

## Michel Scot: Liber particularis, Liber physonomie. Edition critique, introduction et notes by Oleg Voskoboynikov

David Juste

Volume 2, Number 1, 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087178ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/aestimatio.v2i1.37731>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

Institute for Research in Classical Philosophy and Science

### ISSN

1549-4470 (print)

1549-4497 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this review

Juste, D. (2021). Review of [Michel Scot: Liber particularis, Liber physonomie. Edition critique, introduction et notes by Oleg Voskoboynikov]. *Aestimatio*, 2(1), 195–198. <https://doi.org/10.33137/aestimatio.v2i1.37731>

© David Juste, 2021



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

**érudit**

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

*Michel Scot: Liber particularis, Liber physonomie. Édition critique, introduction et notes* by Oleg Voskoboynikov

Micrologus Library 93. Florence: SISMEL – Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2019. Pp. vii + 416. ISBN 978-88-8450-906-2. Paper €70.00

Reviewed by

David Juste\*

Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Munich

[djuste@ptolemaeus.badw.de](mailto:djuste@ptolemaeus.badw.de)

Michael Scot (d. ca 1235) has long been known as an important figure in medieval intellectual history. Translator (from Arabic) of Greek scientific and philosophical texts, notably of al-Bitrūjī and Averroes, he spent the last years of his life as an astrologer at the court of the Holy Roman emperor Frederick II (1220–1250) in Palermo. It is at the request of the emperor that Scot composed his major work, the *Liber introductorius*, a massive encyclopaedia in three parts dealing respectively with astrology and astronomy (the *Liber quatuor distinctionum*), cosmology (the *Liber particularis*), and physiognomy (the *Liber physonomie*). Totaling over 550,000 words—that is, by way of comparison, more than three times Ptolemy’s *Almagest*—the *Liber introductorius* is one of the lengthiest scientific works produced in the Middle Ages. Another particular feature of the *Liber introductorius* is that it draws on a large number of sources, a good many of which are very rare, lost, or otherwise unidentified, thus making this trilogy markedly different from standard 12th- and 13th-century works dealing with the same subjects. The *Liber introductorius* thus appears as an important text in the history of medieval science, one whose critical edition has been called for by historians ever since the pioneering studies by Lynn Thorndike and Charles H. Haskins in the 1920s.

Oleg Voskoboynikov partly fulfills this desideratum by offering for the first time a critical edition of the second and third parts (the *Liber particularis* and *Liber physonomie*), which altogether represent about a quarter of the whole work. Besides the edition [63–385], the volume includes a bibliography [387–398], two indexes (names, places, and sources [401–405]; subjects

---

\* DAVID JUSTE is research leader of the project Ptolemaeus Arabus et Latinus at the Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften in Munich (<https://ptolemaeus.badw.de>).

[407–415]), and an engaging introduction [3–61], in which the author surveys the life and works of Scot, showing full mastery of the relevant primary and secondary literature and its wider historical and intellectual context.

There are good reasons for editing the *Liber particularis* and the *Liber physonomie* together insofar as both texts are found one after the other—and without the *Liber quatuor distinctionum*—in seven of the nine manuscripts that Voskoboynikov considers, all of which date from the 14th and 15th centuries [53–61]:

- Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, lat. fol. 550;
- Budapest, Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, lat. 157;
- \*London, Wellcome Institute, 507 (L);
- \*Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, L. 92 sup. (A);
- \*Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. Misc. 555 (O);
- \*Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rossi 421 (R);
- Wrocław, Biblioteka Uniwersytecka, IV.F.21.

In the other two manuscripts,

- Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, n.a.l. 1401 (the earliest manuscript of any part of the *Liber introductorius*, copied ca 1279) and
- Escorial, Real Biblioteca del Monestario de San Lorenzo, f.III.8 (14th century),

the *Liber physonomie* is missing and the *Liber particularis* follows the *Liber quatuor distinctionum*. Another characteristic of these two manuscripts is that they preserve a shorter version of the *Liber particularis* (and of the *Liber quatuor distinctionum* for that matter), and a shorter version which differs considerably between the two manuscripts. Thus, we actually have three versions of the *Liber particularis*: two short versions represented by these two manuscripts of Paris and Escorial and the longer version contained in the seven manuscripts listed above.

To be complete, I take this opportunity to draw attention to two manuscripts unknown to the author:

- Escorial, Real Biblioteca del Monestario de San Lorenzo, e.III.15, a 14th-century manuscript containing the *Liber particularis* on f. 41ra–51va; and
- Bologna, Biblioteca Universitaria, 1598 (824), a 15th-century manuscript containing the *Liber physonomie* on f. 89r–114r.

Voskoboynikov edited the *Liber particularis* and the *Liber physonomie* on the basis of the four manuscripts marked with an asterisk above, all of which

date from the 14th century. For the *Liber physonomie*, he also collated the version printed in Venice in 1477 by Jacopo da Fivizzano. The edition is clearly presented and easy to use, with chapter numbers added for convenience. The text is accompanied by two apparatuses, one reporting the variant readings and the other providing identification (when possible) of the citations found in the text, as well as, occasionally, other remarks by the editor. Since this volume essentially consists of an edition (without translation, commentary, and analysis of content and sources), there is little that can be discussed in a review, but I should like to draw attention to two points.

First, as fundamental as it is to evaluating Scot's contribution, the question of the relationships between the three versions of the *Liber particularis* is left unaddressed. Voskoboynikov is satisfied with briefly reporting the hypothesis of Gundula Grebner [2008], according to which the earliest version was the short version of the Paris MS, a version which was expanded into the long version, which in turn was abridged in the short version of the Escorial (f.III.8) MS. To this Voskoboynikov responds: "Mais un processus inverse reste aussi plausible" [55],<sup>1</sup> without further explanation. This would have called for more. If Grebner's hypothesis is correct, then the short version of the Paris MS gains special importance and the attribution of the long version to Scot becomes problematic, if not questionable. At the very least, the reader would have expected the author to engage with Grebner's hypothesis, to examine and compare the three versions, and to justify his choice of editing the long version.

Second, Voskoboynikov does not say how he edited the texts. MS O was chosen as the base manuscript [56]; but, for the rest, the reader is left to guess how the editor proceeded. For example, we do not know to what extent the base manuscript was trusted and what happened when it was not. The editor writes:

Il n'y a que quelques cas où la lecture de R ou L m'a paru plus convaincante pour la reconstitution du sens.<sup>2</sup> [59]

but the cases in question are not detailed or referenced. We are not informed either about which variants were reported in the apparatus and which were ignored. Judging from the very small number of variants noted throughout

---

<sup>1</sup> "But a reverse process remains also plausible".

<sup>2</sup> "There are only a few cases where the reading of R or L seemed to me more convincing <than O> for reconstructing the meaning".

(an average of about seven variants per page for four to five witnesses colated!), it is clear that a selection was made. Closer inspection shows that the spelling variants were systematically ignored. This is not explained in the introduction and the reader has no way of knowing what other kinds of variants were silenced in the apparatus.

As problematic as these shortcomings might be in the context of an *édition critique*, this book nevertheless represents a considerable scholarly achievement and Oleg Voskoboynikov is to be congratulated for making these two long-awaited texts fully available.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Grebner, G. 2008. "Der *Liber Nemroth*, die Fragen Friedrichs II. and Michael Scotus und die Redaktionen des *Liber particularis*". Pp. 284–297 in G. Grebner and J. Fried edd. *Kulturtransfer und Hofgesellschaft im Mittelalter. Wissenskultur am sizilianischen und kastilischen Hof im 13. Jahrhundert*. Berlin.