Before we consider where Gloss scholarship might want to go next, let us consider what I hope this book has shown that we do know. The Gloss was not the work of Walafrid Strabo. It originates with the glossed biblical books produced by masters Anselm and Ralph at their school at Laon, for use in the classroom. Their work was carried on by their pupils or collaborators, especially Gilbert of Auxerre, and possibly Alberic of Reims. From the beginning, the text of the Gloss was presented in a particular format, which includes the entire biblical text written out continuously, but visibly separately from the text of the glosses. The glosses are both marginal and interlinear, but they are not two different texts: marginal glosses may move into the space between the lines, and vice versa. Only part of the Bible seems to have been covered at this stage—up to about twenty years after Anselm’s death (1117). Few manuscripts of Glossed books remain from this period; it is not until about 1140, from the milieu of the Paris schools, that copies start appearing in larger numbers. The Gloss seems to have been given a new lease of life by some combination of Peter Lombard, Gilbert de la Porrée and the school of St Victor. They were aided in this by the beginnings of a secular commercial book trade in the city. It may be that it is only at this point that “the Gloss” as a conceptual entity comes into existence.

The second half of the twelfth century sees the Gloss in its pomp. Masters in Paris comment not only on the unvarnished biblical text but on the Glossed text. Manuscripts are copied in large numbers, both within and without the context of the schools. Masters (or former students) returning home or entering monastic (and other) communities take their Glossed books with them, and promote the acquisition of others. By the end of the twelfth century, the Paris schools are placing an increased emphasis on works of theology rather than exegesis, and Mendicant Orders (especially the Dominicans) produce their own biblical postilla which superseded the Gloss. However, the Gloss does not stop being copied. In fact, there are more extant Gloss manuscripts from the thirteenth century than from the twelfth; and manuscripts go on being produced at least until the first printed edition in 1480–81. We certainly have Glossed books made in England, Germany and
Italy, although we are not sure what proportion of Glossed books continued to be made in Paris, and exported elsewhere. Outside of the Paris schools, we have no clear picture of how the Gloss was used. Thirteenth-century (or later) copies are generally easier to work with than the twelfth-century volumes, which often have smaller script (especially for the glossing text) and lack reader aids such as running headers and chapter numbers.

The text of the Gloss does not remain stable. The Psalms and Pauline Epistles were subject to the widest scholarly interest, and alongside the “original” parva glosatura text circulated commentaries by Gilbert de la Porrée (the media glosatura) and Peter Lombard (the magna glosatura). Although the rest of the biblical books did not receive such wholesale attention, it seems likely that their Glosses were each subject to at least one major revision before the turn of the twelfth century (aside from minor tinkering). Also, the characteristic layout of the Gloss changes, beginning around 1160 to 1170, marking a change in use from oral classroom text to private reference material. “Reading” the Gloss in the classroom as the basis of the lectio gave way to using the Gloss behind the scenes, as preparation for lectures or reinforcement of knowledge gained in them. The fact that the Gloss was used in the schools does not mean that it was always read in public.

The material of the individual glosses themselves is taken from the works of the major patristic writers and their Carolingian interpreters, especially Rabanus Maurus. Relatively little is the work of the glossators themselves. We are not sure what proportion of the patristic material is taken directly from the original works of the Fathers, and how much comes via already-existing collections of glosses and florilegia. Where other sets of glosses existed, they appear to have been used, and patristic texts are often quoted verbatim through Rabanus, rather than from the original work. Going back to the original does not seem to have been particularly necessary for the glossators’ working method. More often than not, the original author of the material in the glosses is not identified, although the “sense of scripture” that it represents may well be.

The Gloss slowly became too old-fashioned for the cutting-edge classrooms of Paris, but this does not mean that it ceased to be used elsewhere. Indeed, the Gloss survived for so long because it could be adapted to suit changing needs in a variety of situations: the change in layout is a good example of its staying power, almost against the odds. For the Gloss was certainly not the best that could have been devised, nor the easiest to use. In its favour it had the benefit of being