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History as a Visual Concept: Peter of Poitiers' *Compendium Historiae*

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THE “HISTORY AS A VISUAL CONCEPT” project concerns Peter of Poitiers’s diagrammatic work, the *Compendium historiae in genealogia Christi*. Peter of Poitiers (1125/30–1205), a master of theology in Paris, originally designed the *Compendium* as a tool to help his students learn the complexities of biblical history. He developed a linear synopsis for visualizing time, a graph representing both synchronous and diachronic relationships between people and events. The *Compendium* soon became a standard work across the Latin West; more than three hundred manuscript witnesses are currently known. Despite its prevalence, however, the *Compendium* has

neither been edited nor studied with regard to its graphical “metastructure” for the order of history.

Researchers at the Universities of Tübingen, Wuppertal, Graz, Venice, and London are creating the first digital edition of Peter of Poitiers’s *Compendium* using the standards of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI/XML), the International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF), vector graphics (SVG), and Semantic Web technologies.¹ Bringing together the fields of art history, medieval history, Latin philology, text editing, and digital humanities, this project will result in a freely accessible, online critical edition of the text embedded in a navigable visualization of the graphic metastructure. Along with a codicological database, the edition will serve as the platform for studies of variants of the work, individual manuscript witnesses, sociocultural contexts, and other aspects of the tradition.

The Compendium

THE AUTHOR AND RECEPTION

Peter of Poitiers began his academic career in Paris in the mid-twelfth century, where he taught theology before assuming office as the chancellor of the cathedral school of Notre Dame in 1193.² One of Peter of Poitiers’s predecessors, Peter Comestor, had produced a summary of biblical history that eventually became one of the most popular theological texts of the Middle Ages: the *Historia scholastica*.³ Building on the work of his predecessor, Peter of Poitiers authored a continuation of the *Historia scholastica*, a historical account of the Acts of the Apostles.⁴ He also based the *Compendium*, to a large extent, on the *Historia scholastica*.

1 With the support of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) (project no. 504265959) and Der Wissenschaftsfonds (FWF) (project no. I 6133), the project is headed by Profs. Andrea Worm (Tübingen), Patrick Sahle (Wuppertal), and Roman Bleier (Graz). Additional project partners are the Mercator Fellows Laura Cleaver (London) and Franz Fischer (Venice).

2 Philip S. Moore, *The Works of Peter of Poitiers: Master in Theology and Chancellor of the University of Paris (1193–1205)* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1936), 6.

3 Mark J. Clark, *The Making of the Historia Scholastica, 1150–1200* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2015).

4 Moore, *The Works of Peter of Poitiers*, 7.

During the thirteenth century and beyond, the *Compendium* served as a visual aid for the study of history. A large portion of the surviving manuscripts transmit the *Compendium* together with the *Historia scholastica*, especially those produced for the university in Paris or other academic institutions. Given that the oldest dated manuscript is linked to a Benedictine monastery at Mondsee (near Salzburg, Austria), the *Compendium* seems to have spread quickly from Paris to schools all across Europe.⁵ Early copies associated with cathedral schools are also present in the British Isles.⁶ The *Compendium* remained popular throughout the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries in both continental Europe and in Britain. Today more than half of the manuscript witnesses of the *Compendium* are found in Germany and England, with a significant number also in Austria and France.

Aside from the *Historia scholastica*, the *Compendium* accompanied other historical and encyclopedic texts, as well as Bibles. Its didactic hegemony lent it symbolic clout. Often transmitted on rolls, institutions invested in large formats and high-quality illumination (fig. 1). By the mid-fourteenth century several pictorial programs had emerged to illustrate the *Compendium*, notably for English rolls and French presentation copies.⁷ By this time, it served not only as a teaching aid but also as a picture of sacred time, symbolizing the cosmological underpinnings of creation and salvation. The *Compendium* thus appeared as a frontispiece for manuscripts such as the multivolume Bible given by the king of France to the College of the Sorbonne in 1270 and the immense early thirteenth-century copy of Flavius Josephus's *Antiquitates Judaicae* owned by Cambrai Cathedral.⁸

5 Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 363. The explicit names an Abbot Heinrich in Mondsee, dating it to between 1180 and 1183.

6 See, for instance, Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.15.5, likely owned by Nigel Wireker (d. 1200), monk at Christ Church, Canterbury from 1186 to 1193.

7 Rolls belonging to this English tradition are London, British Library, Royal MS 14 B IX and Add. MS 60628; New York, The Morgan Library & Museum, MS M.628; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Lat. th. b. 1 (R). French presentation copies include Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 17579; Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut.15.11; and Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli, MS VII C 3.

8 These are Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 15467; and Cambrai, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 680 (620), respectively.

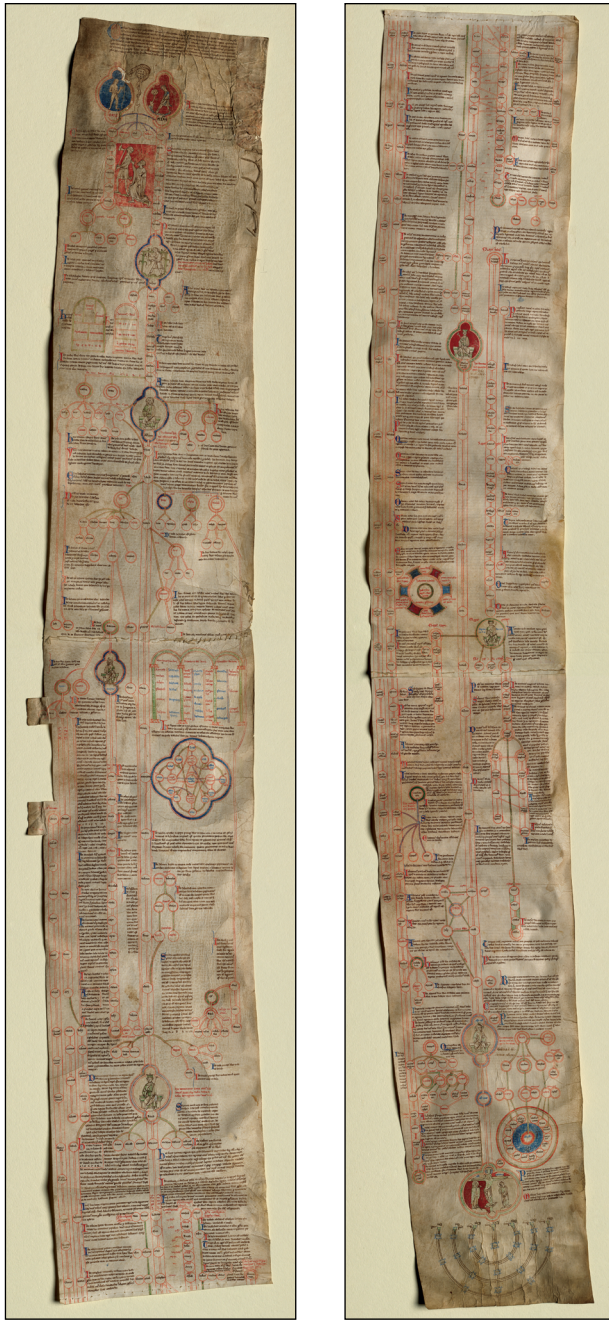


FIGURE 1. Roll in two parts, Peter of Poitiers, *Compendium historiae in genealogia Christi*, Canterbury, thirteenth century. Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art, J. H. Wade Fund 1973.S.a-b.

The *Compendium* became a standard introduction for historical chronicles, continuations that were often based on local histories.⁹ It subsequently served as the basis for other visual biblical, royal, and world histories, such as Giovanni da Udine's *Compilatio nova* and printed world chronicles including the *Fasciculus temporum* (Cologne, 1475) and Hartmann Schedel's *Weltchronik*, or Nuremberg Chronicle (Nuremberg, 1493). The *Compendium*, in other words, established a visual model for history that remains standard: the timeline.

FORM AND CONTENT

The *Compendium* is formatted as a genealogical flow chart. Beginning with medallions containing Adam and Eve, lines extend downward to the medallions labeled as their children, in turn connected to their children, and so on (fig. 2). Blocks of texts are situated around the medallions, describing persons and events. The center line (the *linea Christi*) continues, unbroken, until the birth of Christ. Alongside this center line, the *Compendium* also includes chronologically simultaneous lines. It shows, for instance, the synchronicity between the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah (fig. 3). Encompassing lineages that were not necessarily bloodlines, the genealogical chart also includes judges (descending from Moses) and priests (descending from Aaron).

The *Compendium* displays additional historical information in the form of diagrams independent of the main genealogical graph. Almost all copies contain three of these extra diagrams. The first shows the forty-two encampments of the Israelites in the desert in three different years, the second the placement of the tents of the twelve tribes of Israel around the Tabernacle (fig. 4), and the third a plan of Jerusalem (fig. 5). Many exemplars of the *Compendium* also include one or more cross sections of the Ark of Noah. These diagrams speak to the mode of theological study dominant at the

9 Andrea Worm, *Geschichte und Weltordnung: Graphische Modelle von Zeit und Raum in Universalchroniken vor 1500* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 2021).

university in Peter of Poitiers's time, a mode invested in the analysis of numerical details as the basis for exegesis.

The *Compendium* divides history into six ages (which begin respectively with Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, Zedekiah, and the birth of Christ), demarcated in some cases by illustrations. But the flow of the graph remains continuous. In the codex format this meant that scribes had to find solutions for representing continuity over page breaks, often in the form of labels or color coding. The roll format, on the contrary, lent itself to a linear, genealogical graph: Peter of Poitiers's great contribution to the visualization of history.

Manuscript Database and Digital Edition

MANUSCRIPT DATABASE

The *Compendium historiae* has never been properly edited and has been printed only once, in 1592, in what can be regarded as an antiquarian edition.¹⁰ The large number of manuscript witnesses, together with the graphic complexity of the *Compendium*, has made a critical edition nearly impossible. In 1954 Friedrich Stegmüller mentioned 75 manuscript witnesses.¹¹ Nearly fifty years later, Laura Alidori listed 164.¹² More recently, Jean-Baptiste Piggin provided a useful (if rather flawed) list of 273 manuscripts.¹³ One of the goals of the “History as a Visual Concept” project is to produce a database of the witnesses. This has involved, first, the verification of each entry given by Piggin and,

10 Ulrich Zwingli, ed., *Petri Pictaviensis Galli genealogia et chronologia sanctorum patrum* (Basel: per Leonhardum Ostenium, 1592).

11 Friedrich Stegmüller, ed., *Repertorium biblicum Medii Aevi*, vol. 4, *Commentaria: Auctores N–Q* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Francisco Suárez, 1954), 362–65.

12 Laura Alidori, “Il Plut.20.56 della Laurenziana: Appunti sull’iconografia dei manoscritti della *Genealogia* di Petrus Pictaviensis,” *Rivista di Storia della Miniatura* 6/7 (2001/2002): 157–70, at 166–68.

13 Jean-Baptiste Piggin, “Peter’s Stemma,” *Library of Latin Diagrams*, accessed 15 March 2023, <https://www.piggin.net/stemmahist/petercatalog.htm>.

second, a renewed effort to locate unknown copies. The current count of confirmed witnesses stands at 315.

The database will not only contain the standard information found in catalog entries (e.g., location, repository, folios, date) but will also feature visual and diagrammatic elements of the *Compendium*. This includes the layout of the graph, the design of the medallions, and which pictures and diagrams are present. In addition, the database will display textual co-transmission (e.g., the *Historia scholastica*) as well as diagrammatic and pictorial co-transmission. Items such as the allegorical seven-armed candelabrum or wind diagrams, often placed at the beginning or at the end of the *Compendium*, hint at the work's intellectual and cultural context.¹⁴

Each entry in the database will consist of a TEI document. Initially, this document will be filled with metadata available from library catalogs and secondary literature in fields such as “teiHeader,” and “msDesc.” Working with images from digitization campaigns, we will complete these TEI documents with more detailed visual and textual information. The TEI representation will contain references to relevant ontologies such as MeMO (The Medieval Manuscript Ontology) to model and relate the individual components to each other.¹⁵ Together, these data will create a picture of the textual, graphic, and pictorial tradition of the *Compendium*, thus allowing us to create an edition representing the most significant variants.

SUPERSTRUCTURE AND NAVIGATIONAL GRAPH

The basis of our edition will be an idealized and navigable form of the *Compendium*'s genealogical graph. This norm graph (or “NavGraph”) will

14 See Walter Cahn, “The Allegorical Menorah,” in *Tributes in Honor of James H. Marrow: Studies in Painting and Manuscript Illumination of the Late Middle Ages and Northern Renaissance*, ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Anne S. Korteweg (London: Harvey Miller, 2006), 117–26.

15 Sebastian Barzaghi, Monica Palmirani, and Silvio Peroni, “The Medieval Manuscript Ontology (MeMO),” accessed 15 March 2023, <https://irnerio-opendata.github.io/memo/current/memo.html>.

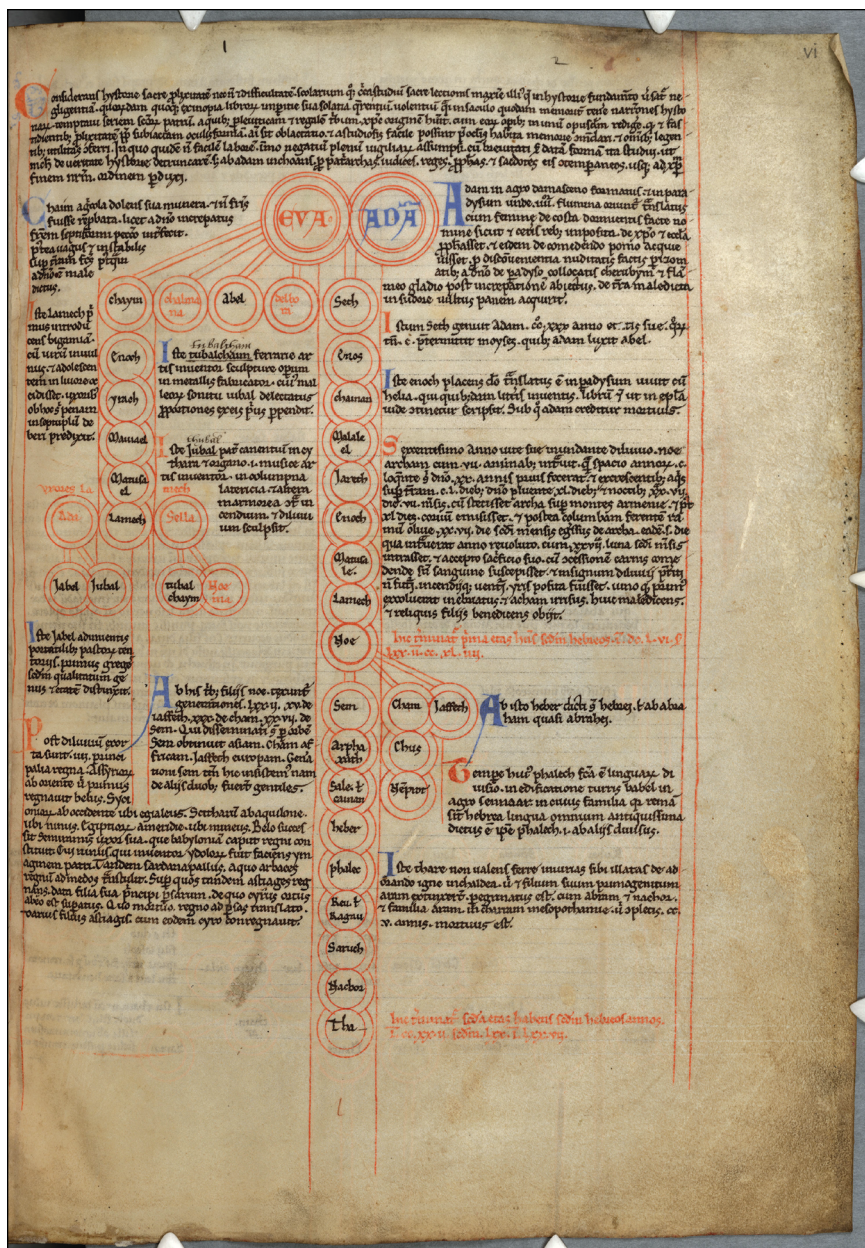


FIGURE 2. Adam, Eve, and descendants, Peter of Poitiers, *Compendium historiae in genealogia Christi*, France, early thirteenth century. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 29, fol. vir. Image courtesy of the Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

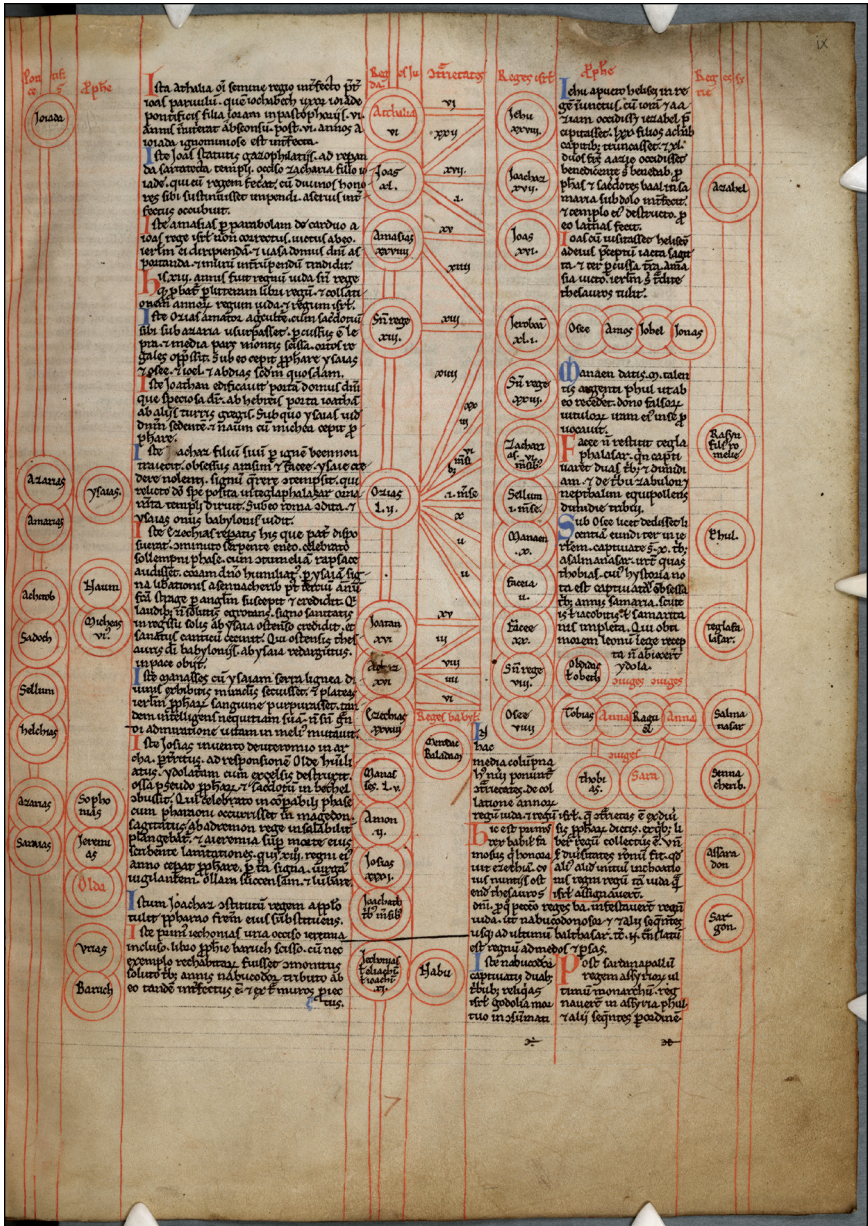


FIGURE 3. Kings of Judah and Israel, Peter of Poitiers, *Compendium historiae in genealogia Christi*, France, early thirteenth century. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 29, fol. iix. Image courtesy of the Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

serve as the portal to a “second layer.” Opened upon clicking, this second layer will display the textual and structural edition of single portions of the main graph, with links to digital facsimiles of the manuscripts representative of significant variants.

Many of the relevant manuscripts are already digitized and available via IIF manifests. The IIF infrastructure supports the sharing of image resources worldwide, allowing us to integrate the manuscript facsimiles into our edition without hosting them on our local servers.¹⁶ IIF viewers have the capability not only to display entire manuscript pages but also to capture zones within images accompanied by commentary and references, and they will be embedded in the *Compendium* edition.¹⁷

To model the *Compendium*'s structure and its variance, we have developed a “superstructure” system. The superstructure synthesizes the elements that appear across the manuscript tradition. This involves creating an identifier for each node, text, connection, diagram, and picture that may occur in the manuscripts. The superstructure ID for the Adam node (n-adam), for instance, identifies the medallion in the *Compendium* labeled “Adam,” independently from the single witnesses. Although the Adam medallion is present in most manuscripts, there are cases in which Adam and Eve appear together in a single medallion. In this case the node receives the ID “n-adam-eve.” As the ID “n-adam” is tagged as “canonic” and n-adam-eve as “variant,” n-adam appears in the code for the norm graph and n-adam-eve in the code for one of the variants shown in the second layer of the edition. In the digital version of the *Compendium*'s graph, this information can be accessed via a clickable section linking to the respective variants.

16 IIF consortium, “IIF | International Image Interoperability Framework,” accessed 5 August 2023, <https://iif.io/>.

17 J. C. Witt, “Digital Scholarly Editions and API Consuming Applications,” in *Digital Scholarly Editions as Interfaces*, ed. Roman Bleier, Martina Bürgermeister, Helmut W. Klug, Frederike Neuber, and Gerlinde Schneider (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2018), 219–47; Joris van Zundert, “On Not Writing a Review about *Mirador*: *Mirador*, IIF, and the Epistemological Gains of Distributed Digital Scholarly Resources,” *Journal of the Digital Medievalist* 11 (2018): 1–48, <https://doi.org/10.1699/dm.78>.

PHILOLOGICAL ASPECTS AND CRITICAL APPARATUS

Given that the *Compendium* has never been published in a critical edition and philological aspects have been widely ignored in recent scholarship, our work also entails an analysis of textual variance.¹⁸ Based on transcriptions of the earliest manuscript witnesses, we are currently establishing a critically annotated text of the so-called short version.¹⁹ Other manuscripts contain an “interpolated version,” which will be treated separately.²⁰ Eventually the edition will include the following apparatuses: (1) a critical apparatus, indicating significant variants of the manuscript witnesses;²¹ (2) an *apparatus biblicus*, providing references to the respective biblical books; (3) an *apparatus fontium*, identifying Peter of Poitiers’s sources (e.g., Peter Comestor, Flavius Josephus); and (4) an *apparatus testimoniorum*, listing the use of the work by subsequent authors. In the digital edition the reading text will appear with various options to simultaneously view scholarly annotations, an English translation, and transcriptions of several representative witnesses.

18 Limited observations on versions of the *Compendium* have been made in Moore, *The Works of Peter of Poitiers*, 100–101; and Stella Panayotova, “Peter of Poitiers’s *Compendium in Genealogia Christi*: The Early English Copies,” in *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages: Studies Presented to Henry Mayr-Harting*, ed. Richard Gameson and Henrietta Leyser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 327–41.

19 Early copies of the “short” version: Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 363; Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.15.5; Auxerre, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 145; Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, MS Ham. 503; Klosterneuburg, Augustiner-Chorherrenstift, MS 696; Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 8715; Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 29.

20 Early copies of the “interpolated” version: Cambridge, University Library, MS Dd. 1.16; London, British Library, Harley MS 658; Cambridge, MA, Houghton Library, MS Typ 216; Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf 39.1 Aug. 2°; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 17579 and MS lat. 15254.

21 The encoding of the critical text will be in accordance with the TEI guidelines for parallel segmentation; see “Critical Apparatus” in the TEI Guidelines for Electronic Text Encoding and Interchange, accessed 28 August 2023, <https://tei-c.org/release/doc/tei-p5-doc/en/html/TC.html#TCAPPS>.

Outlook

In the first decades after Peter of Poitiers introduced the *Compendium historiae in geneologia Christi* as a teaching aid in Paris, it took hold across the Latin West. Enjoying multivalent power as a didactic, spiritual, artistic, and political tool, the *Compendium* appeared in classrooms, ecclesiastical institutions, noble and royal courts, and personal libraries. Its ubiquity, while signaling the need for scholarly attention and a critical edition, is paradoxically what has rendered traditional editing almost impossible, given that the *Compendium's* functional multivalency mirrors its impressive graphic, pictorial, and textual variation.

Our edition project, therefore, will not only establish new ground for scholarly inquiry into intellectual, artistic, and political histories but will also allow for insights into the points where these histories intersect. While the digital approach captures the breadth and variation of the *Compendium's* tradition, the longevity of our edition will be ensured insofar as both texts and graphic structures will be encoded in TEI. Convertible into various publication formats, the edition is intended to be a platform for new directions in textual scholarship that confront graphicality and mediality as significant bearers of meaning.