

Adventures of a Fledgling Medievalist By Eva St. Clair

An entirely worthwhile and enjoyable project, one's first attempt at producing a critical edition of a medieval work introduces the aspiring scholar to the wonderful world of academia in all its bureaucratic splendor. From speaking bad Italian at 1 am in the morning to getting harassed by Wells Fargo bank employees, the student quickly learns how to survive outside the comfort of her office. The situations in this account are the true adventures of one naïve medievalist in her pursuit of academic glory.

This account is divided according to the three F's: Funding, Finding, and Fun Times. Funding refers to the process of finding research grants for a project. In Finding, I explain how I determined which manuscripts to use and how I obtained reproductions of them. I will also talk about modern methods of reading manuscripts in this section. In the last section, I will briefly discuss the actual collation and the fruits of my labors.

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I. Funding

A. Deciding on a Project

After getting interested in manuscripts and editing, I began to look for an outlet for original work with medieval texts. It is not difficult to find a good project because there are a number of manuscripts that have not been examined since the advent of the printing press. All the scholar really has to do is survey the available works and find a project that is interesting to her and for which there is a need. In my case, I chose Algazel's *Metaphysics*, a work that influenced many of the scholastics but of which there was no critical edition. The only printed edition of this text was made from a single manuscript transcribed by J.T. Muckle in 1933.¹ This work influenced the scholastics greatly, and having a new critical edition of part of it would surely be appreciated by the modern philosophical community.

B. URO grants

Now that I had my project, I thought that all I needed to do was obtain the manuscripts and start collating. This was much easier said than done. Before I could even begin implementing my brilliant plan, I had to find funding for my project. Luckily, Stanford University actively encourages budding scholars to work on research, and awards generous grants to enable them to do so. I was very proud to receive such a grant from our Undergraduate Research Programs office (URP). Their address is:

Undergraduate Research Programs
Stanford University
Sweet Hall Fourth Floor
Stanford, CA 94305-3088
Telephone: 650-723-3828
Fax: 650-724-5400
hq.uro@forsythe.stanford.edu

¹ Algazel. *Algazel's Metaphysics: A Medieval Translation*. Muckle, JT, ed. St. Michael's College: Toronto 1933.

The application for the grant was not complicated, but it did have to be exciting, detailed, and above all, well-planned. Of course, at the outset I only had a vague idea of what my project would involve; that is why it was actually a very good exercise for me to write this grant proposal, since it helped me more clearly define what I was going to do and how I was going to do it.

The grant proposal also had to include a detailed explanation of my anticipated expenses. Through much preliminary research, I discovered that there are four main costs for a small-scale collation project: buying copies from archives, having the microfilms copied, then having them scanned onto CDROM, and buying software to read them on the computer. There was one glitch, however: my grant, and as I discovered later, most academic grants, did not cover the cost of computer programs. As having these computer programs was necessary for my project, I had to buy the computer programs out-of-pocket.

C. VPUE Grants

I was also already working with my advisor on her collation project; she was working on a critical edition of Richard Rufus of Cornwall's commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima*. She had obtained funds for me to work with her through a grant from the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education (VPUE). These grants allocate funds for faculty to work with undergraduates on research. This report is the product of working on our joint VPUE project. The address for Stanford's VPUE office is:

Susie Brubaker-Cole, director
VPUE
Sweet Hall 4th Floor
590 Escondido Mall
Stanford, CA 94305-3088
Telephone: 650-736-1153
Email: susiebc@stanford.edu.

II. Finding

A. Introduction

Minor difficulties aside, I was now ready to actually purchase copies of the manuscripts. *Metaphysics* actually has three parts: the Logic, Metaphysics, and Physics. I intended to work on the Physics. A distinguished fellow paleographer, Charles Lohr, had recently produced an edition of the Logic,² and had created a useful manuscript tree that gave approximations as to how close to the original each known manuscript was. Using this list, I chose six manuscripts housed in archives across Europe: two from the Vatican (including the one Muckle had used), two from Paris, and one each from Erfurt and Assisi.

B. Examples of some Libraries

1. Assisi

Assisi proved to be the most difficult. The manuscript I wanted was located in the Sacro Convento di San Francesco (Holy Convent of St. Francis) Library in Assisi, which is run (obviously) by Franciscan friars. This library proved uncommunicative. The website is outdated by more than two years. Email addresses have long since died and the librarians reassigned to new posts. Library opening hours are limited. If I had wanted to call them, I would have had to stay up until one in the morning in order to reach them during business hours. I opted not to try it, as I know very little Italian and figured I would probably end up ordering something I did not want by accident. Their information (kindly supplied by Cecilia Panti) is:

Fr. Pasquale Magro, Director
Centro di Documentazione Francescana
Sacro Convento di San Francesco
Piazza San Francesco, 2
06082 Assisi PG-I
Italy
Telephone: 0039 075 8190093
Fax: 0039 075 812443
Email: centrods@tiscali.it
CF 80002810549 PI 00516830544

² Lohr, Charles. "Logica Algazelis: Introduction and Critical Edition." *Traditio* 21 (1965) 223-290.

Faxing Assisi turned out to be the best option, but again it had to be done in the middle of the night because they turn their fax machine off when they are not open for business. Even when I had finally reached them and explained what I wanted, I was told that that they do not work with outsiders. This was a serious blow. Luckily, the project was saved from imminent doom by my advisor, who entrusted a Franciscan friend with the mission of obtaining this manuscript while on her trip to Italy.

Another aspect that makes obtaining manuscripts an adventure is one never knows exactly how much they are going to cost, since most libraries bill after they send the order. I found out too late that this Assisi manuscript cost as much as all the others combined, forcing me to use all of my manuscript funding on a single film. It was a good thing that I was able to move funds from another expense category to make up for that disaster, otherwise the project again would have died before it began. Finally, I encountered a strange problem with paying Assisi, in that the nice priest who obtained the microfilm for me did not answer faxes or emails, making it very difficult to send him payment.

This, of course, led to another adventure. I was hoping to send a money order through the post office. Their method of sending international money orders involved buying the money order at the local post office and sending it to Missouri. The Missouri branch then sent it to its international destination. However, the post office discontinued sending this system of sending international money orders only a few weeks before I tried to send one. In the end my advisor and I had another friend in Italy stop by Assisi and pay him in lira in person, and we paid her with a check in dollars. From start to finish, obtaining and paying for Manuscript A (for Assisi) took over nine months.

2. Erfurt

The Erfurt library was nearly as difficult as Assisi. Their contact information is:

Universitäts - und Forschungsbibliothek Erfut/Gotha
Universitätsbibliothek Erfurt
Postfach 90 02 22 99105 Erfurt
Nordhäuser Straße 63,
99089 Erfurt
Germany
Telephone: (03 61) 6 55-15 25
Fax: (03 61) 6 55 15 26

Although manuscripts are usually available to the public on microfilm, Erfurt University refused to sell one to me; it is their policy only to send Xerox copies of their manuscripts. This would have made it impossible to decipher a difficult manuscript, and I thought I was sunk again until my advisor intervened. The head librarian at the University kindly granted me a dispensation, saving my project from imminent doom.

Erfurt's library accepts payment only advance and only in Euros. Although it sounds like a minor point, getting money to them proved to be a major hassle. Even at that time, the post office would not send money orders to Germany. I tried going to banks next. I had a series of unpleasant encounters involving a credit union and three incompetent Wells Fargo Bank branches (<http://www.wellsfargo.com>) before I was finally told that even most banks do not send money orders in Euros. I ended up using Thomas Cook Foreign Exchange (<http://www.us.thomascook.com>), which was decidedly a bad idea. They charged a huge service fee, made out the order for the wrong amount of money and made it payable to the wrong person. It was a most irritating experience and caused the nice Erfurt librarian a good deal of trouble.

Unfortunately, the story does not end there. About five months later I received a letter in German from the Erfurt library. It said that the German bank that processed the Thomas Cook money order only credited the library with 75% of the face value of the money order, meaning that I still owed money. This is yet another reason why I will never, ever return to Thomas Cook. The Erfurt manuscript cost twice as much as it was supposed to. Rather than attempt to send another money order, I asked another friend in

Germany to pay Erfurt the balance directly in Euros, and I paid him back in dollars.³ The entire process for Erfurt took about eight months.

3. Paris

The Vatican and Paris libraries were a nice change from the Erfurt debacle. Both had a standard, easy-to-follow procedure for ordering manuscripts. While they bill in Euros, they also take foreign credit cards, which means that the bank handles the exchange rates instead of the incompetent medieval scholar. As large public archives, the Vatican and Paris libraries are used to handling orders from scholars around the world and for that reason are much more user-friendly. Paris ended up taking the least amount of time: start to finish rang up at only two months. Their contact information is:

Bibliothèque nationale de France
Service Reproduction
Quai François Mauriac
Tour des Temps
75706 Paris cedex 13
France
Telephone: 33 (0) 1 53 79 82 22
 33 (0) 1 53 79 82 24
Fax: 33 (0) 1 53 79 42 60
Email: reproduction@bnf.fr

³ I would not recommend relying on having friends in foreign countries to pay these bills. There are a few new ways to pay, such as through Citibank's program <http://www.c2it.com>. It allows you to pay international bills with a check or direct deposit for only a ten dollar fee. The only catch is that their exchange rates are not very good, and it requires you to give them your social security number and proof of residence (which cannot be a dorm or post office box). In all, it takes about a month to set up an account for c2it. However, given my experiences I would gladly have used them to avoid the other hassles.

4. The Vatican

While Paris went off without a hitch, there were a few problems with the Vatican. To my initial delight, I found that the Vatican can send images in CDrom, so I ordered one manuscript CD format. I specified on the form that I wanted separate tif files of each image, but even so, they sent one gigantic Adobe Acrobat file. My advisor very kindly separated each image into its own file and saved them in tif format while I was away during the summer.

Of course, the fun did not stop there, and I quickly discovered when I came back that half the images were in bitmap format instead of grayscale, which for reasons I will explain later is very undesirable. I sent the Vatican a complaint that I could barely read the images they had sent (mentioning also that they had sent the images as one huge file). They were very nice and sent me a new CD with individual files and almost all of the images in grayscale. I sent the first CD back to them at their request. But again, this process took nearly two months, which meant lost time for me in working on the project.

During the time that I was struggling along with the first CD, I realized that I had forgotten to order the other Vatican manuscript, which coincidentally was the one that Muckle had used. This meant that I had to start the ordering process all over again three months after the others had gone through. I decided not to take any chances and ordered a microfilm instead of another CD. It was nearly eight months before I completed business with the Vatican. Its contact information is:

Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana
Ufficio Riproduzioni e Diritti
Cortile Belvedere
V - 00120 Città del Vaticano
Telephone: 0039 06 6987 9411
Fax: 0039 06 6988 4795
Email: fatt.eco@vatlib.it

There is also an online order form, available in English or Italian:

English: www.vatican.va/library_archives/vat_library/docs/documents/verde_gb.pdf

Italian: www.vatican.va/library_archives/vat_library/docs/documents/verde_i.pdf

With the manuscripts ordered, there was nothing left to do but wait for them to arrive. They trickled in slowly over a period of eight weeks, which is average for foreign orders. If you are planning on doing a project like this, I would highly recommend ordering your materials at least four months before you plan to actually begin working on it.

Since very few archives offer CDRoms, it is best to expect to order microfilms. But as was said earlier, ideally the scholar will read the manuscripts on the computer, so another expense is having the microfilms scanned onto a CD. Also, since getting microfilms is so hard, having the microfilms copied is a basic safety precaution, a backup in case of scholarly disasters. Finally, in order to read manuscripts on the computer, one must own software with Photoshop capabilities, which can be quite expensive.

C. Reading

1. Copying

Once all of the manuscripts were securely in my possession, I prepared them to be copied and scanned. My method was to send the microfilms to a very reliable copier in Connecticut, who would then send the copies back to me and forward the originals along to a professional scanning company in Minnesota. The contact information for the Connecticut company is:

Archival Microfilming Services
1133 Dixwell Avenue
Hamden, CT 06514

2. Scanning

It is not a good idea to have scanning done at the nearest available location because there are many copies who specialize in scanning things like microfilm and charge lower rates than the campus rate -- \$15. The rate for the company I used in Minnesota is \$1 a scan, and they understand that scholars actually want to read the material on the page. This means that they will be careful not to inadvertently cut off the sides of the manuscript, rendering it illegible.

Most manuscripts contain multiple works. This was true of my five manuscripts, and of course, when making a microfilm the archive simply puts the entire manuscript on the same film. However, it is very costly to order scanned images of an entire microfilm, so it is important to tell the scanning company exactly which frames they should scan. This turned out to be relatively simple. I put the microfilms through the microfilm reader and found where the *Metaphysics* began. Then I marked that frame as "B," the one before it as "A," and the one after it as "C." I did the same to the last two frames of the piece and one after it, except using the letters "X," "Y," and "Z." This tells the scanners where to begin and where to end, and it gives them one frame of leeway on either end just in case they get mixed up.

Just in case the markings were not clear to them anyway, I sent them a letter explaining exactly how each film was marked and also how to number the images on the CD. Since manuscripts are usually foliated rather than paginated, I asked the scanner to number them accordingly, so that 98 verso and 99 recto became image 98. But rather than explain the reasoning behind this to them in the letter, I just asked them to start numbering "A" as 98 and so on. It turned out that their machines could not number the images according to the folio numbers anyway, meaning that I was given images numbered 1-22 instead of 82-104. I had to renumber them myself, which took a significant amount of time (but less time than trying to figure out which image I wanted every time I began a new folio).

I had other problems with the scanning company. The Connecticut copiers had successfully copied all of my manuscripts, returned the copies to me, and sent the originals to Minnesota. But the scanning company waited two weeks before they even started the project, and each microfilm took a week to copy. This meant that I would easily finish working on the first Vatican manuscript already on CDRom well before any of the others were returned to me. I called them every other day for about two weeks before they began to bother them about not beginning. This was a highly effective

method, as I am sure my microfilms would still be sitting there not completed if I had not bothered them so often.

Another problem arose when Manuscript N from Paris returned: the scanners had gone backwards from the starting marks at A, B, C instead of forwards, meaning that I had a chunk of the text that preceded *Metaphysics*. This again was partly my fault, since I had marked ABC as CBA, and of course their natural inclination was to head in the correct order of letters. But they should have realized something was wrong when they did not find the corresponding end marks at XYZ, which were in the right place going the right direction. By now, I was on a first-name basis with the head scanner, who was very apologetic about this problem and immediately backtracked to fix it. The contact information for the scanning company is:

Linhoff Photo & Digital Imaging
4400 France Avenue South
PO Bo 24005
Edina, MN 55424
Telephone: 800 874 8338
Fax: 800 340 8998

3. Photoshop

And now for a word on enhancing reading capabilities. With modern technology, the scholar can use Adobe Photoshop to read the images, a system far superior to using microfilm readers. Photoshop can sharpen letters, zoom in, and adjust for contrast, to name a few features. But even this innovation can go dreadfully wrong: if the images are non-grayscale bitmaps, they are practically useless because Photoshop cannot adjust them - what you see is what you get. Unfortunately, this is usually a pixilated, grainy, black-and-white smear. It is actually better to use microfilm than bitmaps. This is why I was so displeased with the first Vatican CD: it was mostly bitmaps.

III. Fun Times

A. Collation

Meanwhile, I buckled down to the actual collation, the most fun part of the project. Generally, the editor will not be collating a work that has already been transcribed: that is one reason that the editor should try to begin with the least corrupt, oldest manuscript. She has a much better chance of getting the most accurate reading (although that is not necessarily true) and a good starting transcription to which she can compare her other manuscripts. I was fortunate enough to have the Muckle transcription, which meant that all I had to do was type up the parts of the text I was working on and collate all of the manuscripts using Muckle. It was also good for me, as a beginning editor, to have a “second opinion” from Muckle: it was likely that I would make mistakes in reading, and Muckle’s Latin was much better than mine.

Each time an editor begins working with a new manuscript, she must get used to reading a new “hand,” i.e., the handwriting and style of the scribe. Some scribes use particular abbreviations, have strange letter formations, or use odd characters for certain letters or words. It usually takes several folios before the editor can read swiftly without mistakes. It is ideal to work with another person when editing - meaning that the editor reads the manuscript aloud while the other person notes variants and corrects the editor if she reads something other than what is in the first transcription. However, this system could be duplicated by tape recording oneself reading the manuscript aloud, then going back and checking the transcription against what you said. It would double the time it takes to read, though.

B. The Need for a Critical Edition

As I read through my manuscripts, I was careful to watch for signs of place and date in order to determine which manuscript was the oldest and most accurate. I had Muckle's opinion that the one he used was the best, but I wanted to make sure that that was actually the case. I also wanted to make sure that he had transcribed *Metaphysics* correctly. After transcribing five manuscripts, I expect to know whether or not Muckle's edition is reliable and whether some of the manuscripts were copied from a common exemplar.

C. Publishing

Upon completing my collation project in the next eight months, I plan to have my findings published in a journal of philosophy or medieval history. It would be a great honor as an undergraduate to be a published scholar, but more than for my own personal achievement, I think that this work will be both interesting and useful to those who study medieval scholasticism and the transmission of knowledge from East to West.