

# Critical Texts beyond Print Layouts: Review of the Edition of *Summa de officiis ecclesiasticis*

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**Abstract** This chapter presents an assessment of Franz Fischer’s digital critical edition of William of Auxerre’s *De Officiis*. An examination of the introductory essays is provided as well as a discussion of the advantage of digital critical editions, which combine traditional methodologies with the potential of XML encoding.

**Zusammenfassung** Dieses Kapitel konzentriert sich auf Franz Fischers online kritische Ausgabe von Wilhelms von Auxerre *De Officiis*. Neben einer Analyse der Einleitung wird diskutiert, welche wichtigen Vorteile digitale kritische Editionen mit sich bringen, bei denen traditionelle Vorgehensweisen mit XML-Encoding kombiniert werden.

**Keywords** methodology, scholarly digital edition, manuscripts, TEI, medieval Latin literature

The digital critical edition of William of Auxerre’s *Summa de Officiis Ecclesiasticis*—which I shall refer to here as *De Officiis*—is the result Fischer’s doctoral and postdoctoral endeavours at the University of Cologne, and is a milestone in the employment of data processing technology to produce a historical critical edition. Fischer’s open-access digital edition was first launched in 2007, and its revised version was made available in 2013. This is a remarkable work for various reasons: Fischer’s text is the first critical edition of William of Auxerre’s *De Officiis* ever, and it will become the standard edition for years to come. Furthermore—and perhaps most notably—Fischer’s work is at the forefront of a fortunate union between digital humanities and textual criticism applied to medieval literature in Latin. This is, in fact, not only the first digital critical edition of a liturgical treatise, but also the first critical edition of its kind. Combining traditional editing methodologies with the potentials offered by digital formats and XML encoding, Fischer’s edition makes available online not only a critical text of the *De Officiis*, but also the digitisation of the manuscripts or the high-resolution scans of the microfilms, and diplomatic transcriptions of two manuscripts which present different versions of the treatise.

Similarly to a printed critical edition, Fischer's work is accompanied by three copious introductory essays, divided into further subsections through which readers can easily browse, which provide an accessible discussion of: (1) the life and work of William of Auxerre and the *De Officiis*, (2) medieval liturgy and liturgical treatises, and (3) the methodologies employed by Fischer to produce his edition.

As Fischer observes, William of Auxerre is known for being an authoritative lecturer in theology at the University of Paris between the twelfth and the thirteenth century. He was probably born around 1160 and his death can be placed towards the end of 1231, during his visit to the city of Rome. Most information concerning William's life are related to his activity as a theologian in Paris, where he is recorded as amongst the most prominent scholars of his time. He had an important role in the dissemination of Aristotelian philosophy and in adapting it to Christian doctrine. Although in 1210 and 1215 Pope Innocent III officially forbade the reading of Aristotle's natural philosophy and metaphysics in schools, his successor Pope Gregory IX in 1231 appointed William member of a commission responsible for revising Aristotle's texts excerpting the uncontroversial parts suitable for teaching. This whole project, however, was abandoned in that same year when William died.

Fischer provides a reasoned overview of William's production, then he focuses particularly on the *De Officiis*. Three works can be attributed with certainty to William of Auxerre: first, a commentary on the *Anticlaudianus*, a hexametric poem written around 1182–1183 by Alain de Lille, second, the four books of the *Summa Theologiae*, also known in later times as *Summa Aurea* for its popularity, and, third, the allegorico-liturgical treatise entitled *Summa de Officiis Ecclesiasticis*, written during William's activity in Paris and aimed at his students of theology.

Fischer rightly emphasises that the *De Officiis* is not as well studied as the *Summa Aurea*, often being considered inferior by scholars, and it lacked a critical edition before this one was published. Fischer divides the structure of the *De Officiis* into six main sections that follow a prologue, which focus on: (1) the canonical hours, (2) the celebration of the mass and the features of specific holidays, including (3) Advent, (4) the other most important holidays, and (5) the liturgy for the consecration of a church. Then we find an unfinished section devoted to (6) priestly clothing in the *Old Testament*. This partition is also adopted to divide the critical text itself into various sections, allowing readers to handily survey each part of the treatise. As Fischer remarks, the actual structure of the *De Officiis* does not match with William's original plans, since the work was meant to include a section on priests—a topic briefly touched upon in the discussion of sacred clothing in the *Old Testament*—and another section concerning the appropriate places to officiate the rites, which was never written.

The date of composition of the *De Officiis* can be reconstructed only by analysing internal evidence: the terminus post quem is the reference to Pope Innocent III,

hence we can assume that William started to work on the treatise after the pope's election (18th January 1198). Fischer suggests that the *De Officiis* was likely to have been finished before the completion of the *Summa Aurea* (probably in 1223), and specifically during the preparation for the Fourth Council of the Lateran (between 1208 and 1215).

Following a careful study of the manuscript tradition of the *De Officiis*, Fischer observes that the text of the treatise is handed down uniformly by most manuscripts—fifteen in total—with the exception of a manuscript from Klosterneuburg (*siglum*: K, *Codex Claustroneoburgensis 788 Klosterneuburg*) and one from Cambrai (*siglum*: Ca, *Bibl. municipale, 259 A*). While the manuscript from Klosterneuburg is a summarised version of the *De Officiis*, the manuscript from Cambrai preserves a text with revisions and addenda, which show the circulation and the fortune of William's work in the early thirteenth-century France. To allow for a better study and understanding of this manuscript, Fischer includes not only high-resolution digitisations of it, but also a diplomatic transcription.

Before dealing with medieval liturgy, Fischer addresses two further points concerning the *De Officiis*, namely its possible models and its reception. William's reference to earlier and contemporary authorities cannot be identified easily, since he draws on an established tradition without always referring to his sources explicitly. This is the case of the allusions to the liturgical works by Jean Belet, Praepositinus of Cremona, and Sicard of Cremona. On the other hand, some renowned authorities, such as Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Innocent III, are openly acknowledged. With regard to the reception of the *De Officiis*, Fischer argues that it literally disappeared towards the end of the thirteenth century because it was included in the *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* by Guillaume Durand (bishop of Mende), a compendium of Medieval liturgy written in the years 1286–1291. Guillaume Durand either copies verbatim or readapts vast portions of the *De Officiis*, acknowledging William of Auxerre's authority not more than four times; only in one case does Durand call William by his name, whilst thrice he addresses him wrongly as 'master Peter of Auxerre' (*magister Petrus Autissiodorensis*). The other case showing the influence of the *De Officiis* is the work of another thirteenth-century compiler, namely the *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus da Varagine, whose references to William are, however, fairly short if compared to the large borrowings in Guillaume's *Rationale*.

The second section of Fischer's introduction is a rich discussion of medieval liturgy, a detailed assessment of which goes beyond the scope of this review. Through structuring his argument progressively and signposting it carefully, Fischer's analysis is extremely clear and accessible to a lay reader, and makes it possible to gain a better understanding of the ideas and expectations underlying a twelfth- to thirteenth-century liturgical treatise such as William's *De Officiis*.

The third introductory section contains the ideas and methodologies adopted to create the online critical edition of the *De Officiis*. First, Fischer emphasises the advantages offered by this new electronic format: through making available digitisations of each manuscript and the transcriptions of the different versions with a single click, readers can easily assess the editorial work, and are provided with a solid starting point for developing further research on the text. Another important asset, as Fischer suggests, is the possibility to keep the digital edition constantly updated at no expense, and to not only emend possible misprints but also to integrate new scholarship.

Fischer argues that an online digital edition can, therefore, fulfil the same scientific purposes as a printed critical edition, but at the same time it does not only present an analysis of the textual evidence, since it can also include digitisations of the witnesses and the very collation the manuscripts, or of some of them. The data processing employed to produce this edition is not meant to automatize the process of recensio and collatio of the manuscripts. The results of the collation need to be inserted manually and encoded in XML by the editor: thus, there is no difference between the methodology adopted in digital and printed editions. Yet the new digital format makes it possible to synchronically and mechanically check the textual variants, and to attain a hitherto unprecedented level of precision. This, by itself, should be seen as a good reason for traditional editors to learn how to use and benefit from this technology, and to systematically encode in XML the results of their collations.

Scholars who refuse to recognise the advantages offered by digital editions may object that the additional information provided in this new format is not easily accessible. In fact, Fischer seems to take for granted that his readership is familiar with XML encoding and with the online platform *TEI: Text Encoding Initiative*, since only through downloading the XML encoding of the edition and through uploading them onto TEI can one verify and assess Fischer's critical work transparently. Indeed, Fischer's assumption seems inappropriate, given that scholars who have an understanding of this technology are still a small minority. This is probably one of the main factors accounting for the relatively scarce production of digital critical editions of medieval and especially of classical texts, as Monella himself remarks.<sup>1</sup> In order to attempt to bridge the gap that divides editors who prefer digital editions and those who still favour printed editions it would seem natural to expect that the former should take a step towards the majority of scholars who have a limited knowledge of this new format, and help them to better understand its potentials. In Fischer's case, it might have helped to address this point more explicitly in the introductory essays, and also to provide a link to a PDF or an image containing the

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1 Monella (2018).

results of the data processed through TEI. To be able to visualise easily these results could not only encourage inexperienced scholars not to shy away from the technical jargon of XML encoding and from the fairly technical interface of TEI, but it could also arouse their curiosity about learning how to use it.

More than fifteen years ago, Bolter—while describing our time as the “the age of late print”—reflected upon the emergence of digital books competing with their analogic counterparts, and discussed more broadly the evolution of the book from its origins to the present day. He noted, in particular, the striking similarity between early printed texts, such as Gutenberg’s Bible, and manuscripts contemporary with them.<sup>2</sup> Whether this similarity between manuscripts and early printed texts was intentional or unintentional—i. e. due to fact that early printers could not conceive of a book in a different format—it undoubtedly helped readers to welcome and to become progressively accustomed to this new technology. In a similar way, in order to ease the transition from printed to digital critical editions, it might be helpful to make this passage more gradual: in Fischer’s case, it could have been useful to add an option to access the *De Officiis* in a format similar to that of the digital Loeb Classical Library, for example. Although this might appear as an idle effort, given the amount of time and programming it would require, an immediate comparison between the two formats could eventually help to promote the digital format: through reading Fischer’s edition in a traditional format, readers could more easily understand how its limitations outweigh the advantages offered by the more accessible and more informative interface in which this digital edition is presented.

Fischer discusses the genealogical relationship amongst the fifteen manuscripts preserving the *De Officiis*, which he divided into two main branches following Arnold’s reconstruction:<sup>3</sup> on the one hand, the manuscripts from Besançon (*B*), Brussels (*Br*), Douai (*D*), Milan (*M*), Tours (*T*) and Trier (*Tr*) and, on the other hand, those from Carpentras (*C*), Graz (*G*), the Vatican (*O*), the Abbey of Saint-Victor in Paris (*P<sub>2</sub>*), and Subiaco (*S*). The aforementioned manuscripts from Cambrai (*Ca*) and Klosterneuburg (*K*), and a thirteenth-century codex from Paris Saint-Germain (*P<sub>1</sub>*) cannot be ascribed to either of these families and, because of the significance of *Ca* and *P<sub>1</sub>*, their full diplomatic transcription is provided and can be read separately. Although Fischer’s discussion is set out very clearly, it might have been useful to add a stemma codicum here.

Thanks to the attractive presentation of the website—which makes it possible to check the digitised manuscripts, their codicological description as well as the transcriptions of *Ca* and *P<sub>1</sub>*—Fischer’s work can be appreciated not only by specialists but also by readers with a more general interest in palaeography and

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2 Bolter (2001) 7–8.

3 Arnold (2006).

codicology. The orthography of the critical text is normalised and the variants recorded are only those which are relevant to the *constitutio textus*. Readers can handily access the critical apparatus by clicking on the numbered endnote apexes next to the relevant readings and, from the apparatus, they can go back to the main text by simply clicking on the readings. After the apparatus one can find a useful list of the sources referred or alluded to by William of Auxerre (“*Quellen*”) and from later texts which were influenced by the *De Officiis* (“*Rezeption*”). These lists can be handily browsed by clicking on the endnote apexes—which are lowercase and capital letters for the models and the reception, respectively—and then through clicking on the relevant passage in the list it is possible to return to the critical text. Fischer, therefore, has to be commended not only for making available this precious and substantial amount of information—fundamental to a better understanding of both the models and the reception of the *De Officiis*—but also for integrating it within an interface that enables readers to gain such data effortlessly.

There is much to be learned from Fischer’s work, and it is hoped that the remarkable potential offered by this new format will inspire classicists as well as medievalists. The rich, thought-provoking and fundamentally open-ended edition by Fischer is valuable both as a scholarly achievement in itself, since it makes a critical text of *De Officiis* finally available, and since it shows how it is possible to combine the traditional methodologies of textual criticism with the potentials of XML encoding. If additional efforts to make technical contents more easily accessible could be undertaken, this edition will become a solid starting point in the dissemination this ground-breaking technology.