CHAPTER FOUR

PRODUCTION AND OWNERSHIP

With surviving manuscripts of the Gloss dating from the twelfth century right through to the sixteenth, it is clear is that there is not a single, simple story of production and ownership of the text. Instead, there are definite stages in Gloss production, varying along with the changing needs of users, the technical possibilities of book production, and external fashion. Work has been done on only certain phases of this story—and since beginnings are always fascinating to historians, there is most work for the parts with the least remaining material evidence. This chapter surveys a lot of time and geography, and of necessity relies very heavily on what other scholars (often not looking specifically for the Gloss) have discovered. Some evidence comes from extant manuscripts; some from surviving book lists and catalogues. It is patchy and provisional. Nevertheless, I think it worth mapping out the territory, if only to make clear how much is left to do. I have divided the material into chronological phases of production, but a closer study of areas other than Paris and northern France would show that each has its own, different pattern. This is because the Gloss’s production history is intimately linked with the history of its use—an issue that is often forgotten or neglected by scholars. Given that the story of the Gloss’s making is already convoluted, this chapter will try to keep the two strands of production and use separate, concentrating here on the physical aspect of production, and reserving the matter of the use of the books for the next.

I. The First Stage: to c. 1140

Patricia Stirnemann has made a path-breaking attempt to discover, date and localise the earliest Gloss manuscripts.¹ So far, she has assembled

¹ P. Stirnemann, “Où ont été fabriqués les livres de la glose ordinaire dans la première moitié du XIIᵉ siècle”, in Le XIIᵉ siècle. Méditations et renouveau en France dans la première moitié du XIIᵉ siècle, ed. F. Gasparri, Cahiers du léopard d’or 3 (Paris, 1994),
a group of around thirty manuscripts which she dates to between 1120 and 1135 and 1140. Unfortunately, none of them can be assigned a definite date from internal or external evidence, and Stirnemann has to work by making comparisons to other datable manuscripts, on grounds of style, decoration, and other physical evidence. Dating from this sort of comparison is an inexact science, especially when an argument hinges on a decade or two. Looking at different types of evidence can produce slightly different results. For example, on the basis of the physical appearance of the manuscript, Stirnemann has dated Laon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 74, containing the Gloss on Matthew and the Song of Songs, to between 1120 and 1135. Dove, on the other hand, using this manuscript alongside others whilst preparing an edition of the Gloss on the Song, prefers to date it “later rather than earlier” in Stirnemann’s range, from a textual point of view. Alongside the difficulties of dating, there is also the question of deciding what texts exactly constitute the Gloss at this period when the texts are so much in flux, an issue which is as yet unresolved.

Stirnemann’s researches are most interesting. She has divided the earliest (1120–1135) manuscripts into two groups: those whose manufacture can be associated with Laon, and those from elsewhere, especially Paris. She localises eleven glossed manuscripts to Laon, containing glosses on Genesis, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job (three copies), the Song of Songs, Matthew (two copies), John (two copies), and the Canonical Epistles (two copies). One further copy which may date from this period has the Pauline Epistles. Notably, this list contains two copies of the Gloss on John, which seems to have been the work of Anselm, and two of the Gloss on Matthew, which is associated with his brother Ralph. The Gloss on the Song of Songs is also thought by its editor to have links with Laon. Together, the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job and the Song form the greater part of the so-called “Sapiential Books”,

pp. 257–301. As of writing, she has no further evidence to report. I am most grateful to Dr Stirnemann for our discussions of these questions.

