VERNACULAR BIBLES, BIBLICAL QUOTATIONS AND THE PARIS BIBLE IN ITALY FROM THE THIRTEENTH TO THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY: A FIRST REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

It is demonstrable that Latin Bible manuscripts underwent some standardization in Paris during the first half of the thirteenth century. This process, which affected both material and textual aspects, has been related to the needs of professionals of the sacred page, masters involved in university teaching and preachers, many from the mendicant orders, requiring quick and easy access to the biblical text. The new type of Bible was immensely successful and spread rapidly all over Western Europe (France, England, Spain and Italy), strongly influencing local Bible production. These new Parisian-style Bibles were somewhat uniform in their material and textual features: portable size, single volume, layout, standard book sequence and chapter division, as well as the presence of the Interpretation of Hebrew Names. However, they were never a uniform edition and certainly did not represent an absolute standard, not even in Paris itself.

The analysis of the mechanisms underlying the diffusion of the Paris Bible in Italy benefits from two different approaches: 1. a direct one which traces the links between Latin and vernacular Bibles produced in the peninsula from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century and their dependency on Parisian models; 2. an indirect approach aimed at evaluating the penetration of the Parisian-style Bible in Italy by examining the nature and contents of Biblical quotations in contemporary Latin and vernacular sermons.

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1 For a description of the main features of the Paris Bible with further bibliography, see Laura Light, "Versions et révisions du texte biblique" in Le Moyen Age et la Bible, ed. Pierre Riché and Guy Lobrichon (Paris, 1984), pp. 55–93, at pp. 75–93 and the introduction to the present volume.

Latin Bibles, Vernacular Bibles and the Paris Bible in Italy from the Thirteenth to the Fifteenth Century

Latin Bibles

Analysis of the Latin Bibles produced in Italy reveals that these are typical of a commercial, relatively standardized and up-to-date book production. Similarity to the Paris Bible was strongly linked to the university world, viz. Bologna and its surroundings. This is hardly a surprise. The book ateliers at work there satisfied the needs of students and masters. Many of these professionals of the sacred page had studied in Paris and were familiar with the tools (such as biblical Concordances) that the Paris schools had implemented, tools that relied on key paratextual features, primarily standard chapter divisions. They had very high expectations from their Bibles, especially regarding key characteristics such as portability, single-volume format, specific layout, modern book sequence, chapter divisions and the presence of the Interpretation of Hebrew Names. All these elements, therefore, can be found quite regularly in Bibles produced in a university milieu in Italy.

Even further afield, where university models were not well known or considered as compelling as in Bologna, or where it was not possible to commission the production of manuscripts reflecting the Parisian model, Bibles following older exemplars were adapted by users to the new mode. In some earlier-style Bibles, Parisian-style textual readings, prologues, chapter divisions and variants were added wherever possible in the margins, in blank spaces and on flyleaves. The readers of these Latin Bibles, quite often friars, made great efforts to revise their Bibles so that they would comply with the standards of the particular type of Bible they had learned to use and appreciate during their theological studies in Paris or in other university towns. Resistance to the standardization process occurred as well, as evident in a number of Latin Bibles read in specific religious contexts or destined for lay patrons. Amongst the latter, Bibles connected to the patronage of Manfred Hohenstaufen of Naples and Sicily (†1266) or to the Angevin kings of Naples (mid-fourteenth century) and their immediate circles often contain capitula lists and extra-canonical

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3 A similar process is evident in Bibles from Durham Cathedral, addressed in Richard Gameson’s essay in this volume.
4 On interventions in non-Parisian Bibles by the readers themselves see Magrini, “Production and Use”, 246–248.