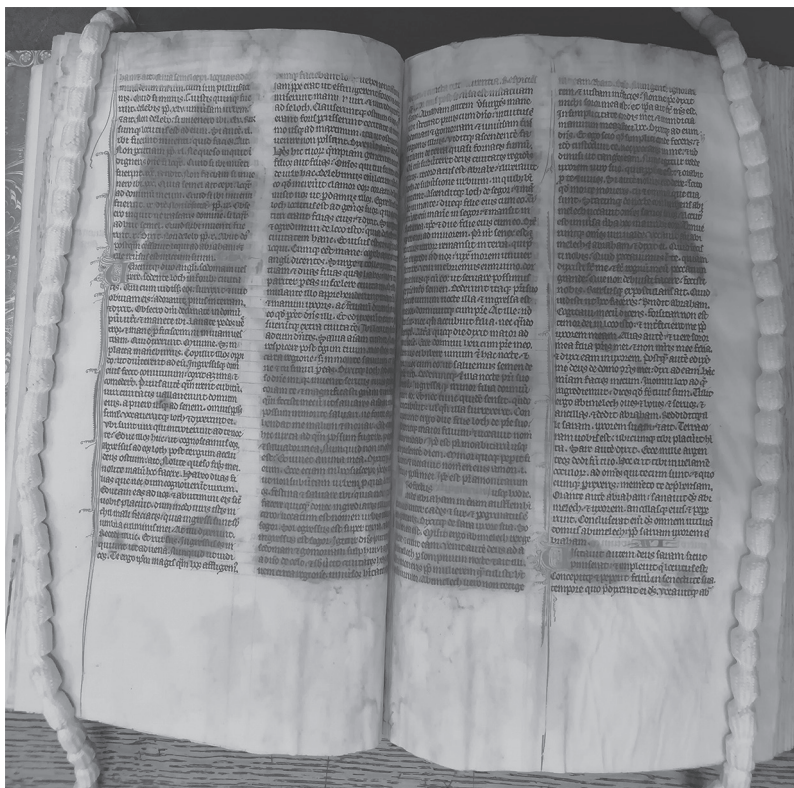


Figure 1.

Genesis 18–24. Note moisture damage.

Rugby, Rugby School Archives, MS A2, fols. 23v–24r  
(Courtesy of Rugby School Archives)

dex any more specifically on stylistic grounds because of the similarities in bible production in this period.<sup>10</sup>

124 The text and contents of the Rugby School bible, in addition to severe moisture damage, have suffered further loss. At 143 folios, MS A2 is very slender, much slimmer than we would expect for a typical bible of this period, which on average contained some 492 folios, though this was dependent, of course, upon the size of the parchment and the script.<sup>11</sup> Examination of the text shows the codex to be an incomplete exemplar of the genre. Though the moisture damage and faded ink render large parts of many folios and incipits illegible, it is clear that, in its present state, MS A2 is a hodgepodge of different biblical books, most of which are deficient. There is nothing remarkable about the contents of this example, and thirteenth-century bibles of this kind are not particularly rare. It includes among other books: Interpretation of Hebrew Names, Sophonias, Aggeus, Genesis, Judges, Ruth, Psalms, Isaías; Jeremias, Zacharias, Maccabees, Matthew, and Epistles of Paul.<sup>12</sup> This aligns roughly with a common order of books found in medieval bibles, though there are some anomalies, such as the Interpretation of Hebrew Names, which usually came at the end of bibles of this period, and some of the prophets appearing before Genesis, which are probably the result of modern rebinding.<sup>13</sup> Though incomplete, the wide range of biblical books represented in MS A2 suggest that it was originally a

10. See Peter Barnet, "A Pair of Thirteenth-Century Bibles: The Ruskin Bible at Yale and the Scripps Bible in the Detroit Institute of Arts," *Yale University Library Gazette* 55 (1980): 1–13 at 10.

11. Ruzzier, "Miniaturisation," 113.

12. For a full list of contents, see Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts*, 4:227–28.

13. See Frans Van Liere, *An Introduction to the Medieval Bible* (Cambridge, 2014), 54–56; Laura Light, "French Bibles, c. 1200–30: A New Look at the Origin of the Paris Bible," in *The Early Medieval Bible: Its Production, Decoration and Use*, ed. Richard Gameson (Cambridge, 1994), 155–76 at 155.

complete pandect bible, and we might posit that it probably numbered some 300–600 leaves, as was common with other examples of the genre that have overall dimensions between 331 and 450 mm.<sup>14</sup>

The manuscript begins with the most popular *Aaz* rendering (so-called after its first entry) of the *Interpretationes nominum Hebraeorum*, an extrabiblical text that explained the meaning of Hebrew names found in the Bible, both literally and allegorically (col. pl. 5). As Laura Light has noted, the *Aaz* rendering was the perfect accompaniment to the single-volume bibles produced in the thirteenth century because its expanded list of names “answered the needs of users who were used to searching through the biblical text as a whole.”<sup>15</sup> The *Interpretationes nominum Hebraeorum* helps with dating the manuscript, since it was commonly found in bibles produced in Europe after ca. 1230.<sup>16</sup> This dovetails neatly with the fact that the text of MS A2 is written below top line, which, as noted above, was a scribal practice which also became common after ca. 1230.<sup>17</sup> The decoration and layout of the codex also place it firmly in the context of the portable Latin bibles copied in large numbers in Europe after ca. 1230. This evidence means that our codex is securely datable to between ca. 1230 and ca. 1300, probably at the

14. Ruzzier, “Miniaturisation,” 114.

15. Laura Light, “Non-Biblical Texts in Thirteenth-Century Bibles,” in *Medieval Manuscripts, their Makers and Users: A Special Issue of Viator in Honor of Richard and Mary Rouse* (Turnhout, 2011), 169–83 at 171.

16. MS A2, fol. 1r: “*Aaz apprehende[def.] uel apprehensio*”; see: Laura Light, “The Bible and the Individual: The Thirteenth-Century Paris Bible,” in *The Practice of the Bible in the Middle Ages: Production, Reception and Performance in Western Christianity*, ed. Susan Boynton and Diane J. Reilly (New York, 2011), 228–46 at 234; Eyal Poleg, “The Interpretations of Hebrew Names in Theory and Practice,” in *Form and Function*, 217–36 at 217, 220.

17. Ker, “From ‘Above Top Line.’”

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end of the period on account of the angular, upright form  
of the textura script.

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