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CHAPTER SIX

Description of the manuscript used

The only witness extant of the Commentary on the Isagoge attributed to Thomas Manlevelt is the manuscript Erfurt, Bibl. Ampl. 288 f. 1\textsuperscript{r}–43\textsuperscript{v} (henceforward: siglum E). This manuscript is the basic text of the present edition. It is a quite good manuscript. The text seems to have been written by an able enough scribe, and is of good overall standard. Obviously, however, the text is incomplete or corrupt in some places, and is thwarted by self-repetition in other places, not to mention the minor mistakes and cases of miswriting, apart from the occasionally left-out 'non'.

I have for the present edition used E by working from a microfilm, without having the original manuscript at hand. So I could not attempt to give anything approaching a full description of the codex. For such a full description of the codex, the reader should consult the work done by Schum and Markowski in their respective catalogues of the Amplonian Library in Erfurt. Based on their work, however, the technicalities may be summarized thus:

288. paper with a watermark showing a pear with some foliage; bound in wood with green leather back; two-column text in quarto, format 215\times 150\text{mm.}; middle or latter half of the fourteenth century; 146+1 folios.

f. 1\textsuperscript{r}–43\textsuperscript{v}: Thomas Manlevelt (\textit{attr.}), Questiones libri Porphirii. \textit{Inc.}: Queritur circa initium Porphirii, utrum necesse sit aliquem scire. \textit{Des.}: Expl. explicat qui plus vult scribat. Expl. quest. libri Porph.

f. 43\textsuperscript{v}–145\textsuperscript{r}: Thomas Manlevelt (\textit{attr.}), Questiones super Predicamenta. \textit{Inc.}: Circa libr. pred. Ar. potest primo queri utrum aliquid sit equivocum. \textit{Des.}: sicud per ipsam cras – ad argumentum vero in oppositum, quid sit demonstrandum.

f. 146\textsuperscript{v} + 1: \textit{tabula questionum} to both these commentaries.

The technicalities as given by Markowski, far more concise as they are, do contain some additions as well as some corrections to the version that is explicitly referred to by Schum. The main correction is in the fixation

1 Markowski 1987, 201; Schum 1887, 528f.
of the number of commentaries in this manuscript to only two, instead of Schum's three. Markowski's limiting the number of commentaries to only two: one on the *Isagoge* and the other on the *Categories*, is correct; Schum's including a commentary on the *De interpretatione* is incorrect.

As can be gathered from Schum, the manuscript of which the *Questiones libri Porphyrii* forms the first entry used to have on the outside a paper note saying '13. loyce', which is to say that it was listed as number 13 among the logical works in the Catalogus Amplonii, the catalogue made by the collector Amplonius himself, and in which it was specified: 'Item, questiones optime Thome Manlevelt super veteri arte, videlicet: super ysagogis Porphirii, predicamentis Aristotelis et libris peryermenias Aristotelis.'

There is no doubt that the *questiones* on the *Isagoge* take up the first 43 folios of the manuscript, and that the *questiones* on the *Categories* start from there. But Schum is certainly mistaken when he lets this commentary on the *Categories* end on folio 140 with 'ad argumentum in oppositum dicitur, quod sententia Arist. est necessaria,' after which the *questiones* on the *De interpretatione* are supposed to begin with 'Nunc queritur consequenter circa capitulum de prius; primo queritur utrum aliquid sit prius primo tempore' and end on folio 145 with 'sicud per ipsam cras – ad argumentum vero in oppositum, quid sit demonstrandum.' In fact there is no trace of a commentary on *De interpretatione* in the manuscript. Markowski, not repeating the mistake made by his predecessor, rightly divides the manuscript in two separate texts: the *questiones* on the *Isagoge* taking up folio's 1–43°, the *questiones* on the *Categories* taking up folio's 43°–145°. The portion of the manuscript mistakenly identified by Schum as being the commentary on *De interpretatione* evidently starts off, as is already clear from the fragment of text provided by Schum himself, with a discussion of one of the so-called post-Predicamenta: *prius*. It is not clear whether the original description of the text by Amplonius himself was wrong, or if Schum was simply wrong in identifying his own manuscript number 288 with the original Amplonian manuscript number 13. It is highly unlikely, in any case, that the manuscript 288 is missing its latter part, which should have contained the commentary on the *De interpretatione*, hinted at by Amplonius. In fact the manuscript is neatly rounded off by a

complete listing of all foregoing questiones on the Isagoge and Categories, suggesting that the two texts should be (or in any case were) read as a whole.

Despite their punctual execution, the small, sharply-pointed letters of the manuscript make rather hard reading. The beginning of a new questio is marked by larger writing. The initials, which mainly toward the end of the Questiones libri Porphirii are sometimes missing, are in black, and rudimentarily decorated. These decorations contain fleurs-de-lys protruding from the left end of the initial, and fishscales filling up the open space within the initial. Not mentioned by either Schum or Markowski are the funny little drawings that are now and then inserted between text blocks. There is something looking like a warning finger extending from the initial on folio 34°; in other instances there are two blessing fingers. There is a fish for example on folio 25°. From folio 17° onward, the initials are decorated with sombre, but comically executed faces.3

There was at least one hand at work in the manuscript apart from the one that wrote the body of the text. At the top of the very first folio there is the remark, identified by Schum as stemming from the late fourteenth century, that is to say, a couple of decennia after the completing of the text itself: ‘Hec questiones fuerunt compilate per Thom. Manlevel Anglicum doctorem solempnem.’4 The manuscript itself contains many variants, erasures, corrections and scribblings in the margins, which at least in some minor cases seem to be by another hand. But I cannot say this with certainty.

In the course of the text there do occur some variations in the handwriting, but these are so minor that they do not justify however the conclusion that one scribe took over the work from another. For example, from the fifth questio onward, which runs from 4th to 5th, the text is

3 I am not sure how much is to be made of these iconographical bits and pieces. The fish and the fishscales may be an all too general Christian reference. But one cannot help but notice that the fleur-de-lys as a heraldic symbol is particularly associated with the French monarchy. And the hand with two extended fingers may refer to the royal scepter, which in France at least since the days of Louis IX, better known as Saint Louis (1214–1270), was tipped with an open hand of benediction on the top, known as the main-de-justice. This would give our manuscript a distinctive French aspect. Which, of course, fits in quite well with Manlevelt having spent an important part of his career in Paris.

4 If, however, Markowski is right in dating the body of the work to the thirteen seventies, eighties or even nineties, there seems to be room to surmise that the added remark is not from a later date after all.
written in a more spacious hand, that makes easier reading than the text before that. The word 'sicud' here is written in full and ends in a 't' instead of the 'd' that rounded off the abbreviations before. This notwithstanding, it seems improbable that another hand was at work here, seeing that other typical characteristics as well as the overall character of the writing remain unaltered.

Textual oddities remain constant throughout the text as well. Apart from the alternation of 'sicud' and 'sicut', mention can be made of the writing of 'scit' instead of 'sit', which is clearly meant, of 'Scicero' instead of 'Cicero', and 'sivitate' instead of 'civitate'. It is unclear what conclusions (if any) may be drawn from such spelling about the geographical origin of the manuscript.

In a frame under column 4th is written 'quia est eius principium', which is the beginning of the text of the next column: 5th. This framed little string of words should best be viewed upon as an 'editorial' device. After all, four folios together made up one quarto. The framed little text may thus have served either to help make sure that the text, once completed, is bound in the right order of quarto's, or as reminder for the scribe himself: once the first quarto is laid aside, the second quarto must begin thus and so. Similar examples of pieces of texts announcing the continuation of one quarto to the next are to be found at the bottom of 12th, 20th, 28th and 36th – which, incidentally, suggests a grouping of quarto's in pairs.

Considering the number and the visual rather than aural character of the clerical errors, the repeating and the omitting of lines, the transposition of words, the miswriting of certain words occasionally resulting in the replacement of a nonsense word for a word having a superficial resemblance to the nonsense word as well as sense in that given context, one can hardly come to any other conclusion than that the text edited here is a copy of another text.

The slight variations in text width, letter height and line spacing suggest that the present text was not made without interruptions. Some fragments seem to have been inserted at a later stage, at spaces left open for this purpose.

In the catalogues by Schum and Markowski, no reasons are given why this manuscript is supposed to originate from the middle or later half of the fourteenth century. The guess however seems to be well-educated nevertheless.

The writing material is paper, which indeed was already a common material in the middle of the fourteenth century. The text is written
in two columns, and has a number of characteristics which, if I take S.H. Thomson’s handbook on *Latin Bookhands* for my compass, leads me to conclude that it may very well stem from the fourteenth century. Schum’s estimation that it stems from the middle of the century can be endorsed, if this is to include the sixties and seventies of the fourteenth century. And Markowski’s estimation that it is from the seventies, eighties or nineties is not really far off the mark, either.

Schum does not say anything about the place of origin of either the manuscript or its scribe, and neither does Markowski. But Germany seems to be a very likely candidate, taking into account Thomson’s catalogue.

Bared of all aesthetic pretence, the rapid hand of this manuscript has a more than superficial likeness to the various examples presented by Thomson from the second half of the fourteenth and the first decades of the fifteenth century in Germany, especially that of a 1367 collection of various commentaries on Aristotle and other scholastic texts written, probably, at Cologne. Like the 1367 collection, this manuscript at least in some places reveals great haste. Thomson links the scholastic hand to the legal, with which it had many features in common, in ductus, ligatures, shading, abbreviations and in the formation of individual letters.

Closer scrutiny reveals that some individual letters in the manuscript have a form that came to characterize the German manuscripts from the third quarter of the fourteenth century onwards. For example, the initial ‘h’ has a straight last stroke which we may find hereafter in German scripts. While the final ‘s’, which is a reversed ‘3’, closed or almost closed at the right, will appear consistently hereafter in German scholastic hands.

Other letters in the manuscript show a remarkable resemblance to their counterparts in Thomson’s 1367 example as well. In the one text as well as in the other, only the lower loop of the letter ‘a’ is made in the first stroke; both the ‘o’ and the ‘e’ are made with two jabs and are frequently hardly distinguishable; the letter ‘r’ shows a separation at the top, but the horizontal stroke is connected to the vertical at the bottom.

The evidence, of course, is not conclusive. But a random look at the book on medieval manuscripts by Arndt and Tangl leaves room for no other conclusion than that the greatest resemblance of this manuscript is to the reproduction therein of a text from 1374.

5 Thomson 1969.
6 Arndt and Tangl 1976.
So the hypothesis seems warranted that the manuscript used for this edition stems from Germany, around the 1360s or 1370s. One conclusion, then, to be drawn from this hypothesis is that this manuscript can hardly be expected to be an autograph by the presumed author of this commentary on Porphyry, if the addition ‘Anglicus’ to his name really means that Thomas Manlevelt is an Englishman. As explained by Thomson, the geographical peculiarities of a manuscript say a lot about the provenance of its scribe, and less about the place where it was written. A scribe tends to retain the peculiarities of the environment where he acquired his penmanship, no matter where in the medieval world he was to practise his art later on. So an Englishman would not trade his English way of writing, even when practising his art in Germany. If this text really is Manlevelt’s and if Manlevelt really is an Englishman, the manuscript must be reckoned on this evidence alone to be one that was not written out by the author himself, but one that was written off by a German scribe. In this case, if the 1360s or 1370s really are the periods around which the manuscript was written, it is still possible that the original text stems from a somewhat earlier time.

But let us not make too much out of this. Even if my educated guess about the German hand is right, this does not necessarily mean that the manuscript itself was written in Germany. It could as well be taken as an indication that the scribe may have been a German. And this scribe may or may not have been working in the German heartland; he might just as well have been doing his job somewhere else. Or this scribe was not a German at all, but one who merely took a German education and was writing in a more or less ‘German’ hand.

Earlier on in this Introduction, I have brought forward some pieces of circumstantial evidence suggesting that this particular text stems from pre-university Louvain. As for now, it must be noted that my speculations on the German hand of writing is anything but incompatible with the text stemming from Louvain. The scribe may have been a German, working in Louvain. Or the scribe was a Brabantian, writing in a German hand.

All geographical speculations set aside, the overall high quality of the text, together with its obvious copy-character, suggests that the present text is not too far distanced from the basis text; it may even

\[7\] Surmises about the probable time and place of origin of our manuscript may be strengthened by comparison of this to other manuscripts as well. For now it must suffice to compare our manuscript with the readily available, well-chosen examples in the books by Thomson and by Arndt and Tangl.
be a copy of a first-hand reportatio or rather, a first-hand compilation of Manlevelt’s Questiones libri Porphirii. But as long as this is the only known manuscript of this particular text, no definitive conclusions as to its precise status can be drawn.

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8 On the diversity of texts captured under the general heading of ‘reportatio’, see Hamesse 1997. On the sense in which this text is to be taken as a compilation, see above, section 3.1.