

An Italian Visitor to the Library, c. 1525

On an unknown day in an unknown year, but probably sometime in the mid 1520s, New College received a library visit from an unknown Italian. He took a note of the books that caught his eye and his list survives in the form of a contemporary copy now in the Vatican Library, MS Reginensis latinus 2099.¹ New College was in fact one of eighteen institutional libraries in England which this anonymous Italian visited. His identity and the purpose of his select lists are nowhere stated, but there is one available known quantity, which is the identity of the man who had this copy made. He was the Italian Marcello Cervini (1501–1555), created cardinal in 1539 and consecrated as Pope Marcellus II on 9 April 1555, twenty-two days before his death. The first column of the document is in his hand, after which he gave the job to his principal amanuensis, a man whose handwriting is familiar from Cervini's letter books.²

The learned Cervini, a distinguished humanist scholar and reformer, would have found much of immediate interest in our document. He was the prime mover in some of the great printing projects of Tridentine Rome: revised editions of the bible, works of the Fathers, conciliar literature and the fundamental texts of canon law, as well as the Greek and Latin classics. He and his circle prized manuscripts over print for the possibility that these might contain textual variants to inform their work. It made of old libraries a happy hunting ground and it is no surprise that Cervini should have wanted a copy of this document. That he was not personally involved in this bibliographical tour is established by the fact that it must have taken place before August 1534, since a report is included on the library of the Franciscan Observants at Southampton who were expelled at that time when they refused the oath of supremacy. In 1534 the young Marcello Cervini had never left Italy and was not yet in a position to foster a bibliographical tour in England, a country which he would never visit.

The identity of the visitor will not be easy to resolve because his reports are so spare. Each institution is named in a heading and the select list of titles is arranged in a column underneath. There is no date or rubric, no signature, and no explanation as to the basis of selection. Thirteen of the lists are for religious houses, which would all be dissolved between 1534 and 1540, and five are for secular colleges in Oxford, which were not dissolved (albeit that was a close-run thing). The Italian's first list is from the London Franciscans 'in Anglia'. He also viewed the Carmelite house in London, the Benedictine abbey of Chertsey in Surrey, the Franciscan convents in Reading and Southampton, Hyde abbey in Winchester, along with Winchester cathedral and the city's Franciscan and Dominican convents, the Benedictine abbey at Abingdon, and eight libraries in Oxford. The locations of the houses is enough to suggest an itinerary from London into Surrey and the Thames valley to Oxford, then south to Abingdon, Winchester, and finally Southampton where this visitor presumably embarked for home.

If we were to seek a learned Italian with reason to visit England and an interest in manuscripts, then a name which presents itself is that of Girolamo Ghinucci (1480–1541), absentee bishop of Worcester, who was papal nuncio in England in 1520–21, 1525, and again in 1526. He was a friend and ally of Cardinal Wolsey's, whose magnificent Oxford foundation of

¹ This document and the following discussion is treated more fully in my essay, 'Cardinal Marcello Cervini (1501–1555) and English Libraries', in *Books and Bookmen in Early Modern Britain. Essays presented to James P. Carley*, ed. James Willoughby & Jeremy Catto (Toronto, 2018), forthcoming.

² These registers occupy seventy volumes in the Archivio di Stato in Florence, in large part unpublished. The largest published portion is contained in *Concilium Tridentinum*, 13 vols (Freiburg, 1901–38). An extensive modern literature exists on Cervini's life, career, and influence. The best introductions are W. V. Hudon, *Marcello Cervini and Ecclesiastical Government in Tridentine Italy* (DeKalb, IL, 1992), and C. Quaranta, *Marcello II Cervini (1501–1555). Riforma della Chiesa, concilio, Inquisizione* (Bologna, 2010). Also S. Giombi, *Un ecclesiastico Tridentino al governo diocesano: Marcello II Cervini (1501–1555) e la riforma della Chiesa fra centro e periferia*, *Fonti e studi* 13 (Ancona, 2010); and id. 'Marcello Cervini e la predicazione', in *Papa Marcello II Cervini e la Chiesa della prima metà del '500: atti del Convegno di studi storici, Montepulciano, 4 maggio 2002*, ed. C. Prezzolini & V. Novembri (Montepulciano, 2003), pp. 127–98.

Cardinal College was established in July 1525. In the May of the following year, Wolsey wrote to Ghinucci to enlist his help in finding Greek books to be copied for his college's library. Ghinucci affirmed that he would arrange for copies to be made of books not only in the papal library but also in Venice, where he thought some could be found which were not in Rome. By subsequent letters he sent catalogues of the Venetian library and of the Greek books in the pope's library, this latter having been drawn up in answer to Wolsey's request.³ Cardinal College, still only half-built, was brought to an end by Wolsey's fall from power in October 1529 and his death in November 1530. There can be no doubt that any learned Italian would have wished to see the library of the cardinal had he been in Oxford while the college was a going concern. So the fact that there is no report for Cardinal College may be instructive. Ghinucci was in England for the last time in November and December 1526, when there would not yet have been much to see in the library. If our document were indeed his, then a date for its compilation before then, perhaps of around 1525, would be plausible. Ghinucci was made a cardinal in 1535 by Pope Paul III. His licence to enter England was annulled at that point, after the Break with Rome, but he remained a supporter of English causes and took the English Hospice in Rome under his protection. Importantly for our matter he was a friend of Cervini's, both men members of Pope Paul III's inner circle.

Leaving aside the question of his identity, in Oxford the visitor gained access to eight libraries: the university library, the colleges of New, Magdalen, Balliol, and Lincoln, as well as the Dominican convent and the Oxford *studia* of the Benedictine cathedral priories of Durham and Canterbury. For all these libraries, the Italian's evidence is valuable indeed. There are few titles that can be pointed to in some other surviving catalogue from the same institution; for five of the libraries—Chertsey, the Southampton Observants, Winchester cathedral and the city's Dominican and Franciscan convents—his select list is the sole documentary witness.

Oxford, then as now, was a land of libraries, so the choice of those to visit made by the Italian is revealing. They all held large collections which had been enriched with humanistic books: Balliol's by William Gray (*c.* 1414–1478), Lincoln's by Robert Flemming (1416–1483), Magdalen's by William Waynflete (*c.* 1398–1486), and, for New College, by a number of humanistically inclined fellows. Most famous of them all, the university library had been nobly enriched by Humfrey Duke of Gloucester (1390–1447), England's first renaissance prince, who announced his intention to settle his entire library on the university and made several gifts in that direction before the tap was closed after his death under arrest for treason.⁴ There is no report on Merton, for instance, or on All Souls, two of the largest libraries in Oxford but whose collections had nothing to hold a humanist's attention. What All Souls owned by way of suitable material had come in recent years in the form of print. We can assume that the libraries included in the tour were those with reputations for owning recondite material, and had been named as such to our visitor. It is of interest that two monastic colleges, cells of the cathedral priories of Canterbury and Durham, were included. It implies that they shared in the same reputation, deriving from the knowledge that each was in receipt of books sent from the great resources of the mother-house. In fact, while this is true, neither seems to have held any very surprising material. Their collections were oriented to the needs of the curriculum, and the Italian's reports are brief: three titles from Canterbury College and one from Durham. These titles happen to be representative of the visitor's interests: patristical rarities, in this case two pseudonymous works attributed here to Gregory the Great and Ambrose, with conciliar material, in this case a copy of the decrees of the synod of Antioch of AD 341; and, at Durham College, a work of Cicero, his *Pro Milone*.

³ J. M. W. Willoughby, 'Thomas Wolsey and the books of Cardinal College, Oxford', *Bodleian Library Record* 28 (2015), 114–34, at 122.

⁴ On the fate of Duke Humfrey's Library and a list of identified manuscripts, see D. G. Rundle, 'Good Duke Humfrey: Bounder, Cad and Bibliophile', *Bodleian Library Record* 27 (2014), 36–53. Also A. Petrina, *Cultural Politics in Fifteenth-Century England. The Case of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester* (Leiden, 2004), and S. Gillam, *The Divinity School and Duke Humfrey's Library at Oxford* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 3–27.

At New College the visitor reported fourteen titles, one of the longer reports in the document. The titles combine to represent the same interest as witnessed in the monastic colleges, with the addition of another two notable themes: the works of British writers, in this case Gildas, and scientific works, in particular those of Roger Bacon, who was a contemporary Italian taste and whose name appears no fewer than fifteen times in the document overall. There are some rarities, for example the copy of a Crusade history by Galvanus de Levanto, *Liber sancti passagii christicoliarum contra Saracenos pro recuperatione Terrae Sanctae*, whose unique witness is BnF MS nouv. acq. lat. 669. Only one survivor may be pointed to, and that is a stray from the library: MS Bodley 798 (SC 2656) (s. xiv^{ex}), a theological miscellany which is identifiable in the first catalogue of the library of c. 1415 and which was given to the Bodleian in 1601 by Thomas James, then a Fellow of the College. The bibliographer John Leland (c. 1503–1552) visited New College in 1535 and drew up a select list in similar style to the Italian's. His runs to forty-three items and intersects with ours at 7 and 14. These two, with Bodley 798, are the only books which are visible in another documentary source. The other eleven are attested for New College only by the notice that the anonymous visitor, and subsequently Cardinal Cervini, happened to take in them.

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Appendix

The following is printed from Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Reg. lat. 2099, fol. 307r. The list has recently been printed in *The University and College Libraries of Oxford*, ed. R. M. Thomson with the assistance of James Clark, *Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 16* (London, 2015), pp. 1197–1200. Full editorial annotation on the entries is provided there, but here for convenience I offer a basic identification of the work in each case. Boldface numbering in the transcription below is editorial and not original.

In collegio nouo obsonie

- 1 B. Greg. [-sup] speculum .3. libri.
 - 2 Gullielmi Autisiodoren' super ep. Pauli.
 - 3 Propositio Domini Linconiensis coram papa anno 1253.
- col. b]
- 4 Hugonis de sancto Victore Chronica.
 - 5 Ghilde historia. Idem de Regi Cuntone (*sic*).
 - 6 Epistola Samuelis Israelite de [-cu] longa captiuitate Iudeorum.
 - 7 Q. Curtii. (*blank*) Initium *inter be*[[c]].
 - 8 Galuani de [-regni] Leuando T[[]].
de ludo scaccorum.
de regimine Danorum.
De passagio Christianorum.
 - 9 Egidius de naturis motu et significatione cometarum.
 - 10 Alb. Magni de xii. experim[[entis]] de corio serpentis.
 - 11 Rogerii bachon aggregatorium totius artis geomantie ad astrologiam reducte. *Artem Geomantie sub breuibus et claris uerbis compilan' intende.*
 - 12 Computus Robert Lincone[[nsis]].
 - 13 Petrus de Lene de Sancto Adomaro tractatus de nouo quadra[[nte]].
Eiusdem Instrumentum menodia [-sa] pars Ecli[[]].
 - 14 Petri de Palude de potestate ec[[cl.]].

1 Adalbert of Metz, *Speculum Gregorii*. **2** Probably Haimo of Auxerre, Commentary on the Pauline Epistles. **3** Probably now Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 798 (*SC* 2656) (s. xiv^{ex}). Robert Grosseteste, *Dicta et Scripta*, composed and delivered at the papal curia in Lyon in 1250 &c. This is the fourth item in the manuscript. **4** Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Chronica*. **5** Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae* and *Encomium Emmae reginae*, as in BnF MS lat. 6235, fols. 7r–14r (England, c. 1500) in which the second text is headed ‘Ex eodem Gilda in historia de Sueyno et Knuctone quam in gratiam scripsit ad reginam Emmam’. **6** Samuel Israelita, *Epistola contra Iudaeorum errores*, tr. Alphonsus Boni Hominis. **7** Quintus Curtius Rufus, *Historia Alexandri Magni*. **8** The subtitles belong to sections of Galvanus de Levanto, *Liber sancti passagii christicoliarum contra Saracenos pro recuperatione Terrae Sanctae*. **9** Giles of Lessines, *De essentia, motu et significantia cometarum*. **10** Iohannes Paulinus, *De corio serpentis*. **11** Rolandus Scriptoris (*ps.* Roger Bacon), *Compilerium artis geomantiae*. **12** Robert Grosseteste, *Computus correctorius*. **13** Petrus de Sancto Audomaro, *Nouus quadrans correctus* and *Semissa* or *Compositio instrumenti*. The two works go together in Cambridge, Gonville & Caius College, MS 141/191 (England, s. xivⁱⁿ). **14** Guillelmus Petri de Godino (*ps.* Petrus de Palude), *De causa immediata ecclesiasticae potestatis*.