



New Findings in Early Biblical Manuscripts of the Vatican Library

Entering the Jubilee year 2025, the third volume of *The Vatican Library Review* invites readers to learn about recent discoveries concerning early versions of the Bible in various languages from the rich holdings of the Vatican Library. After innumerable generations of scholars, the profound breadth of biblical exegesis, and the immense variety and versions of Biblical texts, material philology can still offer new findings in early witnesses of the Bible.

Among the Vatican Library's biblical manuscripts, Codex B (*Vat. gr. 1209*) enjoys the most prominent position since it is reputed to preserve a relatively complete version of the Bible in Greek from the fourth century. Its outstanding philological value has been somewhat obliterated by later reinking of its faded letters, corrections, and various critical symbols that have been assigned to different periods by scholars, extending more than a millennium. A collaboration between chemists and philologists clarifies the date of the more than 750 *distigmai*, pairs of horizontally aligned dots in the margins of this manuscript that highlight textual variants, ascribing them to the sixteenth century instead of the fourth as many scholars had believed previously. This important discovery, based on objective material analysis, opens new doors for discussion and demonstrates that intuitive methods allied with the natural sciences can obtain further results.

The *P. Vat. Copto 9*, a papyrus also from the fourth century, is an invaluable witness to the earliest known form of proto-Bohairic language together with *P. Bodmer 111*. The article here includes the edition of these early Coptic versions of the prophet Naoum, together with the classic (medieval) Bohairic version from another manuscript in Rome. This is the first element in a series of studies which will publish for the first time this early version of the Minor Prophets with a careful philological apparatus and French translation.

Many manuscripts went out of use, and often these were purposefully destroyed or recycled for their durable parchment. A couple of contributions present such type of material. The Jerusalem or "Palestinian" Talmud has come

down to us in one complete Italian manuscript and two partial manuscripts. The 18 European short fragments are augmented by a careful presentation of a new testimony, an Ashkenazi fragment from the twelfth century (*Vat. ebr. 726*, f. 6) which was sliced up and used as binding support. Another study presents a new fragment of the Babylonian Talmud (tractate *Soṭah*), from which two folios from the turn of the fourteenth century Sefardi manuscript were used as flyleaves in a colligate of two Italian editions of Jewish texts from the sixteenth century.

Biblical texts, especially Psalters, were sometimes copied in multilingual manuscripts. The Vatican Library holds the so-called *Psalterium Pentaglottum* (*Barb. or. 2* with Ge'ez, Syriac, Coptic, Arabic, and Armenian versions). A longer Arabic note in this manuscript is analyzed to reveal a new episode in its tortuous history: how it was repaired in the early seventeenth century.

Damaged manuscripts, especially if not attractive to readers, are often destroyed or dismembered and reused as has just been referred to with regard to the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud fragments. If their content retained some value, they were normally repaired. This is what happened with the *Psalterium Pentaglottum* and also with the Greek Gospel Lectionary from the late-eighth-century Constantinople (Morcelli Calendar, *Vat. gr. 2144*). Here the earlier repair has changed irreversibly the original Byzantine binding. Conservators today do more than restore old manuscripts. Ideally, they respect the physical structure of the original and its historical elements, while also considering their structural functions, even by removing the problematic traces of what was added during earlier repairs. A collaborative study between a conservator and a textual expert illuminates how the synergy between departments of the Vatican Library can fulfill its mission to guarantee the conservation of its precious holdings.

András Németh | ORCID: 0000-0002-1722-468X
Department of Manuscripts, BAV, Vatican City
nemeth@vatlib.it