Case 6 2013/14: A Traictise from the Mendham Collection

Expert adviser's statement

Reviewing Committee Secretary's note: Please note that any illustrations referred to have not been reproduced on the Arts Council England website

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Brief Description
This printed copy of Stephen Gardiner and Thomas Martin, A Traictise declaryng and plainly prouyng, that the pretended marriage of Priestes… is no mariage (London, 1554), is extensively annotated in the hand of John Ponet, Bishop of Winchester (c.1514-1556), and contains, on interleaved pages, a substantial manuscript work by Ponet, comprising draft passages and working notes for his book-length reply to this treatise.

Quarto (195 x approx. 140mm), on paper, rebound in a mid-nineteenth century morocco binding. The printed book consists of 288 pages, many of which have been heavily annotated; it has been interleaved with approximately the same number of blank pages, most of which bear manuscript notes by Ponet. There are some 140 full pages of Ponet’s manuscript. Both printed book and manuscript are in good condition.

2. Context
The provenance of this volume is obscure, though presumably it was in Ponet’s library in Strassburg at the time of his death and it may have been among the books acquired by Sir Anthony Cooke from Ponet’s widow. Much later it was in the collection formed, mostly by purchase from antiquarian booksellers, by Joseph Mendham (1769-1856) and presented in 1869 to the library of the Law Society. It was loaned by the Law Society to Canterbury Cathedral Library from 1985 until 2012, when it was withdrawn for sale.

The manuscript component of this volume was entirely overlooked by the published catalogue of the Mendham collection (1994). It has remained unknown to scholars of reformation history and to biographers of its author, John Ponet, an important figure for whom remarkably little documentary evidence has survived.¹

3. Waverley criteria
I consider this volume to meet Waverley criterion three, as it is of outstanding significance for the study of the history of the English Reformation and for the study of the history of the book.

The issue of clerical marriage was one of the touchstone controversies of the Reformation, beginning with Luther himself. John Ponet was a major contributor to the debate in England, publishing his first tract in defence of clerical marriage in 1549, the same year in which it was made legal by Act of Parliament. The manuscript under discussion sheds light on the next stage of the debate, and reveals in detail how Ponet (in exile) worked up his rejoinder to the attack on his views which had been mounted in print by Stephen Gardiner and Thomas Martin. Evidence of this sort is extremely rare and is of great significance also for scholars interested in authorial processes and the adversarial culture of publication in sixteenth-century England. It enables a detailed analysis to be made of the composition of Ponet’s *Apologie* (1556) and would form the basis for a scholarly re-evaluation of Ponet’s important text.

This manuscript bears witness to the critical period in the mid-1550s when the fate of the English Reformation hung in the balance, as Mary restored the doctrine and personnel of the Catholic church. One such doctrine was clerical celibacy and one such person was Stephen Gardiner, who had been ejected as Bishop of Winchester, replaced by Ponet, and then reinstated. In the pages of this volume, two Bishops of Winchester, each dispossessed by the other, are seen locked in controversy. In addition to its importance to scholars, this volume would be a key exhibit in any major exhibition to mark the approaching quincentenary of the Reformation.

**DETAILED CASE**

1. **Detailed description of item**

The printed component of this volume is a copy of *A Traictise declaryng and plainly prouyng, that the pretensed marriage of Priestes… is no mariage, but altogether vnlawful… Herewith is comprised in the later chapitres, a full confutation of Doctour Poynettes boke entitled a defense for the mariage of Priestes* (London, 1554). The book was published under the name of the lawyer and polemical writer Thomas Martin (1520/21-1592/3), but its authorship is usually attributed – at least in part – to Martin’s patron and master, Stephen Gardiner (c.1495x8-1555), Bishop of Winchester and Lord Chancellor of England. The printed book itself is not especially rare: the English Short Title Catalogue lists 22 copies in UK libraries.

What makes this volume remarkable is its provenance and its manuscript contents. It belonged to the person who is the subject of the printed attack: John Ponet (c.1514-1556), reformer, controversialist and Bishop of Winchester. The manuscript component includes Ponet’s heavy annotation of the printed text (with notes on almost every page and on interleaved pages) together with a substantial book-length manuscript (of some 140 full pages), part working notes and part draft text for Ponet’s own reply to Gardiner and Martin, which was partly published in 1556. No other manuscript by Ponet is known to survive, with the exception of a very few letters, mostly in German and Swiss archives.

2. **Detailed explanation of the outstanding significance of the item**
Waverley 3: Outstanding significance for the study of the history of the English Reformation and for the study of the history of the book

This manuscript bears witness to the critical period in the mid-1550s when the fate of the English Reformation hung in the balance, as Queen Mary restored the doctrine and personnel of the Catholic church. The reformer John Ponet, who had assisted Cranmer in preparing the Book of Common Prayer and other central texts of the Edwardian Reformation, and who had replaced Stephen Gardiner as Bishop of Winchester in 1551, made his escape following the failure of Wyatt's rebellion against the Queen and was in exile in Strassburg by the summer of 1554.

In Strassburg, Ponet had, in his own words, 'pen, ink, paper, and quietnes' (Apologie, p. 128). He must have acquired this copy of Gardiner and Martin’s Traictise soon after its publication in London in May 1554. The Traictise explicitly set out to refute the argument of Ponet’s own A Defence for mariage of priestes (London, 1549) and to justify the Marian reintroduction of clerical celibacy. As the manuscript contents of this volume show, Ponet prepared his own polemical response, deploying a variety of techniques to undermine the credibility of the author of the Traictise (whom he identifies as Gardiner) and marshalling a point-by-point and line-by-line refutation of the printed text. His tone is confrontational, personal and frequently indignant: Ponet defends ‘my book’ and addresses Gardiner directly as ‘you’.

Ponet’s annotations in the printed text include underlining, pointing fingers and marginal symbols, in addition to verbal notes. His own manuscript text is written in English, Latin and Greek, in both a secretary and an italic hand, in different inks and evidently over some period of time; it contains many corrections and crossings out and is a discontinuous mixture of working notes and rough drafts of some passages. Ponet’s reply is full of citations from Biblical, patristic and classical texts; it combines relentlessly systematic logical argument with rhetorical point-scoring, anecdotes and ad hominem attacks. Two surviving letters from this period shed light on the facilities available to him in exile. In April 1556, Ponet wrote to the Zurich reformer Heinrich Bullinger, asking for a transcript of a Greek text by Ignatius on the subject of the marriage of Paul and other apostles; this was quickly supplied by the naturalist and bibliographical scholar Konrad Gesner. Another letter, from Ponet’s widow Maria in July 1557, makes clear that while in Strassburg her husband had borrowed many books from his friend and fellow reformer Peter Martyr.2

My own brief comparison of Ponet’s manuscript with the published versions of his reply suggests that the manuscript represents an early stage in its preparation, including a few passages which were later published verbatim, many which were significantly changed, and others which seem not to have been published at all. The textual history of the published versions of Ponet’s reply is itself complex, however: two editions of the first part, An Apologie fully ausvweringe by Scriptures and aunceant Doctors, a blasphemose Book gatherid by D. Steph. Gardiner, were published in Strassburg in 1555 and 1556.

respectively, with some textual variations (STC 20175 and 20175a). What may be the posthumously published second part of Ponet’s reply appeared as *A defence of priestes mariages…agaynst a Ciuillian, namyng hym selfe Thomas Martin* (London, [1567?]: STC 17518 and 17519), edited by Matthew Parker from 'a certayne wrytyng... gathered together, and written, in the raigne of Kyng Philip & Queene Marie, wherin, much of the treatise of this Ciuillian is reproved… by a learned man of that tyme, who shortly after dyed.' This has usually been interpreted as a reference to Ponet and may even be a reference to this very manuscript.

This manuscript is of outstanding significance to scholars of the English Reformation because it bears directly on one of its most important controversies, the issue of clerical marriage, and is in the hand of one of the principal proponents in that controversy. Ponet’s role as one of the leading defenders of clerical marriage is well known from his printed contributions of 1549, 1555/6 and (possibly) 1567, but his views are also of particular interest because he had a personal stake in this debate. Ponet himself had married in 1548, even before Edward VI’s parliament had abolished the requirement for clerical celibacy. But in 1551, he divorced his first wife, on the grounds that she was in fact already married to a Nottingham butcher, and in the same year he married for a second time. Scholarly attention has previously focused instead on Ponet’s treatise justifying resistance to an ungodly ruler (*A Shorte Treatise of politike pouuer* (1556)), but the discovery of this authorial manuscript will enable his thought processes, reading, citation and choice of language to be studied in detail for the first time and compared with the published texts.

The manuscript is also of outstanding significance to historians of the book because of the insights it offers into the relationship between manuscript and print in an adversarial authorial culture. Ponet’s use of a printed text to generate its own refutation, building upon this with quotations from a wide range of other sources and expansive wordplay, provides a rare example of a common sixteenth-century genre in mid-composition.4

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3 According to a story which may be apocryphal, Stephen Gardiner, when asked in this period whether he thought he would ever be Bishop of Winchester again, replied that since the butcher had managed to retrieve his wife from Ponet, he believed that he might recover his bishopric: Nicholas Sandor, *Rise and growth of the Anglican schism* (1877), p. 209.

4 Nothing similar is recorded, for instance, by J.K. Moore, *Primary material relating to copy and print in English books of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (Oxford, 1992)