

DURHAM'S PARIS BIBLE AND THE USE OF COMMUNAL BIBLES IN A BENEDICTINE CATHEDRAL PRIORY IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

Richard Gameson

One of the little-known treasures of Durham Cathedral Library is a fine thirteenth-century Bible, now MS A.II.3 (fig. 3.1).¹ The order of the biblical books, the choice of prologues, the system of chapter divisions,² the absence of capitula lists, and the inclusion of the Interpretation of Hebrew names all show it to be an example of the Paris Bible.³ The appearance of the volume – its script, pen-work flourishing and, above all, art-work – point to an origin in Paris itself, and to a date in the second half of the century; one might more tentatively suggest the 1260s or 70s. In the first section of the present study we shall examine A.II.3 itself. In the second, we shall investigate the implications of the arrival of such a volume for the older Bibles in the collection of Durham Cathedral priory. Third and finally, we shall consider the general points concerning the use of Bibles in a late medieval Benedictine context that are raised by the material as a whole. We must begin, however, by summarising one of the key distinctions between Paris Bibles and their predecessors, as this will be central to some of the discussion that follows.

As is well known, the Paris Bible was the result of two phases of re-ordering and standardisation – one achieved around 1200, the other c. 1230 – which rationalised many of the paratextual features, an important advance given the variety that had characterised earlier copies.⁴ Numerous

¹ Thomas Rud, *Codicum Manuscriptorum Ecclesiae Cathedralis Dunelmensis Catalogus Classicus* (Durham, 1825), pp. 13–14; Richard Gameson, *Manuscript Treasures of Durham Cathedral* (London, 2010), no. 24, with col. ills. of fols. 2r (pp. 9 and 106), 176r, 299r, 340r, 375v, 384v+385r (pp. 164–5) and 409r (p. 173).

² With a few variations (e.g. the start of Mt 6 is actually marked at 6.5).

³ For summary descriptions outlining the general characteristics of the type see Ker, *MMBL I: London* (Oxford, 1969), pp. vii–viii and 96–8; Robert Branner, *Manuscript Painting in Paris during the Reign of Saint Louis* (Berkeley, 1977), Appendix I.

⁴ Laura Light, “Versions et révisions du texte biblique” in *Le moyen âge et la Bible*, ed. Pierre Riché and Guy Lobrichon (Paris, 1984), pp. 55–93, esp. pp. 75–93; eadem, “French Bibles c. 1200–30: A New Look at the Origins of the Paris Bible” in *The Early Medieval Bible: Its Production, Decoration and Use*, ed. Richard Gameson (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 155–76; also A. d’Esneval, “La division de la Vulgate latine en chapitres dans l’édition parisienne du XIII^e siècle”, *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 62 (1978), 559–68.



Figure 3.1. Durham Cathedral Library, A.II.3 (Paris Bible), fol. 2r (Jerome's Prefatory letter).