

Lucas. glo. en. A.

INTRODUCTION

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THE BOUND MANUSCRIPT DESCRIBED AND ILLUSTRATED IN the following pages comes very close to my idea of a perfect old book: a Gospel of Luke produced in Canterbury nine centuries ago and given the name *Lucas glosatus cum A*, the ‘Glossed Luke with the letter A’. Unlike the majority of surviving manuscripts from the medieval period, the volume remains in its first binding. This particular feature first drew me to it when the book appeared at auction in 2009. A tactile skin, which we now know to be roe deer, covers a pair of solid oak boards. Together, this skin and wood protect 156 parchment leaves. On these translucent pages are written in Latin both the gospel text and an extensive commentary, later to be absorbed into the *Glossa ordinaria*. This commentary, a new text at the time, had come to England from France in the wake of the Norman Conquest. Its appearance in the manuscript, written between the lines of the main text and in the margins, speaks to the *mise en page* of a book at the time of its production nearly a millennium ago.

When my friend John Jeffrey, a bookbinder and Greek Orthodox priest, first held the book, I was taken aback to see him kiss it. Gradually, however, I began to understand the reverential aura a sacred object of this kind can transmit. I re-read Luke’s Gospel and tentatively dipped into the *Glossa ordinaria* (available online). A specially designed box was made by James Brockman to house this venerable yet vulnerable codex.

A manuscript of this age is a rare survivor in any condition. One so well preserved is, perhaps, little short of miraculous. Benedictine monks at St Augustine’s Abbey most likely made this glossed Luke. Unlike such monumental works as the Book of Kells or the Lindisfarne Gospels, which are a few centuries older, this copy is not illuminated. Even the

decoration is limited to a few initial letters in green, red and ochre on the first leaves. Paleographers refer to the style of the main script as 'prickly'. To my eye this characterful handwriting, like the ink itself, possesses an organic resonance. Extensive markings of different readers in the margins of many pages offer evidence of its thoughtful devotional use over the centuries.

More than an artefact, and more than a sacred biblical text, this book is a window into the English monastic world. The book remained at St Augustine's from the time it was made in the early Norman period until the Dissolution of 1538 when that way of life quite suddenly came to an end. From that event until 1800 the volume's location and owners are not known. If nothing else, we can speculate that it was benignly neglected. In the early twentieth century, the Glossed Luke was acquired by George Dunn, a distinguished English collector. A letter from Dunn to Sydney Cockerell of 6 February 1905 (unearthed by Bill Stoneman) amusingly refers to the book: 'I raided Quaritch's the other day with poor results. Only four things that suited my fancy and purse – not one among them that you would envy, except a downright ugly Lucas glossatus ... in its original binding.' (Houghton: MS Eng 1106/16).

Books of such quality – 'downright ugly' or not – rarely come on the market. Though known to scholars since Dunn's time, this manuscript had last appeared in public in 1968 at the sale of the books of Sir Alfred Chester Beatty – apparently a cast-off from his remarkable collection. It then passed to Sir Alfred's friend John Galvin, an Australian-born newspaper, mining and cattle baron. Galvin died in 1994, and in 2009 one of his heirs consigned the book to Sotheby's in London.

Once acquired, it was my desire to learn more about *Lucas glosatus* and share its story with others. To this end, I asked Bruce Barker-Benfield, a senior curator at the Bodleian Library, to write the principal essay in this booklet. An authority on medieval manuscripts, he is the editor of the three-volume catalogue of the library of St Augustine's Abbey in the *Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues* series. When I brought the book to Oxford, Bruce examined it from cover to cover, educating me along the way. His close inspection revealed features that had previously eluded scholars. One of these, a shadowy letter A on the spine, may relate to the last part of the book's name, '*cum A*' [plate 21]. The essay Bruce has written, sprinkled with humour and speculation, evinces his quiet enthusiasm for this book and his deep knowledge of the world it once inhabited. Bruce's fellow medieval scholar Christopher de Hamel remarked to me after reading the essay, 'I know of no other account of a single manuscript which so comprehensively encompasses the history of monastic life in England'.





Bruce begins with an account of St Augustine's Abbey, its extensive library and late medieval catalogue, describing what is known of its other seventeen copies of the Gospel of Luke text. Significantly, none of these is known to have survived. He then turns to the production of the book itself in the Abbey's scriptorium, analysing the respective roles of the four scribes who wrote out the main text and gloss, and of the maker of the elegant, though unfinished 'arabesque' decoration. Bruce's story continues with an account of the gloss and the tradition from which this commentary emerged. From these original textual elements, he turns to the annotations of three of the book's monastic readers. After considering the reading and borrowing of books at St Augustine's, Bruce takes us into the library room itself, speculating on its layout and reconstructing the arrangement of the volumes on the shelves. Concluding with an account of the more recent history of *Lucas glosatus*, he offers a telling observation: 'Just as one stray leaf carries the DNA of its parent book, so one book can represent a library'. In a manner that is no less engaging than scholarly, Bruce has hit precisely on my idea of the perfect essay about this perfect old book.

I am grateful not only for his contribution but for his patience with the delay in publication. To this, I add my thanks to Andrew Honey, Bruce's Bodleian colleague. A member of the Library's conservation team and a highly regarded bookbinding historian, Andrew produced a detailed description of the binding on *Lucas glosatus*, and oversaw the book's photography. When further conversations led to the plan that Andrew's account might be expanded for inclusion in this booklet, I also welcomed his idea to prepare a parallel description of another twelfth-century St Augustine's volume (MS Bodl. 826) also in its original binding. While necessarily technical, these descriptions make an important contribution to the scholarship on medieval bookbinding. Detailed photographs of the bindings' components, along with Andrew's skillful drawings of sewing and other generally hidden features, complement his insightful observations.

Since acquiring *Lucas glosatus*, I had been curious to know if there was a scientific technique that could, in a non-invasive way, determine what animal's hide covers the volume. Until the autumn of 2012 I made little progress. Then a contact at the National Museum of Scotland put me in touch with Professor Matthew Collins at the University of York, who reported that his colleague Dr Sarah Fiddyment had developed 'a non-invasive analysis to enable identification of animal skin'. In December 2012 I brought the book to York. The method, developed from traditional conservation techniques, involved lightly applying a PVC eraser to the skin's surface and collecting the waste eraser fragments from which minute amounts of collagen could be

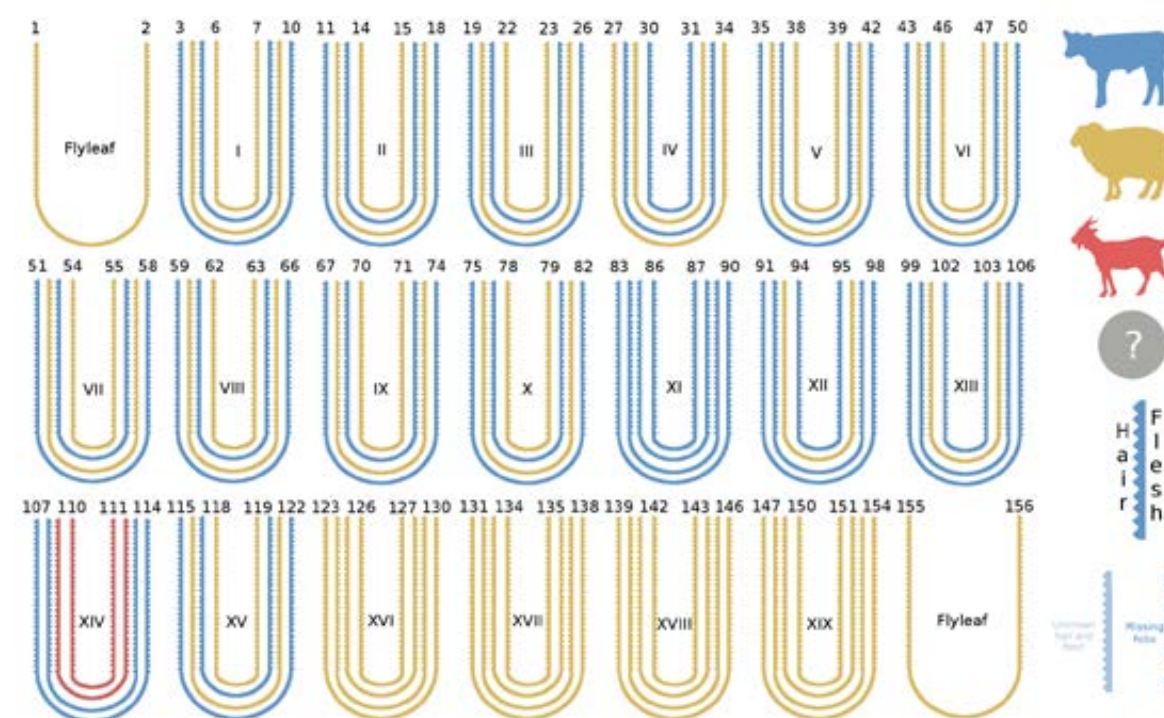
extracted. While it was designed primarily for parchment rather than an alum-tawed skin, such as is on the Glossed Luke, it transpired that there were sufficient quantities of the collagen protein on the surface to obtain a sample for analysis. The multi-step method, which used a rather large machine called a Matrix-Assisted Laser Desorption/Ionization Time of Flight Mass Spectrometer, can be seen in a five-minute video by searching the terms ‘University of York, parchment, archaeology, ZooMS’ and scrolling down to the YouTube link. A few days after my visit to York, Sarah and Matthew shared the results. The book was bound in deerskin, specifically roe deer. The small strap, which at one time connected the boards, was thought to be from a red deer or fallow deer. A more detailed exchange of information with Dr Naomi Sykes, director of the Fallow Deer Project at Nottingham University, provided context and interpretation to the identification of roe deer. These results were first reported in an article entitled ‘Holy Roe!’ in the journal *Deer* (Summer 2014).

I now had the answer to my original question about the skin of the binding. However, the scientific investigation did not end there. On a visit to Edinburgh, Sarah Fiddymment and her colleague Jiří Vnouček (a conservator at the Royal Library in Copenhagen) used the method, as well as photography and close visual inspection, to analyze all of the manuscript’s parchment leaves. Each of the nineteen quires, the primary binding unit, consists of four folded parchment sheets (bifolia), or eight leaves – thus sixteen pages to a quire. The results were surprising. They reveal a complex arrangement of the quires, represented in the diagram opposite.

The first ten quires are composed of equal numbers of interleaved calf and sheep bifolia. (The order reversed in quire 4.) Quire 11 is made entirely from calf parchment, while 12 and 13 each have a single sheep bifolium. Quire 14 then presents something unexpected: two goatskin bifolia (comprising half a goat) within two of calf. While goats were not an animal at all removed from the environs of southern England, it was not expected that any had wandered into the St Augustine’s scriptorium in Canterbury – even if briefly. It may be a coincidence, but it is in the same quire (14) as the goatskin leaves that the single reference to a goat (hædum – or more properly ‘kid’) is found in the gospel text (Luke 15. 29, ‘and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends’, on fol. 107r). Continuing the sequence: quire 15 looks back to the earlier calf-sheep arrangement of quires 1–10, while the final four quires (like the front and back flyleaf bifolia) are sheep parchment.

Jiří Vnouček’s analysis of the markings of each bifolium to determine the part of the respective animal from which it comes, concludes that

Lucas glosatus was made from twelve sheep (4 bifolia per sheep); seven calves (4 bifolia per calf); and a goat (or rather half a goat). Adding in the roe and red deer, we have quite a zoological array in a single volume. The detailed results of the work of Collins, Fiddymment, Vnouček and their colleagues is published in *Bioinformatics* (2020), ‘How to Get Your Goat: Automated Identification of Species from MALDI-ToF Spectra’ (available online: <https://doi.org/10.1093/bioinformatics/btaa181>).



[PLATE 3] Diagram devised by Jiří Vnouček and Sarah Fiddymment of the quire structure of *Lucas glosatus*, indicating species identification and hair and flesh sides of the parchment bifolia.

Courtesy of Sarah Fiddymment, Jiří Vnouček and the ‘Beasts to Craft’ Group

As this was the first time the parchment of a medieval manuscript had been so systematically scrutinized in this way, the significance of these findings, however surprising or however random, remains a matter of current discussion among scholars. Until further codices are analyzed much necessarily remains speculative.

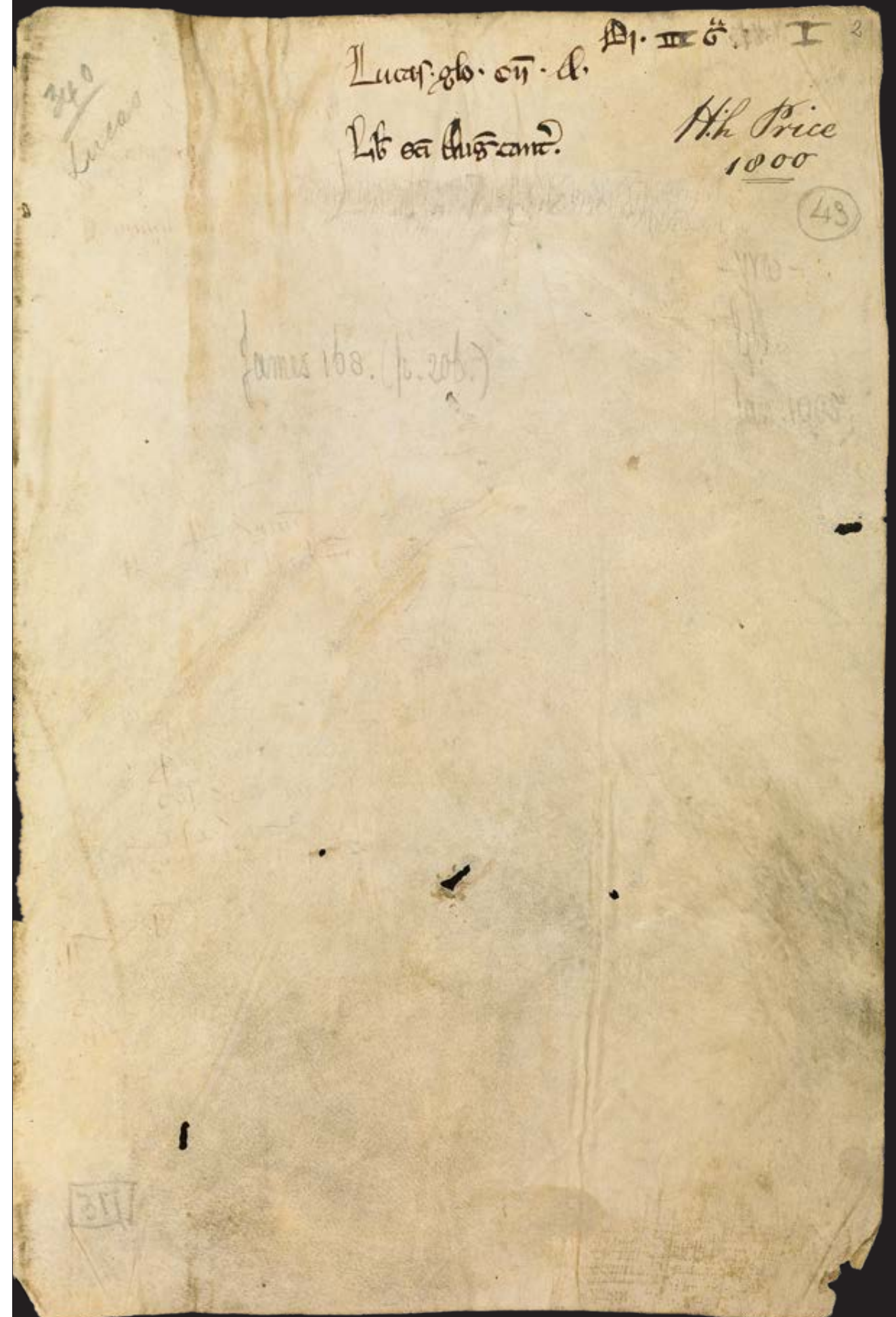
In any event, the results were of enough interest to announce them at a gathering of medievalists, book historians, scientists and others which took place in May 2017 at the Bodleian Library. It was led by Professor Peter Stallybrass, director of the ‘Beasts and Books Project’,

a collaboration between researchers at the universities of Pennsylvania, York, Manchester, and Virginia. The Project combines archaeobiology and codicological, historical and literary analysis to discover what we might learn from working on parchment manuscripts using every possible means now available. Building on these approaches, the general aim is ‘to analyze individual books in as much detail as possible, to provide a model for the 360° study of any book.’

Once again, I took the *Lucas glosatus* in its protective box down to Oxford. What followed were two fascinating days of talks, discussions, and above all close inspection by expert eyes not only of the Glossed Luke but also of a dozen or so other downright wonderful manuscripts from the Bodleian’s collections, including ms Bodl. 826 – the St Augustine’s manuscript in Andrew Honey’s comparative article in this booklet.

Writers and photographers from magazine *Science* covered the symposium and produced articles both in print (Gibbons, ‘Biology of the Book’, *Science* 346–9, 2017) and online (search the terms ‘sciencemag, goats and bookworms’). These pieces, and the symposium itself, brought the story to a far wider audience than I might ever have imagined. Nevertheless, it is in the pages which follow that the best account is to be found. Having said that, it only remains for me to invite you, after reading this booklet, to come to Edinburgh to see this ‘down-right ugly’ *Lucas glosatus cum A* for yourself.

Edinburgh, May 2020



[PLATE 4] Fol. 2r (front flyleaf): medieval and later inscriptions

overleaf

[PLATE 5] Fols. 92v–93r (Luke 13. 1–4, 4–7, parable of the barren fig tree): full view of open book, written by main Scribe I and Gloss-scribe iii, with book-mark of braided green silk