
There is much to commend this recent collection of fifteen essays which revolve around the subject of medieval biblical manuscript production and, concomitantly, ‘the liturgical, exegetical and pastoral expressions of the Bible in physical, textual, and aural forms’ (6). The volume had its genesis in a planned project on the history of the Bible in the Middle Ages which, upon recognising some clear lacunae in current scholarship, subsequently evolved into a more focused study with a strong emphasis on how the Bible was ‘experienced’ in the medieval world.

Susan Boynton is associate professor of Musicology at Columbia University and Diane J. Reilly is associate professor of art history at Indiana University, Bloomington. The remaining twelve contributors are drawn from the worlds of medieval history, medieval literature, art history, and intellectual history. In addition, one contributor, Laura Light, was formerly medieval manuscripts cataloguer at the Houghton Library, Harvard University and another, Stella Panayotova, is currently Keeper of Manuscripts at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University. Although Jennifer A. Harris is associate professor of Christianity at St Michael’s College, Toronto, her doctorate was in medieval studies and not theology *per se*. This absence from the volume of the voice of any professional theologians is noteworthy, but may also reflect efforts to shed light on areas largely ignored by scholars such as the Jesuit theologian, Henri de Lubac, in his *Medieval Exegesis*, to which the editors give favourable mention in the first chapter entitled ‘Orientation for the Reader’.

The volume proper opens with an essay on the Bible and the Liturgy by Susan Boynton. Here Boynton reminds us that the words of
the Bible were most often heard and experienced in the context of liturgy in the Middle Ages and, in turn, the liturgy shaped the understanding of scriptural exegesis. In what Boynton calls ‘performative exegesis’, the interpretation of some passages of scripture could change and develop over time under the influence of both liturgical performance and, indeed, so-called ‘liturgical’ drama. Boynton draws attention, for instance, to the offertory antiphon of Ps. 44:3 which was used for Marian feasts. From late antiquity in both sermons and even the Roman liturgy, an association was drawn between this verse (‘grace is poured abroad in thy lips; therefore hath God blessed me forever’) and the Virgin Mary. Although exegesis of the passage remained broadly Christological (celebrating the union of Christ and his Church), by the twelfth century this began to bow to a more Marian reading, doubtless assisted by the weight of liturgical expression.

Richard Gyug’s essay has a narrower geographical focus, examining early medieval bibles, biblical books and the monastic liturgy in the Beneventan region. As many of the contributors to this volume are at pains to remind us, the one-volume bible (or pandect) was a rarity in the early Middle Ages and, indeed, before the large-scale production of the Paris Bible from the thirteenth century onwards. Furthermore, biblical books, which were produced, for the most part, in monastic scriptoria, were directed towards liturgical ends and should be regarded as such rather than some form of proto-Bible. This is a close study of particular aspects of surviving Beneventan biblical manuscripts (of which some thousand remain) and their liturgical orientation. For example, there are nine instances of musical notation accompanying the Lamentations of Jeremiah, a text which was chanted during Holy Week. And yet, Gyug points out, they were clearly not exclusively designed for strictly liturgical use as the manuscripts all contain biblical texts which
would not have been read during the liturgy and may have been reserved for devotional reading instead.

Isabelle Cochelin’s essay, entitled ‘When the Monks Wrote the Book’, has a broader focus, surveying the place of the Bible in monasticism from the sixth to the eleventh centuries. Here the presence of the Bible in the day-to-day lives of the monks is examined, not just in the performance of the *Opus Dei*, but also through visual reminders found in paintings, sculptures and carvings inside the monastery walls in dormitories, refectories and chapter rooms, where monks slept, ate and argued. This total immersion was most effective in the case of oblates, who were donated to monasteries at very young ages by their parents, and were regarded as ‘malleable clay upon which the Bible could be forever impressed’ (65). The diligent monk should know the scriptures (or at the very least the psalms) and be constantly ruminating on them until they configured themselves to the text rather than using the text for the purpose of theological debate (as would be the case increasingly among the schoolmen of the scholastic period).

In the next essay, which turns to the influence of the Bible in the writing of history in the Middle Ages, Jennifer A. Harris surveys the development of Christian historiography over several centuries and especially from the fourth-century writings of Eusebius of Caesarea and also lesser known figures such as the Spaniard, Paulus Orosius (d. 419), who popularized the political interpretation of the four beasts of the Book of Daniel and also equated the success of imperial Rome with God’s providence; indeed, he saw this empire as the fourth and final kingdom mentioned in Daniel and destined to last until the end of history. Augustine would cast a much more wary eye on imperial Rome, however, in his *City of God* and steer clear of this kind of conflation of the secular and the sacred. Gregory of Tours in the sixth century would also give priority to the biblical model of history. This would not be the case with
his namesake, Pope Gregory the Great, who was fully prepared to interpret contemporary history through the lens of biblical passages; some decades later, Isidore of Seville would also collapse the distinction between sacred and secular history, and his universal history used the reckoning of AM (Annus Mundi) beginning with the creation of the world, a system that largely held until the eleventh century when the alternative system of Anno Domini, long before introduced by Dionysius Exiguus and popularized by Bede, began to dominate. Harris brings us through the Carolingian period and up to and beyond the twelfth-century Historia scholastica of Peter Comestor, which took care to note the temporal concurrence of significant biblical events and those of wider secular history.

Diane J. Reilly’s contribution concerns lectern bibles and liturgical reform in the Central Middle Ages. Here she emphasises the sheer enormity of the investment made by monastic institutions into decorated lectern bibles which involved acquiring the hides of several hundred cattle and thousands of hours of labour. Many of these bibles were gifts to institutions from powerful lay patrons. Reilly takes the reader through the period of the Carolingian Renaissance and its concern for accurate texts and the elimination of scribal errors, and to the eleventh-century ecclesiastical reforms and the production of Romanesque bibles. The attention to detail that is evident in some of these lavishly-decorated works, in Reilly’s estimation, signalled their status as very symbols of reform. Reilly’s contribution is complemented by the essay following it, which focuses on Italian Giant Bibles and is written by Lisa Yawn. This study further supports the preceding study by emphasising the consensus of specialists that Giant Bibles began to be produced in Italy, indeed in Rome, around the year 1050 as part of the broader reform movement.
Although Frans van Liere’s essay is entitled ‘Biblical Exegesis through the Twelfth Century’, it encompasses, in fact, a broader survey of the development of exegesis over time. Van Liere takes us through the different levels of scriptural interpretation (literal, allegorical — itself often subdivided into allegory and anagogy — and the moral or tropological). Helpfully, van Liere reminds us that medieval thinkers did not make the distinction between typology and allegory which is sometimes made in modern scholarship. In distinguishing between an allegorical and literal reading of scripture, van Liere draws a nice contrast between Angelomus of Luxeuil and Andrew of St Victor’s interpretation of the 2 Samuel 11, the story of David’s adultery with Bathsheba. His discussion of the early Middle Ages touches on the extent of the Irish contribution to biblical commentaries and bible glosses (which he somewhat cautiously downplays).

This essay as a whole, which progresses through the Carolingian Renaissance and the later works of figures such as Haimo of Auxerre (d. 855) and Hrabanus Maurus (d. 856) before actually reaching the twelfth century and the School of Saint Victor, although of interest to scholars, would also serve very well as a marvellously clear introduction to the topic for students.

Bert Roest’s essay on mendicant school exegesis is a similarly useful survey of the topic and draws attention at the outset to one of the effects of the ambulant life of friars on bible production: the need for ‘pocket’ bibles. Among other subjects Roest discusses the biblical method employed by Aquinas and Bonaventure. He also draws attention to the thirteenth-century Franciscan Roger Bacon who was, in many ways, a man ahead of his time in calling for the study of languages and the development of philological tools in order to ascertain whether a text was valid and without recognisable deficiencies. This, however, would not be
realised until centuries after his death and the establishment of the humanist-led *Collegium Trilingue* in Louvain in 1517.

For most lay Christians access to biblical material in the Middle Ages was by way of the medieval sermon, and this is the subject of Eyal Poleg’s contribution. It was vernacular sermons, by and large, that offered mediated access to the biblical text. This is an important observation and Poleg does a very good job at setting out the significance of the medieval sermon for the transmission of biblical *pericopes*, even if these were sometimes coloured in medieval hues such as in a sermon by Odo of Cheriton on Matthew 21:2 which depicts the village to which Christ sent his disciples as a medieval castle which they go on to lay siege to, armed all the while with charity.

Laura Light’s essay concerns the so-called Paris Bible of the thirteenth century which ‘marks the beginning of the Bible as we know it today’ (228), namely as a single-volume work and copied in significant numbers — indeed, it was largely a product of the commercial book trade. One of the curious extra-biblical elements associated with this work was a text known as the *Interpretation of Hebrew Names* which was usually found after the Book of the Apocalypse and consisted of the interpretation of thousands of transliterated biblical names.

Stella Panayotova’s contribution on the Illustrated Psalter is a fascinating study of how the biblical text informed the images that accompanied it. For instance, verse 3 of Psalm 8 in the thirteenth-century Canterbury Psalter which runs, ‘Out of the mouths of infants and of sucklings thou hast perfected praise’, corresponds to a decorated initial showing the Massacre of the Holy Innocents on whose feast-day (28 December) the psalm was recited. Similarly, in the Bury Psalter of c.1050 the line, ‘I will wash my hands among the innocent’, from Psalm 25 was recited at the Offertory and, fittingly, includes the depiction of a priest washing his hands at this point of the Mass. Psalters for personal
use might also be expanded to include other material such as the Hours of the Virgin and the Office for the Dead, prayers to be recited before Confession and Holy Communion, in addition to tips for not just spiritual but bodily health — advice on blood-letting, diet and various healing herbs, as in the case of a psalter belonging to a woman from Liège in the thirteenth century. Signs of the emendation of earlier texts and commentaries in newly-commissioned manuscripts are nowhere better illustrated than in a critical edition of Peter Lombard’s *Magna Glossatura* which was prepared by Herbert of Bosham (c.1120–c.1194), Thomas Becket’s secretary and adviser. In this work he identified patristic misattributions by means of small figures of various Church Fathers drawn in the margins, stabbing the misattributions with sharp lances and holding scrolls inscribed with the words, ‘I did not say that’!

The final three essays in the collection all concern vernacular bibles of the later Middle Ages. The first, by Richard Marsden, addresses the topic of the Bible in English. Marsden begins his treatment by reminding us that although it was not until the fourteenth century that a complete Bible was available in the English language, many of the most pivotal biblical narratives had been available in English translation for centuries before this, thus giving English one of the longest traditions of bible translation among the western languages. Marsden traces this history from the Anglo-Saxon period (and Bede’s dying work on translating part of John’s Gospel) through the glosses accompanying the Lindisfarne gospels and the tradition of ‘translating’ passages of the Bible through the medium of poetic paraphrase which, along with conveying doctrinal messages, are also embedded in familiar warrior imagery which has the tribes of Israel marching in their mail-coats with shields and spears at the ready. Furthermore King Alfred’s translation of Psalm 23 has ‘very good cattle land’ substituted for the less direct ‘place of pasture’ (280). The question of whether one should aim for a literal word-for-word
translation of the scriptures or a ‘sense-for-sense’ translation was also an important consideration, and, by and large, Alfred took a quite practical approach to the problem. This leads Marsden into the monumental changes to language wrought as a result of the Norman conquest of England, and on to the late fourteenth century when the Wycliffite bible would be birthed. It, too, would take a practical approach to the question of translation, avoiding simple literalism and translating ‘after the sentence and not only after the words’ (289). Indeed, the prologue went even further, intimating that the English translation might well communicate the truth of Scripture more clearly than the Latin itself.

The territory covered by Clive R. Sneddon’s essay (the Old French Bible) will not be as well known as Marsden’s and is, therefore, all the more welcome for this. The Old French Bible had its origins in the thirteenth century but was not chosen by the earliest printers for publication and even now there is no complete modern edition. This translation came about a century before Wycliffe’s and was not the product of a so-called ‘heretical’ group and neither was it condemned by church authorities. Moreover, it is the oldest complete vernacular Bible translation to survive in Western Europe and has only in the last half century or so been the subject of significant scholarly interest. This essay will doubtless be a revelation to many and it is to be hoped that it will provoke further interest in a relatively neglected area of the history of the medieval bible.

The fifteenth and final essay in the volume is by Emily C. Francomano and examines Castilian Vernacular Bibles in Iberia c.1250–1500. These Biblias romanceadas are hugely interesting and have much to say about the interaction between Jews and Christians (and also, to a lesser extent, Muslims) in medieval Spain and the extent to which convivencia actually held firm. Francomano is keen to remind us that the line between Christians and Jews in medieval Spain was often blurred as
a result of conversions, reconversions and, indeed, crypto-conversions to the extent that it becomes very difficult to disentangle church from synagogue. In such a world the Latin translation of scripture served as a useful marker of identity and, by the same token, exclusion. The expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492 led to the almost total destruction of the *Biblias romanceadas* which had, for a time, served as a meeting point of sorts for the three peoples of the Book.

The editors are to be congratulated on gathering together this accessible collection of essays. There are helpful internal markers in each contribution to other essays in the volume, which gives the volume as a whole some coherence (although very occasionally there are examples of inconsistencies in nomenclature). The images are also to be welcomed even if their quality is not the best, and some are too small to be appreciated. Given the fact that many of the essays usefully speak to each other it would have been helpful to include a short epilogue from the editors which might have drawn together some of the salient points communicated across the collection as a whole. This volume will be of interest to many scholars and few will come away from it not having learnt something new.

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