

# Decoding the Past: *Latin Palaeography and the Manuscript Tradition*

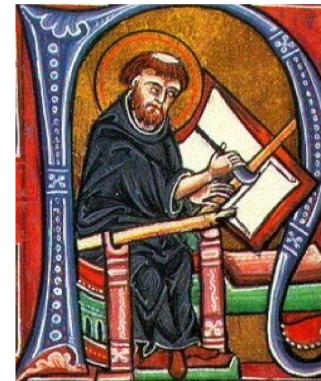
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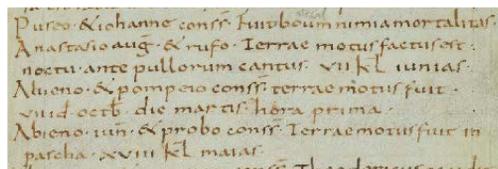


## Introduction

When you purchase a copy of Vergil's *Aeneid*, what you are holding in your hand is the result of a long and complicated process of transcription, collation, and translation, involving numerous versions of the text which span several centuries. The original text never survives. For example, modern scholars have never seen what Vergil actually wrote. Instead, we must rely on copies of copies of copies of the original manuscripts that have managed to survive throughout history. Scribes would have made the first copies by hand in antiquity. Many of these copies would have disappeared by the Middle Ages, but those that did survive would be copied by medieval scribes. Further, oftentimes the full contents of a manuscript from antiquity does not survive – often medieval scribes copied out portions of the original manuscript, leaving us today with no knowledge of what the full contents were. It is from whatever remains of the medieval copies of earlier manuscripts that modern scholars are able to create editions of works such as a Penguin edition of Vergil's *Aeneid*, and it is with medieval copies of manuscripts that I worked for the duration of my research.



## Example I: Working with one manuscript



Excerpt from Manuscript A

Puseo . et iohanne consulibus . Fuit boum nimia mortalitas .  
Anastasio augusto . et rufo . Terrae motus factus est .  
noctu . ante pullorum cantus . vii kalendas iunias .  
Auieno . et pompeio consulibus . terrae motus fuit .  
vii idus . octobres . die martis . hora prima .  
Abieno . iunior . et probo consulibus . terrae motus fuit in  
pascha . xiiii kalendas maias .

Puseo et Iohanne consulibus fuit boum nimia mortalitas. (467)  
Anastasio Augusto et Rufo consulibus terrae motus factus est noctu ante pullorum  
cantus VII kal. Iunias. (492)  
Auieno et Pompeio consulibus terrae motus fuit VII id. Octobres die Martis hora  
prima. (501)  
Abieno iunior et Probo consulibus terrae motus fuit in Pascha XVIII kal. Maias. (502)

501 Avieno| Abieno A2

When Puseus and Iohannus were consuls, many cows died.

When Augustus Anastasius and Rufus were consuls, there was an earthquake in the night before the song of the rooster on 26 May.

When Avienus and Pompeius were consuls there was an earthquake during the first hour on Tuesday 9 October.

When Avienus the younger and Probus were consuls, there was an earthquake on Easter Day, 14 April.

## Manuscripts and Methodology

The first manuscript that I worked with, which I call *Manuscript A*, is from St. Gall in Switzerland, and dates to the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. The second manuscript that I worked with, *Manuscript B*, is from Vienna, and it dates to the 15<sup>th</sup> century AD. For this manuscript I concentrated on the sections that overlap with *Manuscript A*. I arrived at my final translation through several steps: i) Transcription and Diplomatic Edition, ii) Collation and Critical Edition, and iii) Translation and Dating.

## Transcription and Diplomatic Edition

I transcribed each manuscript and created a diplomatic edition, which exactly mirrors the original manuscript text. To do this, I had to get used to reading the different handwriting in each manuscript and learn to recognize different abbreviations and symbols used by Medieval scribes. In the diplomatic edition, all abbreviations and symbols are expanded.

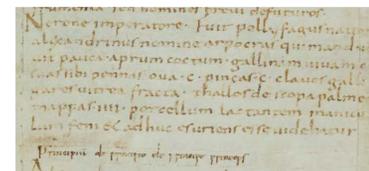
## Collation and Critical Edition

When there is only one manuscript, creating a critical edition is fairly straightforward and involves fixing any formatting, punctuation, and mistakes in order to create a readable and coherent text. When comparing two manuscripts, a collation is done. In a collation the different manuscripts are compared and where there are differences the preferred reading is retained in the critical edition and the variant is noted in footnote form in the *apparatus criticus*.

## Translation and Dating

The final step was translating the critical edition into English. Given the nature of the manuscripts with which I was working I also had to do research and some calculations to find the years and days of the month to which the list of consuls in *Manuscript A* refers, since the Romans used a different system for naming both the years and the days of the month.

## Example II: Working with two manuscripts



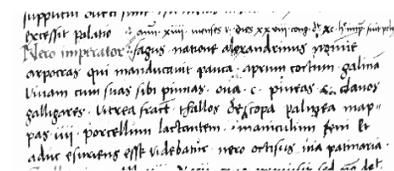
Excerpt from Manuscript A

Nerone imperatore . Fuit pollyfagus natione alexandrinus nomine arprocras qui manduca uit pauca . aprum coctum . gallinam uiuam cum suas sibi pennas . oua . c . pineas . c . clauos galli gares uitrea fracta thallos de scopa palmea mappas . iiii . porcellum lactantem maniculum feni et adhuc esuriens esse uidebatur .

Hoc imperatore fuit polyfagus natione Alexandrinus nomine Arprocras, qui manducauit pauca: aprum coctum, gallinam uiuam cum suas sibi pennas, oua C, pineas C, clauos galligares, uitrea fracta, thallos de scopa palmea, mappas IIII, porcellum lactantem, maniculum feni, et adhuc esuriens esse uidebatur.

IV hoc imperatore] Nerone imperatore A polyfagus] pollyfagus A hoc...poly] supra lineam ser. Bb pennas] pinnas B adhuc] aduc B VI hoc imperatore] Alexandro imperatore A polyfagus] pollyfagus A thallos] tallos AB adhuc] aduc B

When Nero was emperor there was a polyphage from Alexandria named Arprocras, who ate a few things: a cooked boar, a live chicken with its own feathers, 100 eggs, 100 pinecones, hob nails, broken glass, bristles from a palm broom, four napkins, a suckling pig, and a bundle of hay, and he still seemed to be hungry.



Excerpt from Manuscript B

hoc imperatore fuit polyfagus natione alexandrinus nomine arprocras qui manducauit pauca . aprum coctum . gallinam uiuam cum suas sibi pinnas . oua . c . pineas . c . clauos galligares . uitrea fracta . thallos de scopa palmea mappas . iiii . porcellum lactantem . maniculum feni et adhuc esuriens esse uidebatur .