

500 YEARS OF TREASURES FROM OXFORD

Founded exactly 500 years ago in 1517, Corpus Christi College, one of the colleges of the University of Oxford, is a repository of extraordinary treasures, few of which have ever been seen by the public. To mark the 500th anniversary, a selection of fifty manuscripts and printed books, ranging in date from the 10th to the 17th centuries, have traveled to America for the first time. They include dazzling illuminated texts; biblical works in English, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and French; and major landmarks in the history of science.

Latin was the traditional language of scholarship, but the College was intended to be a center of the “New Learning” that promoted Renaissance ideals including the study of Classical and other texts in their original languages. For the Bible this meant Hebrew and Greek. Within the first twenty years, the College’s Founder, Richard Fox (d. 1528), and its first President, John Claymond (d. 1536), provided the Library with a solid foundation of manuscripts and printed books in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Purchases and donations have continued to enrich the collection to this day.

Concentrating on items acquired in the first hundred years of the College’s existence, the books, manuscripts, and objects on display are grouped into themes covering the foundation of the College and its trilingual library (Section I); books in Latin (Section II), Greek (Section III), and Hebrew (Section IV); later English acquisitions (Section V); Scriptures (Section VI); and Science (Section VII).

Highlights include Italian Renaissance illuminated manuscripts of the Latin Classics; a thousand-year-old volume in Greek; a group of volumes that have been described as “the most important collection of Anglo-Jewish manuscripts in the world”; landmarks of literature from Homer’s *Iliad* to Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*; magnificently illuminated biblical texts; and Sir Isaac Newton’s hand-drawn sketches of a comet.

Folger SHAKESPEARE
LIBRARY

5
Corpus Christi
College Oxford 2017

All the objects in this exhibition have been lent by Corpus Christi College, one of the constituent colleges of the University of Oxford.

For more information about individual items, search online for its call-number using quotation marks (e.g. “Corpus Christi College, Oxford, Phi.C.1.6”); buy the booklet, *500 Years: Treasures from the Library of Corpus Christi College, Oxford*; or visit the blog at 500YearsOfTreasures.blogspot.com



Richard Fox, Founder of Corpus Christi College.



The Library at Corpus Christi College.

Sect. 1 - NO CASE ASSIGNED - WALL PANEL - 40H x 30W



St. Jerome in his study, with books in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. See item I.4.

I

THE LIBRARY OF **CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE**

Corpus Christi College, Oxford, was founded exactly 500 years ago, in 1517, by Richard Fox, Bishop of Winchester. His religious devotion is shown in the name he chose for the College: “Corpus Christi” is Latin for “the body of Christ.” He is represented in this exhibition by his portrait, a religious book that he commissioned, two dazzling pieces of his ecclesiastical silverware, and several of the books he donated to the College Library which contain inscriptions asking the reader to pray for his soul.

RIGHT: The main quadrangle of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, with the “Pelican Sundial”



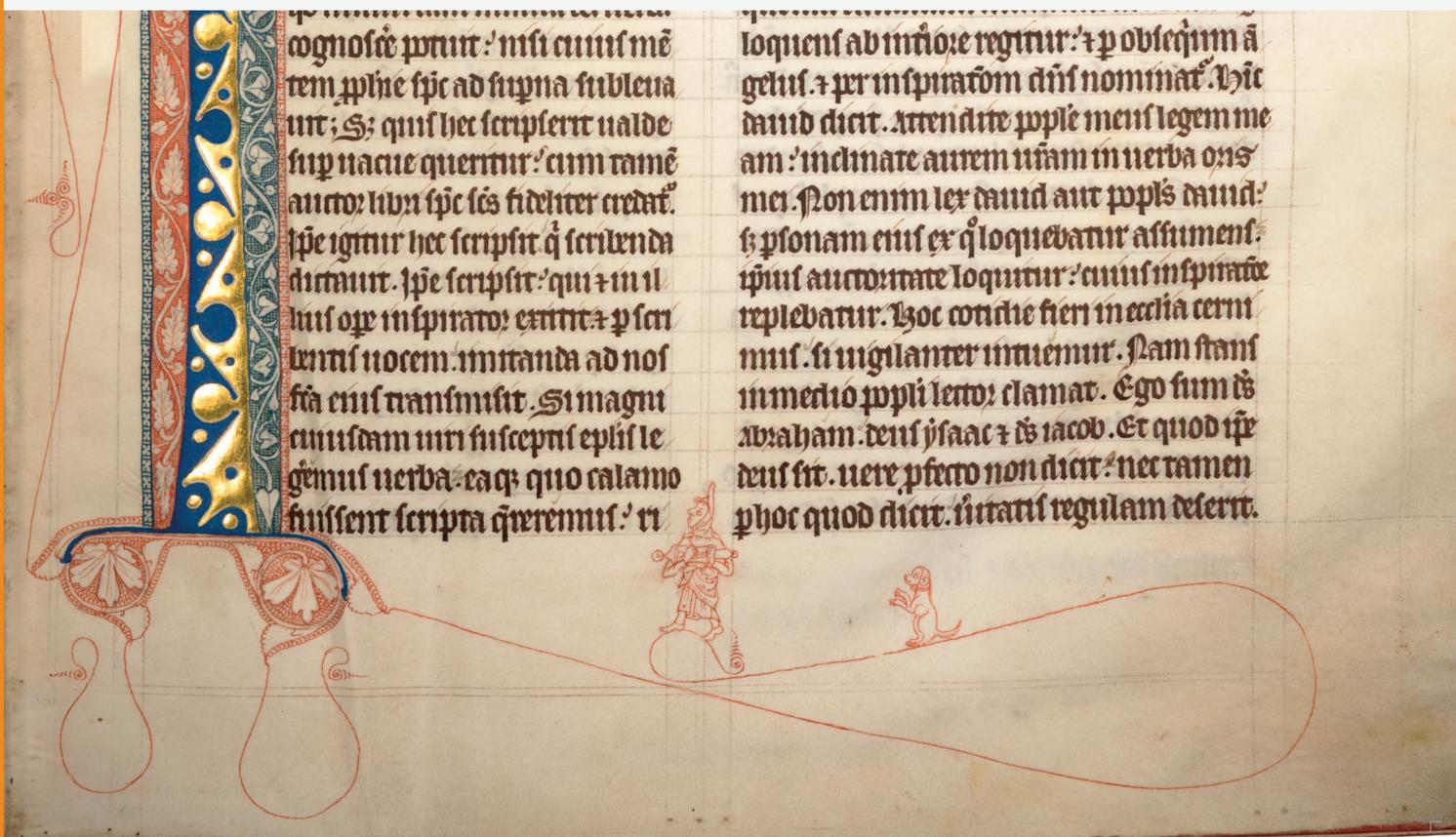
III

THE TRILINGUAL LIBRARY

LATIN

Until the 18th century, Latin was the primary language of European scholarship; this was especially true during the Middle Ages, when competency in Greek, Hebrew, or Arabic, was rare. Renaissance scholars sought out the texts of Antiquity, and works in Classical Latin, especially those of Cicero, were studied for their style as much as for their content. The first Classical texts to appear in print were published in 1465, just a decade after Gutenberg's Bible. Fox actively sought to acquire such printed editions as well as manuscripts for his new foundation, and his statutes stipulated that lecturers were to be appointed in Theology, Greek, and Latin: the latter was to lecture at 8:00 a.m. on prose and verse authors on alternate days of the week.

RIGHT: Saint Gregory the Great (d. 604)
Detail from *Moralia in Job* (volume 1 of 2)
England, perhaps Oxford, late 14th century
Corpus Christi College, Oxford, MS 50



III

THE TRILINGUAL LIBRARY

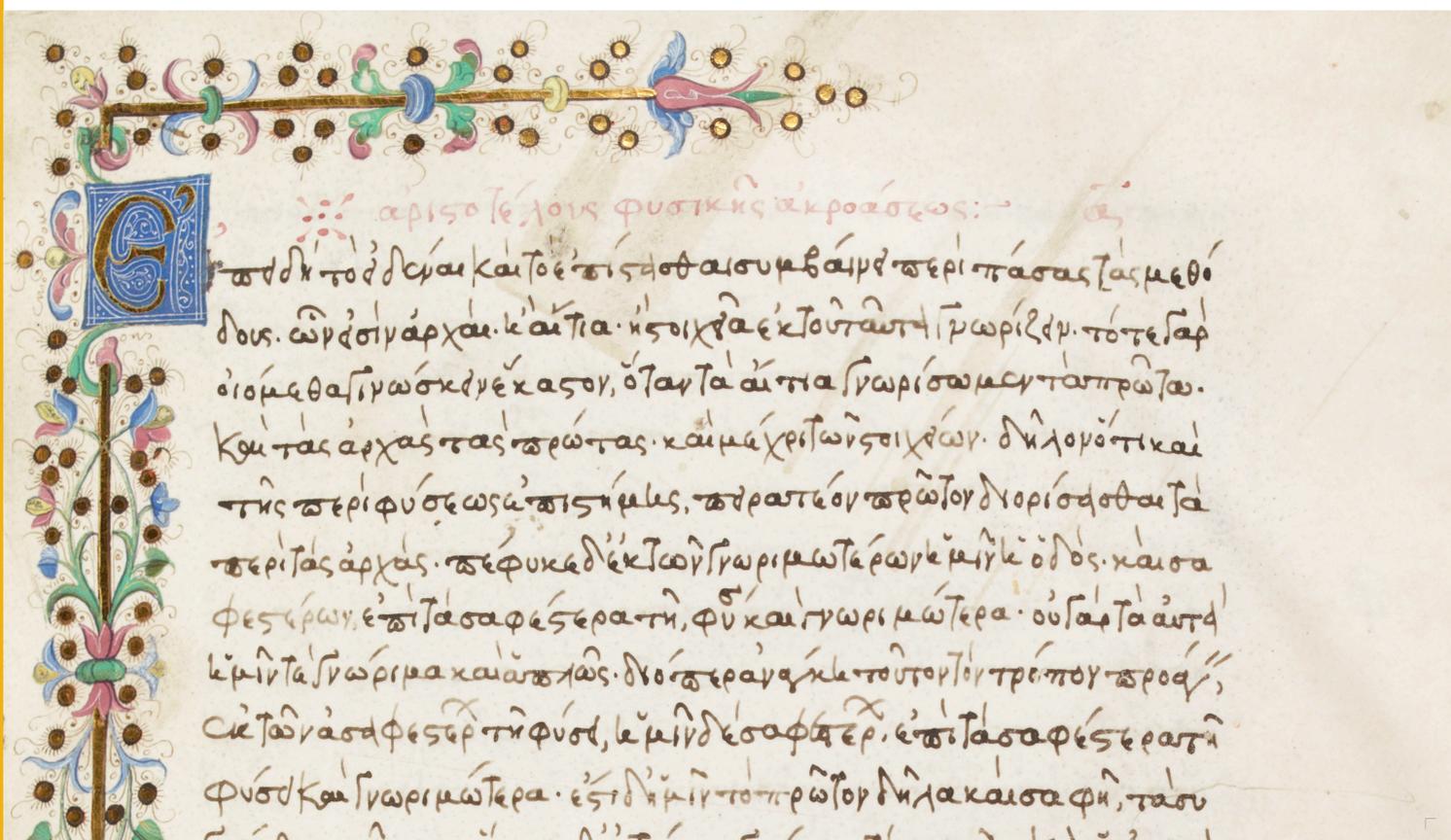
GREEK

THE TRILINGUAL LIBRARY

III

GREEK

Richard Fox not only founded Corpus Christi College, but also provided for Oxford's first public lecturer in Greek. He is not known to have given any Greek manuscripts to the Library, but instead bought and donated recently printed editions. Fox's curriculum, written in 1517, listed the Greek authors who should be studied—Aristotle, Aristophanes, Euripides, Homer, Sophocles, and a dozen others—and by the time of his death a copy of almost all of them was in the Library.



RIGHT: Aristotle (d. 302 BCE)
Detail from *Physics, De caelo, and other works*
Italy, probably Florence, mid to late 15th century
Corpus Christi College, Oxford, MS 104

III

THE TRILINGUAL LIBRARY

GREEK



PSALTERIUM

תהלים



BEATUS uir, qui non ambulauit in consilio impiorum, & in uia peccatorum non stetit, & in confessu derisorum non sedit. Sed in lege domini uoluntas

eius, & in lege eius meditabitur die ac nocte. Et erit sicut arbor plantata iuxta riuos aquarum, quae fructum suum dabit in tempore suo, et folium eius non marcescet, & omne quod faciet prospere faciet. Non sic impius, sed (mouentur ad malum) sicut palea, quam dispellit uentus. Propterea non resurgent impius in ipso iudicio, sicut & peccatores in coetu iustorum. Dominus autem nouit uiam iustorum, & iter impiorum peribit.

האיש אשר לא

הלך בעצרת רשעים ובקרת חטאים לא עמר ובמושב לצים לא ישב :
כי אם בתורת יהוה חפצו ובחורתו יהנה יומם ולילה :
והנה בעץ שרגל על פלגי מים אשר פרוו יתן בפתחו ועלה לא יבול וכל אשר יעשה יגלים :
לאת בן הרשעים כי אם פמוץ אשר תדפנה ריח :
על בן לא יקמו רשעים פמושפט וחטאים בערת צדיקים :
כי יודע יהנה דרך צדיקים ודרך רשעים תבר :



Appellant Hebraei librum Psalmodum ספר תהלים id est, liber hymnorum, aiuntque spiritum sanctum illius, sicut et totius scripturae auctorem fuisse, atque ob id titulum fecerunt huic et sequentibus libris בתהלים nempe quod Conscripsit autem maiorem partem huius libri, regius propheta

The beginning of the Book of Psalms in Latin and Hebrew. See item IV.12

IV

THE TRILINGUAL LIBRARY HEBREW

“THE MOST IMPORTANT COLLECTION OF ANGLO-JEWISH MANUSCRIPTS IN THE WORLD.”

Among the manuscripts at Corpus Christi are a group of seven 13th-century manuscripts, apparently used by Christian scholars to help them understand the Hebrew text at a time when very few would have been able to read the language. They have been described as “the most important collection of Anglo-Jewish manuscripts in the world.” Some of them are related to one another in ways that suggest they share a common origin: two, for example, are partly written by the same scribe, have the same four-column page layout, and contain complementary biblical texts. Some can be associated with Robert Grosseteste, who taught at Oxford University in the 1230s.

RIGHT: (Various authors)
Detail from *Proverbs and Psalms*
England, perhaps Oxford, late 13th century
Corpus Christi College, Oxford, MS 11 fols.27v–28r
(Proverbs 1:1–**** and Psalms 1:1–2.6)



V

ENGLISH

MANUSCRIPTS

The Library of Corpus Christi College is very rich in medieval manuscripts made in England. Only a small selection can be shown here, but they include examples of world importance. Several are written in the earliest forms of the English Language: Old English (also called Anglo-Saxon) and Middle English. Others are masterpieces of quintessential styles of English illumination of the Romanesque and Gothic periods.

RIGHT: William Langland (ca. 1332 – ca. 1386),
The Vision of Piers Plowman
Written and illuminated in England, perhaps Essex,
in the late 14th century
Corpus Christi College, Oxford, MS 201



VI

SCRIPTURES

A theme that runs through much of this exhibition is the translation of biblical books into other languages, either to produce a more accurate Latin translation from the original Greek and Hebrew original texts, or to make the text accessible to people who could not read the ancient languages. In one case nearby are two manuscripts with translations, produced within a decade or so of the foundation of Corpus Christi College: one from Latin into French, the other from Greek into Latin.

RIGHT: Detail from *Erasmus's revision of the New Testament, vol. 1 (Gospels and Acts), in parallel with Saint Jerome's Vulgate version*
Script attributed to the scribe Peter Meghen (d. 1540); illumination by an anonymous Flemish artist
Southern Netherlands, c. 1525
Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 13





Joshua Fighting the Battle of Gibeon. See item VI.1.



The main quadrangle of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, with the “Pelican Sundial”

VII

SCIENCE

All the preceding sections of this exhibition have dealt with religious and literary works, but this last one concerns Science. The items demonstrate the huge strides forward made from the medieval period to the 17th century, in understanding the Universe, the Earth, and its inhabitants – both human and animal. Much of this advancement was made possible by the invention and refinement of scientific instruments such as the telescope and microscope.

RIGHT: Sir Isaac Newton (d. 1727)
Detail from *Letter to John Flamsteed* (d. 1719)
Cambridge, 28 February 1681
Corpus Christi College, Oxford, MS 361.1

