

Leigh Britton

This manuscript is written on parchment and measures 240 x 140 mm, and contains one hundred fifty folios. The type of paper it is written on is vellum. Initially the term was used to describe parchment made from calfskin; however, the term became more loosely used to describe parchments that come from a variety of animal skins. The parchment is extremely durable. I noticed that there is an inconsistency with the texture of the book, but through research I found that vellum is a multi-textured parchment. There is typically a smooth side and a more grainy side, which is due to the hairy side of the animal skin. There are also inconsistencies with the overall coloration and tone of the parchment paper. I initially thought that maybe the manuscript was pieced together from other works, but the inconsistency in color could easily be due to variations in treatment of each animal skin used. There are also a number of wormholes throughout the manuscript, which is common for texts written on vellum.

The text contains wide margins that are approximately two inches in length. The lines are long with each page containing forty-one lines. The manuscript is printed in small gothic letters, using black ink. The first letters of some of the lines appear to be bolded. Latin is the language in which it is written. Some of the characters are darker than others. This could be attributed to age of the book or also to variations in treatment of the animal skin. Upon further scrutiny of the text, I personally wonder if the text had multiple writers who trained in the same style due to inconsistencies in the handwriting. One thing to note as well is presence of small characters written in black on the sides of some

pages. They are comparable to page numbers in modern pieces with the exception of its placement on the side of the page and its presence on only a small percentage of pages.

This text is also considered to be an illuminated manuscript due to the use of color throughout the text. The manuscript contains an incipit, which is written in red that introduces the text. There are a number of paragraphs that are written entirely in red, some in a lighter shade of red than others. Also many of the paragraphs begin with a beautifully painted single character, written in red and trimmed with blue in a very ornate fashion, which measures about a half inch in height. Other pages contain a similar character, also written in red, that span about half the height of the page's text. More than likely, the characters were inserted into the text after the primary portion of the text was written.

The exterior of the manuscript is comprised of Moroccan red leather and it is gilded with gold. The binding is slightly tattered; thus, it is paramount to handle the manuscript with care.

The title of this manuscript is *The Aurora* written by Peter Riga. Born in France in 1140, Peter Riga grew up in a middleclass household. He studied the arts, philosophy, and theology in schools of Paris, and later became known as a renowned poet. Influenced by John Gower, he was considered a master theologian and became a regular canon at Reims Cathedral. Aware of his poetic and theologically critical mind, his colleagues encouraged him to draw allegorical parallels of the Pentateuch. Upon completion of this work, "he called his book *Aurora*, for just as aurora dissipates darkness of night, so too his book,

dissipating the darkness and obscurities of the Old Testament, glows with lightning flashes of truth and shining sparks of allegories. And just as the angel, after nocturnal wrestling with Jacob, said to him “Let me go; it is Aurora,” so too, after wrestling with his book, he can say these same words, “Dimitte me; aurora est.”¹ “*The Aurora* illustrates the medieval concept of Scripture as a ‘fount of living water’ flowing into new channels in answer to new needs. An anonymous preface offers the poem to its readers as more valuable than the Pentateuch: Peter Riga wrote in verse, not prose, and his allegories added Christ’s pearls to Moses’ diamond, a conceit derived from Peter’s own preface.”² This description of Riga’s work shows the profound impact that *The Aurora* made during the middle ages and suggests its success in shifting interpretations of Scripture so that it may be useful and practical giving the current climate and conditions of the time. Due to his poetic genius and critical mind, he also brought new life and appreciation to Scripture. Beryl Smalley posits “Peter forestalls boredom by rhetorical amplification.”³

The initial work is believed to have been written near the conclusion of the twelfth century. The most recent bounding of this particular copy took place in 1810 in Morocco. The piece was owned by Count D. Boutourlin of Florence. It

¹ Peter Riga and Paul Beichner: *Aurora: Petra Rigae Biblio Versificata: A Verse Commentary on the Bible* (Indiana. University of Notre Dame, 1965), 16.

² Beryl Smalley, *Aurora: Petra Rigae Biblio Versificata: A Verse Commentary on the Bible* Vol. 41, No. 2: *Speculum* 1966), 4:312.

³ Smalley, *Speculum*, 4:312.

was also owned by the following individuals throughout the centuries: Techener; Joseph Barrois; Bertram Ashburnham, 4th Earl of Ashburnham; Frederick Ferris Thompson before making its way to Union Theological Seminary in 1923.

The Aurora is a most popular verse Bible of the Middle Ages with an emphasis on the allegorical and moral interpretation. It served as a permeation for medieval perspectives on scripture. It begins with the prologue to the Bible and covers the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Riga went on to versify nearly the entire bible. *The Aurora* is considered a Christian classic. During the Middle Ages, it was reproduced more than two hundred fifty times. In this particular reproduction, additional commentary was added. This was evident due to additional notes featured in the margins. *The Aurora* was used as both a devotional and an educational tool for formal schooling. Both monasteries and convents used it, and it was the basis for lectures in the early thirteenth century focusing on metrics and ethics. It was considered comparable in academic caliber to Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*. In the later thirteenth century, *The Aurora* as well as non-biblical texts of the like were gradually phased out of academic curriculums and used primarily as reference books.

The Aurora was also a staple in most noteworthy libraries throughout Europe. "It seems that every monastic or cathedral library in England in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries possessed a copy, shelved with the Bibles, histories, or volumes of poetry. What is true of England is doubtless true of

France.”⁴ A number of lines are currently found in Migne’s *Patrologia Latina*” which is translated as “poor substitute.”

Between 1170 and 1200, a number of editions were added with three becoming quite notable. The first edition contains an allegorical and moral commentary on the names in the geology of Christ. It also contains a debate of the trial of Antipater. Included in this work are the preface, Pentateuch (Torah) Losue, Ludicum, Ruth, I-IV Regum, Machabeorum, and Evangelium. Included in the second edition are Danielis, Liber Tobie and Ludith. In addition, the prologue was added to complete Evangelium. In the third edition, Liber Lob, Actus Aposolorum, and Cantica canticorum were added. Although there are a number of edition and reproductions, it is interesting to note that *The Aurora* has never been printed in its entirety, only in extracts. Aegidius of Paris contributed a preface and an extensive amount of additional verses and claims to have improved upon the original manuscript. Many regard Aegidius of Paris as the joint author of *The Aurora*. Whether it was coauthored or written exclusively by Peter Riga, *The Aurora* is undoubtedly one of the most influential and graceful documents of the era. Smalley posits, “*The Aurora* serves as a sample of twelfth-century poetics. Peter shows talent as well as facility in handling this material.”⁵ As I look upon on the current manuscript, the same facility that is required to handle and preserve this manuscript is symbolic of the legacy left behind by Peter Riga.

⁴ Riga and Biechner, *Aurora*, 27.

⁵ Smalley, *Speculum*, 4:312.

