Introduction

Historians for over a century have unanimously credited Stephen Langton with inventing the modern chapter divisions of the Bible in the context of the nascent scholastic culture of the University of Paris in the years prior to 1203. In this essay, I shall explain that the system's veritable origin (in the light of our current knowledge of the manuscripts) was not in France but at Saint Albans, a Benedictine monastery in Southern England, after ca. 1180. It was in Bibles copied at the royal abbey of Saint Albans near London between 1180 and 1200 that the modern chapter numbers (with numerous minor variations), inspired by the sederim of the Hebrew Pentateuch, first appeared. In the early examples the new numbering was placed (as in Hebrew Bibles) in the margins of Bibles still formatted into paragraphs appropriate for receiving older schemas. On the Continent the earliest Bible equipped with modern numbering originated at Cîteaux before 1200. In Paris the first Bibles with modern divisions may be dated approximately to between 1200 and 1210, and all come from the monastery of Saint Victor, an abbey with numerous ties to England and to the abbey of Saint Albans in particular.

The earliest use of fixed divisions of any sort for purposes of reference also began in England ca. 1180, but references that cite the new numbers first appeared in a series of quaestiones, summas, and early biblical concordances composed by English scholars in Paris and in England in the second decade of the thirteenth century, one of whom was Stephen Langton. In manuscripts of these scholastic works, references to the new numbering first were added in the margins (or interlinearly) by the original scribes in copies of their texts dating from ca. 1215. The first datable Bible that from its inception was formatted to receive the new divisions was copied in England, probably at Canterbury, at about the same date (Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine MS 5, datable to before 1231); the first firmly
datable Parisian Bible formatted in analogous fashion (Dole, BM, MS 15) is from 1234. Between ca. 1225 and 1230 biblical commentaries and postillae containing references to the new chapter schema were themselves reformatted into sections corresponding to the new chapter divisions (with the same variants between England and Paris that were present in Bibles) in an evolution of mise-en-page comparable to that of many contemporary manuscripts of the New and Old Testaments. Works of biblical exegesis formatted to replicate the new divisions, as far as I can now determine, emerged first in England and among English scholars in Paris.

**Oriental Languages and Graphic Traditions in the British Isles and the Continent**

The emergence of the new chapter divisions in English monasteries and the peculiarly Insular institution of cathedral monasteries must be viewed in the context of a confluence of new interest in oriental languages and the peculiar graphic tradition of the British Isles. Interest in Hebrew, Arabic and Greek formed part of the profound change in culture, termed the Renaissance of the Twelfth Century. Over sixty years after Burckhardt introduced the concept of the Renaissance in the context of the late Middle Ages, Charles Homer Haskins returned to it to explain the intellectual transformation of twelfth-century Europe.¹ The twelfth century shared with the Italian Renaissance an interest in oriental languages although the study of Arabic was not to play a significant role in Quattrocento Italy.² The twelfth-century scholarly interest in these eastern languages was, however, unrelated to a quest to restore the ethos of the ancient world by kindling a rebirth of the art, the literatures or the scripts of a past golden age. Even for classical Latin texts such as Pliny, the twelfth-century emphasis was on current utility and not historical textual integrity.³

The twelfth century’s intellectual interests were anchored firmly in the learning of the East as it then existed, and therefore the new intellectual

