

# History as a visual concept: editing Peter of Poitiers’ "Compendium historiae in genealogia Christi"

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Our project explores Peter of Poitiers’ twelfth-century diagrammatic work, the *Compendium historiae in genealogia Christi*. Ubiquitous throughout the mediaeval and early modern periods, the *Compendium historiae*’s graphic and pictorial elements gave it semantic and aesthetic power in the classroom, and beyond.

Peter of Poitiers, a renowned scholar in Paris, originally designed the *Compendium historiae* as a tool to help his students learn the complexities of biblical history. He innovated a linear synopsis to visualise time, a graph designed so that synchronous and diachronic relationships of people and events can be read simultaneously (see Fig. 1). The sequence of generations from Adam to Christ forms a central axis, correlated with the lines of biblical families and other diagrams representing biblical events. The *Compendium historiae* clarifies the scientific and theological underpinnings of history, while providing a mnemonic tool to facilitate learning. Peter of Poitiers’ synopsis quickly spread throughout the Latin West. Over three hundred manuscript witnesses survive from the late twelfth to the early sixteenth centuries. Despite its prevalence, the *Compendium historiae* has neither been edited nor studied with regard to its graphics—a “metastructure” for the order of history.

As of January 2023, researchers at the University of Tübingen, University of Wuppertal, University of Graz, Ca’ Foscari University (Venice), and University of London have undertaken the first digital edition of Peter of Poitiers’ *Compendium historiae* using the standard of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI/XML), the International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF) and Semantic Web technologies. This interdisciplinary and international research project brings together the fields of art history, mediaeval history, Latin philology, text editing, and digital humanities.

Our aims are:

- an overview of the tradition and socio-cultural context of the *Compendium historiae*
- an analysis of the graphic metastructure as well as the texts, diagrams and images
- a codicological database of the existing manuscript witnesses
- a digital and freely accessible critical scholarly edition, displayed in a navigable visualisation of the graphic metastructure

Our poster will display strategies for digital editing in the face of graphic complexities. The first months of our project have resulted in a still-growing database of manuscript witnesses of the *Compendium historiae*. Our initial push has resulted in the discovery of a far richer diagrammatic and pictorial diversity than hitherto acknowledged. In presenting our findings to the DH community, we are looking forward to an exchange with others who work with diagrammatics, time-modelling, text editing, manuscript transcription/representation, and beyond. With such an exchange we hope to expand our current set of tools and strategies in working to make the *Compendium historiae* accessible.

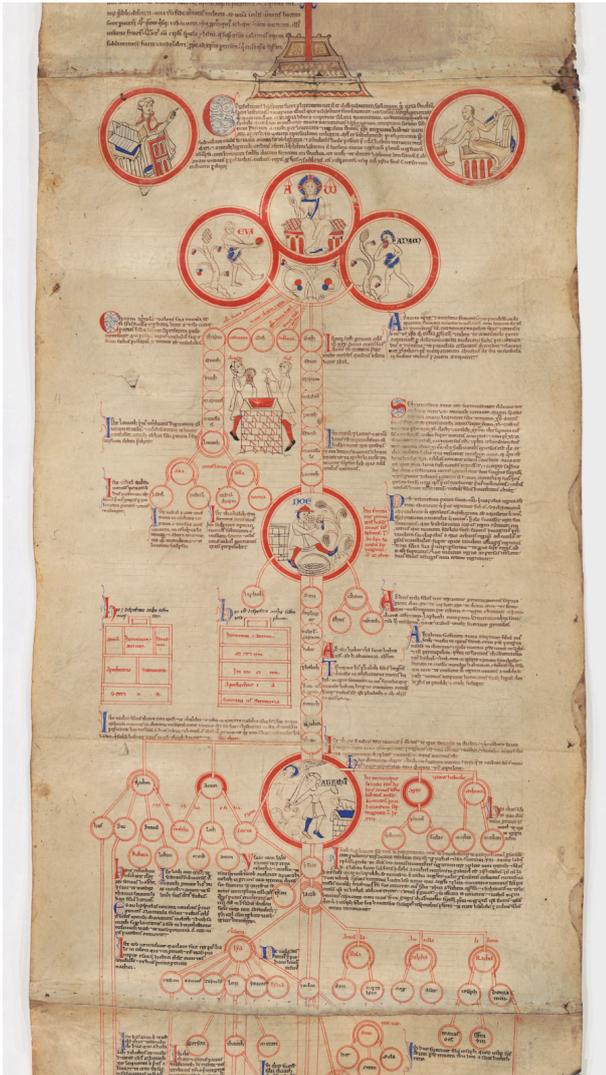


Fig. 1: Part of the beginning of the *Compendium historiae* in a 13th-century scroll (Cambridge, Mass., Houghton Library, Ms. Typ 216).

## Bibliography

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