CHAPTER 10

The Tetragrammaton in Vernacular Bibles, Popular Print, and Illustration

Early Modern Bibles

There was general confidence in Jerome’s Latin Bible during the Middle Ages, though scholars who knew Hebrew, like Raymund Martin and Nicholas of Lyra, noted points where it did not reflect the *Hebraica Veritas*. They explained this as due to different, more accurate versions produced by Jerome as his critical acumen increased, or by denying versions of some books to him. Humanists were sharper. Lorenzo Valla felt able to use words like “crude” and “barbarous.” Reuchlin in his grammar offered some 200 corrections of the Vulgate. Étaples’s 1512 Commentaries on Paul consider that the common Latin which preceded Jerome (which we today call the *Vetus Latina*) was the Scripture he (Jerome) called the “Vulgate.” In 1525 Augustino Steuco (1497–1548), the Italian humanist and Counter-Reformation polemicist, became director of the Grimani library in Venice (where many of Pico della Mirandola’s books had ended up) and used its books to write annotations, strictly literal and historical, upon the Pentateuch. In his *Veteris Testamenti ad Hebraicam Veritatem Recognitio* (Aldus, Venice, 1529) he used these resources to correct Jerome’s Vulgate text. He subsequently did the same with Job and the Psalms.1 Mention should also be made here of the careful work of Santes Pagnino (Pagninus) and the translations of Étaples (Vatablus), whom we have considered in respect of his Christian Kabbalism.2 Nevertheless, it was the Vulgate which was ultimately accepted as the Catholic Church’s Bible at the Council of Trent in March and April 1546.3

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1 Ambrogio Morando edited Steuco’s *Opera Omnia* (D. Nicholinus, Venice, 1578, 1592, 1601). The *Enarrationes in librum Job* are in vol. 1; those on the Psalms are in vol. II. Theobald Freudenberger, *Augustinus Steuchus aus Gubbio Augustinerchorherr und papstlicher Bibliothekar* (Münster in Westfalen, 1935).


Nor were Bibles in particularly short supply. Manuscript Bibles had been turned out in such numbers between 1240 and 1280 that the market was saturated. The manuscripts produced in the 14th and 15th centuries are consequently comparatively rare. Between 1521 and 1570 there were some 138 Latin Bibles printed: the 80 that were printed in Catholic towns were placed on the Index, and 58 Bibles were Protestant. The three most influential were probably those of the Catholic humanist Santes Pagnino (1528), the Protestant Sebastian Münster (1534–1535), and the Zürich Bible of 1543.

The printed text of the Vulgate, however, was not beyond reproach. Though subsequently tidied up in technical and typographic terms, Gutenberg’s printed version remained extraordinarily influential, even though he seems to have given no thought at all to the choice of a copy text. Virtually all of the 15th-century printed Latin Bibles used Gutenberg’s text or those of his slavish imitators. In purely textual terms, this constituted a major and rather arbitrary crystallization from the manuscript tradition, similar in effect to that of the early 13th century around the University of Paris. This was not a particularly good legacy for the 16th century.

Nevertheless, there were attempts to improve on the Latin version, as we have just seen. Thomas Gataker in his De Nomine Tetragrammato Dissertatio in 1645 (Reland p. 481)—a book we shall meet again—offers a conveniently swift survey of the earlier Latin renderings of Exodus 3:14: Jerome had Sum qui Sum or Sum quod Sum, which has been always influential. Pagninus had Ero qui Ero or Ero quod Ero, which is what (he says) the words literally mean. Oleaster is happy to follow this entirely, though he had, of course, set himself the specific task of commenting upon Pagninus’s translation. The Latin Bible brought out

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