# Reading Abbey's Anglo-Norman French Translation of the Bible (London, British Library, Royal MS 1 C III)

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This paper examines a manuscript that was owned by Reading Abbey, a copy of a translation into French of the Bible that Samuel Berger called the *Bible anglo-normande* (hereafter the Anglo-Norman Bible).[1] London, British Library Royal MS 1 C III (Coates, no. 106) contains the first books of a biblical paraphrase that survives in fragmentary form in a small cluster of manuscripts. James Carley suggests that the manuscript was transferred to the Royal library before the Dissolution, as part of a gift of ten manuscripts that were sent by the abbey to King Henry VIII in 1530.[2] If so, then the book was considered particularly valuable.

A manuscript now in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France MS français 1, contains a near-complete text up to the Pauline Epistles, and a small part of the same Anglo-Norman Bible has also been identified in the paraphrase of the Acts of the Apostles and Revelation contained within a compilation that is extant in British Library Add. MS 54325 (England, c. 1350), Bibliothèque nationale MS français 9562 (England, after 1350), and Bibliothèque nationale MS français 6260 (France, fifteenth century).[3] Royal MS 1 C III is unique in its use of English to supplement and to correct the French, making it a trilingual text.

MS français 1 is a very large (530 x 360mm) illuminated manuscript that was commissioned from an English workshop by John of Welles (d. 1361) and his wife, Maud, daughter of William, lord Ros. Their combined coat of arms can be seen by transparency on the verso of folio 3, having been overpainted with the French royal crest. A figure of a secular woman at prayer, painted in the upper margin of the same folio 3 and facing a depiction of the creation of Eve, suggests that Maud was the intended recipient (Fig. 1). Statues of John and Maud have been

identified in Lincoln Cathedral on the elaborate tomb of her great-uncle Sir Robert Burghersh (d. 1306).[4] The Welles family are also associated with a magnificent Anglo-Norman Apocalypse, bound with the *Lumere as lais* (British Library Royal MS 15 D II, c. 1310). A booklist that was transcribed in that manuscript at the end of the fifteenth century reveals that by then the Welles family owned a significant number of books in Anglo-Norman (none of these is the Anglo-Norman Bible).[5] Royal MS 1 C III is slightly smaller than MS français 1 (370 x 250mm), but it is a sizeable manuscript, decorated with twelve puzzle initials. Given that it covers only the first seventeen books of the Old Testament, it is likely that it was originally intended to be part of a multi-volume book.

Shortly before the year 1356, King John II the Good of France (1319-1364) commissioned a translation of the Bible from a Dominican friar and master of theology at the University of Paris, Jean de Sy ('Johannes de Siaco'). Sy used the Anglo-Norman Bible and added commentary material culled from other sources, including Comestor. The sole surviving copy of Sy's work is his work-in-progress (Bibliothèque nationale de France MS français 15397), with the date 1356 written at the end of the book of Genesis. It runs only from Genesis to Exodus, and emulates the *Glossa ordinaria*'s characteristic layout of text – plus – commentary.[6] Jean de Sy's translation was the first attempt at a massive, twelve-volume translation that would only be completed under Charles VI. As late as 1380, Sy's manuscript was stored in the royal library as sixty-two unbound quires. The first six quires of Sy's Bible had been illuminated by the same artist as a *Bible Historiale completée,* intended for King Charles V (1338-1380) when he was Dauphin (from 1349 to 1364) (British Library Royal MS 17 E VII). This two-volume work is also internally dated to 1356 (Part 1, Genesis to Psalms, f. 230), and completed in January 1357.[7] The *Bible historiale completée* combined a different vernacular paraphrase of the Bible, known as the *Bible du XIIIe siècle/Bible de Paris*, with Guyart des Moulins' translation of Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*, and it was a standard support for a copy of the Latin Vulgate.[8] Jean de Sy's project seems to have been bested by the Dauphin's book. John the Good was captured at the Battle of Poitiers on September 19th, 1356, meaning that both manuscripts were being produced at the time that the king began four years of imprisonment in England. He was released in 1360 but returned to London in 1364, where he died the same year.

John was able to commission and to pay for books throughout this period.[9]

It is remarkable that the creation of a handful of manuscripts that are geographically so distant from each other should cluster around the years *circa* 1350 to 1364.[10] Assuming that the 'Reading Abbey' manuscript was copied at the same time, it would make it part of a small chain of transmission that links a middle-ranking Lincolnshire baron to the king of France.

Like other translations of this period which have no declared provenance or patron, Royal MS 1 C III offers a glimpse of a context, and a moment of both reception and production. By 'reception' is meant the manuscript's status as one of a small cluster of copies of a lost exemplar. 'Production' designates the evidence that it provides of a series of strategies employed by the scribal team to tackle several problems that it encountered as it produced this copy.[11] This particular manuscript has been studied extensively in recent years, notably by Pierre Nobel, as a key witness for the complexity of translation within a trilingual insular context. The last part of this paper will analyse this aspect of Royal MS 1 C III.

Owner inscriptions show that Reading Abbey acquired a large number of manuscripts from private hands in the later Middle Ages, so it cannot be assumed that the Anglo-Norman Bible was either made in the abbey or commissioned by it.[12] The gothic cursive and treatment of decorative initials in Royal MS 1 C III are very similar to that of Add. MS 54325, which has also been dated to around 1350 (Figs 2 and 3). Add. MS 54325 is not a lost part of Royal MS 1 C III: it is thicker (571 folios), and it has smaller, narrower pages. Its paraphrase of the Bible is made up of a number of disparate texts, but it is structured for its readers by a clear scheme of rubricated chapter headings.[13] The superficial resemblance between the two Anglo-Norman biblical texts indicates that a common workshop produced both, but for different recipients.

As there is no prior owner inscription for Royal MS 1 C III, and in the absence of evidence to the contrary, it will be assumed here that the manuscript was closely connected with the Benedictine abbey of Reading. There is little external evidence for monastic owners of such texts, the exception being a versified Anglo-Norman Bible in a manuscript that was formerly owned by the Augustinian canons at

Llanthony Secunda, in Gloucestershire (Oxford, Corpus Christi College MS 36).[14] Our particular Anglo-Norman Bible in prose, therefore, had three different readerships: a secular noble household (possibly a female patron), a religious house of monks, and a Parisian master of theology working for a royal patron.[15]

The broader context for this enquiry is the growing awareness of the enduring importance of French in England after 1300.[16] Richard Ingham has stressed the importance of monasteries as well as elementary 'church schools' and grammar schools for French-medium education in England up to the Black Death (1348). A shift during the 1350s to education and writing in English did not abolish the everyday, non-elite use of French in England.[17] In this context, the insertion of English words into Royal MS 1 C III points to the changing linguistic environment of the 1350-1360s. It may be viewed also as a follow-on to the well-known trilingual compilation of texts and music, British Library Harley MS 978, which was possibly copied in Oxford and almost certainly assembled in Reading Abbey in the last third of the thirteenth century. The diverse range of texts and topics of Harley MS 978, both secular and liturgical, led Andrew Taylor to describe it as 'a book to fashion an identity'.[18] Its musical compilation has been described most recently by Helen Deeming as 'the product of a small group of educated enthusiasts' embedded in a European network, who may have tweaked existing compositions, or possibly composed afresh in fashionable genres (polyphony and the instrumental *estampie*).[19] For example, a two-voiced conductus that was well-known across European royal and ecclesiastical courts was reworked in Harley MS 978 for three voices, then provided with a unique translation into French.[20] Ingham, in turn, notes that elementary education took place in the *schola cantus*, and that very young boys learned French at the same time as they learned to sing.[21] Nor did this activity end with the thirteenth century, because later hands added improvements to the music. Harley MS 978 demonstrates the dynamic exchanges that took place between monastic communities as well as between secular courts both in Britain and on the Continent. The manuscript as a whole is, in Deeming's words, 'witness to a tri-lingual, Anglo-French ecclesiastical culture'. The fact that it was used in the fourteenth century points to a milieu that did not vanish overnight.[22]

Some fifty years later, the socio-political situation had changed, but contacts with European courts and universities had not reduced.

Reading Abbey remained a royal foundation within a short journey by boat or horse from the royal courts at London and Windsor, as well as the university and booksellers of Oxford. The Westminster Abbey chroniclers Robert of Reading (active up to 1325) and John of Reading (active from 1345 to 1367) were both Benedictine monks. John mentions the death of the abbot of Reading in 1361, and comments on a violent storm that damaged the abbey in 1365, which hints that he might well have begun his career in that house.[23] By virtue of its connection with the Jean de Sy manuscript, Royal MS 1 C III also provides witness to an 'Anglo-French, tri-lingual ecclesiastical culture' of considerable reach. I have stressed the sophistication of Harley MS 978 because some recent interpretations of the text in Royal MS 1 C III have tended to depict Reading Abbey as a provincial, insular community, where English was used to compensate for a fading Francophone culture. If Harley MS 978 was a book designed to 'fashion an identity' for its monastic readers, it may be argued that Royal MS 1 C III also offers evidence of a multilingual identity with secure foundations.

## Translations of the Bible into French

Before the emergence of powerful heretical movements such as Lollardy, vernacular translations of the Bible text played a growing role in Christian lay piety.[24] These were not word-for-word translations, but rather extensive paraphrase or detailed summary of the text of both the Old and New Testaments in their standard form, the fourth-century Vulgate. By the year 1300, there were at least five complete translations of the Vulgate into French verse. In North-Western France, around the year 1189, Herman de Valenciennes produced a poem known as *Li romanz de Dieu et de sa Mere*. A translator active in the early thirteenth century produced a work that survives only in one manuscript (Bibliothèque nationale MS français 763, entitled *La Bible anonyme* by its editor). Between 1270 and 1320 came the poems by Macé de la Charité and Jean Malkaraume.[25] A late-twelfth-century Anglo-Norman verse translation of the Old Testament survives in four complete and three fragmentary manuscripts, along with prose renderings of it.[26] Post-Conquest England also accounts for earlier verse translations into

French of biblical texts, notably Sanson de Nantuil's *Proverbes de Salemon* (c. 1135-1165, Dean no. 458).[27] Prose translations of the Bible came later, after the emergence of prose in literary circles. These include the *Bible d'Acre* (c.1250-1254), which was commissioned for King Louis IX of France, the Parisian *Bible du XIIIe siècle/Bible de Paris* (c. 1270), a condensed 'Bible en François' attributed to Roger d'Argenteuil (before 1300), and finally the Anglo-Norman Bible.[28]

These translations do not compete over doctrinal accuracy or linguistic authenticity, and are not to be viewed as quasi-heretical texts.[29] On the contrary, they are part of the apparatus of mainstream medieval Christianity. David Lawton has characterized the process of vernacularisation of the medieval Bible as 'a spectrum of linguistic activity from translation through paraphrase to different kinds of imaginative substitution and of social process whereby sacred texts are made available to vernacularity'.[30] After the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), the emphasis on providing the laity with religious instruction in the vernacular impelled the production of translations and digests. In terms of the rise in England of didactic texts written in Anglo-Norman French, a strong case has been made for the influence of constitutions issued by successive bishops, notably Robert Grosseteste (d. 1253), for disseminating accessible manuals for lay devotion, confession and penance.[31] While this does not explain the poems that exist from before 1215, it is useful to place the thirteenth-century prose vernacularisations in this new situation. The *Bible du XIIIe siècle/Bible de Paris* is now believed to be the product of the establishment within the University of Paris of a new division of the Vulgate and its Prologues. Nobel concludes after extensive study that the Anglo-Norman Bible derives from it, and may therefore be viewed as a support for new versions of the Vulgate.[32]

Translation-adaptations such as these relied heavily on parabiblical commentaries and companion books in Latin, notably Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica* (c. 1170) and Peter Riga's verse paraphrase and commentary on the Bible known as the *Aurora* (c. 1170-1209).[33] However, despite numerous commentaries and liturgical applications, and possibly because of their literalism and their generic designation as *istoires* (both 'story' and 'History'), these translations focus on the narrative portions of the Vulgate.[34] A fifteenth-century abbreviated Bible warns at the outset: *'Sil qui weult antremetre de*

*traitier divine escriture et metre de latin en romanz. se devroit bien garder qe il ni mete riens que ne soit de la vraie istoire'* (Whoever sets out to tackle Holy Scripture and to put Latin into the Romance tongue should carefully avoid putting anything in there that is not true history) (Bibliothèque nationale MS français 24728, f. 1). Although Jerome had argued that Scripture should be translated *ad verbum*, it is clear from these texts that sense (and specifically the sense of the narrative) was privileged.[35]


The 'Reading Abbey' manuscript

Royal MS 1 C III is not a luxury item, unlike the manuscript produced for the Welles family, and the work planned by Jean de Sy. There are several decorative initials (twelve of them elaborate), but a significant portion of the manuscript, from folio 200 to the end, was never rubricated: small red ink blots mark out where the rubricator's work was planned. Nobel's statements that the manuscript was written by a single hand are not borne out by looking at it in full. At least two hands were involved. Line widths differ between thirty-eight lines per column, marked out by prick marks and filled in by the scribe (for example, f. 272v, which has a catchword), and fifty-four (f. 273r, facing f. 272v). The narrower plan of fifty-four lines per column is also found in the first gathering (f. 1r). The bound manuscript is a complete book, in the sense that its last folio is written to the end, and closes with an explicit for the Book of Tobit (f. 314v, col.b). There are therefore grounds for assuming that it was originally the first of several volumes.

Anne Wanono suggests that this copy was a tool used by the monks to brush up their French, and Alan Coates suggests that the Abbey's school provided a grounding in French for its pupils, a mixture of boys of the town and the sons of wealthy men.[36] However, 'classroom' Bibles in this period were usually Glossed Bibles, and only Jean de Sy's manuscript provides an extensive gloss. The large size of these volumes also argues against schoolroom use, because there had been a growing trend since the thirteenth century towards miniaturising copies of the Vulgate into a single volume (the pandect), for the purpose of study. Portable and cheaply-produced, as Laura Light notes, 'the one-volume Bible was searchable'; it was a tool for preachers and commentators

such as Jean de Sy.[37] There is no evidence of tabulation or cross-referencing in Royal MS 1 C III. On the other hand, two-volume vernacular bibles appear in several inventories of the later Middle Ages, almost exclusively in the households of the laity and often owned by women. Queen Isabella (d. 1358) owned a lavish two-volume 'biblia in gallicis' as well as a translated Apocalypse at the time of her death.[38] Despite its historical location in a monastic library, Royal MS 1 C III resembles books that were designed for a secular readership, such as its sibling, Bibliothèque nationale MS français 1.

The Anglo-Norman Bible was overshadowed by the success of the *Bible du XIII*ᵉ *siècle/Bible de Paris.* This translation-adaptation often survives in two volumes, but more copies survive of the second volume, the New Testament.[39] Michael Camille studied the illustrative programme of a copy that was illustrated by a prolific artist who was associated with the University of Oxford as well as the royal court, and who was active in the mid-1320s (Cambridge University Library, MS Ee. 3. 52).[40] The artist also illustrated a number of learned books both in French and Latin. This manuscript was copied from a continental French exemplar, possibly one that is now in the British Library (Harley MS 616 and Yates Thompson MS 9).[41] It is clear that copies were available in a number of different social settings by the 1350s.

## A translation in need of improvement

In Royal MS 1 C III, both the Bible and the Jerome Prologues are peppered with English words.[42] The scribes occasionally leave gaps and furnish an alternative word or phrase either in the margin or in the main text (Fig. 4). At first glance this seems to betray an inadequate grasp of French on the part of the scribes. However, Pierre Nobel's detailed analysis of these parts of the text, compared with MS français 1 and Jean de Sy's work, leads him to conclude that they are attempts to remedy inaccuracies and gaps that were found in a common exemplar.[43] Jean de Sy resorted to the Vulgate to correct the text. In his case, there are fewer grounds for assuming that either his Latin or French were lacking, because although a master of theology would have been primarily fluent in Latin, Jean de Sy was from the diocese of Reims – French was his mother tongue.[44]

I have examined Royal MS 1 C III from folio 48 to the end (folio 314), in order to compare Nobel's findings concerning folios 1-48 with an overview of the entire manuscript. The scribe of Royal MS 1 C III tends to leave a blank, then to furnish a possible word a short time later, in either Latin (from the Vulgate) or Middle English. Occasionally a longer periphrasis is provided in French. Some folios are left with several unresolved blank spaces (f. 62r, col.b). At other times, the scribe adds an English word after a French word, and underlines that new English word. For example, Nobel cites the following: '*Jeo ne sui pas si gai et restif blunt que jeo promet*' (f. 4v col.b). The passage renders words from Jerome's letter to Paulinus: '*Non sum tam petulans et hebes*'. Nobel identifies the English word as a correction, not a gloss. In Middle French, the adjective *restif* refers to a dog or a horse that remains immobile, and figuratively therefore applies to someone who is recalcitrant.[45] Therefore *restif* (recalcitrant, stubborn) corresponds less well to the Latin *hebes* (stupid) than the Middle English term for a stupid or obtuse person: *blont*.[46] The *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* defines *restif* as 'stupid' solely on the basis of this example from Royal MS 1 C III. However, in modern English, the Middle French adjective remains the etymology of 'restive' in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: a horse refusing to obey or to move forwards (identical with the modern French adjective, *rétif*). It is therefore likely that the scribe of the 'Reading Abbey' Bible, as Nobel suggests, is not innovating, but correcting an inappropriate use of *restif*.

Examining the manuscript *in extenso* undermines Nobel's argument in favour of a single scribal hand; this lessens the chances of the manuscript preserving the eccentricities of an individual. It also reveals that the glossing and underlining do not continue consistently throughout, and are always an incidental aspect of the scribe's work. Some quires have next to no underlined words, but these correspond to parts of the manuscript that also have no work by the rubricators, meaning that there might be glosses in the text, but that they were not highlighted by underlining. Twice, the English culinary noun *pankake* is added to the French noun *turteux*, which (among several others things) refers to a round cake: '... *et bracoses conspers de oille et mist une turteux a pankake our les gresses* ...' (Leviticus 8, f. 70r, col.b, Fig. 5. See also f. 91r, col.a).[47]

Latin is used as well, as Nobel notes, often a means of referring the reader back to the Vulgate, as can be seen in the double gloss of the French noun *tresorie*: '*tresorie <u>horde depositum</u>*' (f. 68r, col.b). A list of unfamiliar objects (bangles and earrings) leads the scribe to transcribe one of the Latin nouns, with a paraphrasing gloss in French for one noun, plus a word in English for the next: '... *les hommes et les femmes donnent <u>armillas</u> ceo est ournamentz de braz. et eournamentz de orailles. <u>i. mauues</u> et ournamentz*' (f. 61v, col.a). This is a translation of a passage that challenges modern translators of the Bible too (Exodus 35: 23 in the Vulgate): '*viri cum mulieribus praebuerunt armillas et inaures anulos et dextralia omne vas aureum in donaria Domini separatum est*'. The equivalent verses in modern English versions (Exodus 35: 22) read 'bracelets, and earrings, and rings, and tablets,' (King James Bible), 'brooches, earrings, rings and ornaments' (New International Version), 'brooches and earrings and signet rings and bracelets,' (New American Standard Bible).[48] In Royal MS 1 C III, the Latin noun *armillas* is quoted from the Vulgate text and provided with a gloss in French as 'arm ornaments'.[49] The English term provided for what is glossed in French as 'ear ornaments' is unclear; it may be the noun *mauthe* (*mauthen* or *mawth*, the name of the plant *agnus castus*), but this seems inappropriate within the context.[50] The adjective *manye* (many), preceded by the abbreviated form of *id est* ('that is to say'), appears more likely, even though it offers only an approximative translation of the Vulgate's reference to many gold objects (' ... i.e. many ornaments'). The glosses are tentative for the cultural reason that neither arm-rings nor earrings were commonly worn in fourteenth-century England.

Although many of their interventions concern everyday technical or cultural terms, the 'Reading Abbey' hands occasionally struggle with translations that are not simply wrong but in breach of the appropriate register.[51] Nobel points out how an underlined Latin word (taken from the Vulgate) corrects the rendering of '*reges de lumbis tuis egredientur*' (Genesis 35, 11) (Kings shall issue from your loins) as '*rois istront de tes naches <u>lumbis</u>*' (f. 27r col.a). *Naches* (Anglo-Norman *nages*) means 'buttocks'. MS français 1 reads *engendrures*, which designates both offspring and their begetting (f. 10r, col.b).[52] There is a similar attempt to correct the perplexing translation of the injunction not to take a wife's sister as concubine, '*sororem uxoris tuae in pelicatum illius non*

*accipies*' (Leviticus 18: 18): '*tu ne prendras point la sorour de ta femme en foutre .i. pellitatum et ceo est entre hom esposee et sa concubine*' (f. 78r, col.a). Here, the lower-register expression *prendre ... en foutre* is remedied by the direct quotation of *pelicatum* (in concubinage, presented here as a gloss, '... i.e. in concubinage') plus a further gloss in French, 'and that is a matter between a man, wife, and his concubine'.

As Nobel has demonstrated, the three Anglo-Norman Bible copies under scrutiny ('Welles', 'Reading Abbey' and the version by Jean de Sy) stem from an exemplar that was of such uneven quality that each copyist found different ways of improving it. For Royal MS 1 C III, its scribes were fluent enough in French to identify their exemplar's translation errors as well as its uneven register. Awareness of nuance and stylistic issues points to a sophisticated grasp of all three languages.

Wanono hints at the possibility that Reading Abbey played a role in creating the connection between the Anglo-Norman text and those members of the French royal court who were brought to England after the Battle of Poitiers in 1356.[53] Nobel agrees cautiously with Berger's suggestion that Royal MS 1 C III might have been copied in the abbey.[54] Reading Abbey may have had no scriptorium, but there was an established secular book trade in Southern England by the mid-fourteenth century, and its monks were free to visit secular booksellers.[55]

Coates's reconstruction of Reading Abbey's library shows that it held some books in the vernacular, but their provenance is disputed, and they do not seem comparable to the four books '*in gallico*' (one of them a translation of the Song of Songs) owned in 1372 by the Austin Friars at York, or by the holdings of Leicester abbey.[56]  In addition to Harley MS 978, Reading Abbey may have owned a twelfth-century French commentary on the Book of Psalms (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc. 91, ff. 68-100), but its most recent editor has suggested that these folios were not originally part of the codex (Coates, no. 63).[57] There was also a copy in both French and English of the *Distichs of Cato*. This is a student's compilation, now London, Lambeth Palace MS 371 (Coates, no. 65).[58]

Neither Wanono nor Nobel resolve the question of why Jean de Sy based his translation on an unreliable insular work when some of the many copies of the *Bible du XIIIe siècle/Bible de Paris* were circulating in Northern France as well as in South-Eastern England. His weak source material is not justified in terms of his studies in Paris towards

his successful qualification as a Dominican master of theology. Even if his three successive appointments to read the Sentences (1348-1350) were disrupted by the Black Death, he had completed two years of study of the Bible and impressed his superiors as a '*famosus clericus*'.[59]

Jean de Sy used Peter Comestor and other mainstream complementary sources in his work, but the only plausible explanation for his choice of an unsatisfactory exemplar for the crucial main text is that he worked away from Paris. This in turn suggests that he joined John the Good in England as early as the Autumn or Winter of 1356. John the Good's correspondence shows that he enjoyed considerable financial freedom, maintained contact with his agents in Paris, and spent lengthy periods of time in the royal castle at Windsor.[60] It is therefore not inconceivable that the nearby royal abbey was an accessible source of books. Jean's incomplete, unbound quires that stop abruptly in the book of Exodus may reflect as much the frustration of relying on disappointing resources as news of the completion in France of a rival project for the Dauphin – or more prosaically, either his death or that of his patron.

Was it possible, then, for Jean de Sy to have gone to Reading Abbey for his books? Reading Abbey held a fourteenth-century Vulgate (Bodleian Library MS Auct. D. 4. 10), which concludes with Peter of Poitiers's *Compendium historiae* on ff. 586-97 (Coates, no. 64). On the other hand, it only acquired its other fourteenth-century Latin Bible in the fifteenth century (Göttingen, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, 8° Cod. Ms. theol. 2; Coates, no. 105).[61] A copy of the Vulgate would have been necessary for studying the abbey's copy of a commentary on the *Historia Scholastica* (now ff. 1-24 of Cambridge Pembroke College, MS 225; Coates, no. 68).[62] Famously, Reading Abbey had had a prized Latin Bible stolen in 1253. That year its sacrist sent out a letter notifying the whole of England of the quest for this book, which included standard supporting supplementary works such as Peter Riga's *Aurora*.[63] The lost Bible may have been linked to a thirteenth-century copy of Comestor and Peter of Poitiers that remained safely in the abbey library until the Dissolution, (British Library Royal MS 8 C IX; Coates, no. 89).[64]

Reading Abbey's library also held a few biblical commentaries, including Paschasius Radbertus's commentary on Lamentations (British Library Royal MS 3 A IV; Coates, no. 44), but it would only acquire by donation in 1398 a copy of Robert Holcot's commentary on

the book of Ecclesiasticus (British Library Royal MS 3 A XIV, composed before 1349; Coates, no. 114). Without a definite mark of its provenance, it is accepted that the late twelfth-century copy of the Book of Judges with *Glossa ordinaria* was either copied or assembled at Reading Abbey (British Library Add. MS 54230; Coates, no. 37).[65] Overall, and assuming that the damage reported by John of Reading in 1365 did not destroy a fine library, the picture is one of thin but adequate holdings for a writer whose ambitions did not stretch beyond an accurate paraphrase supported with the *Historia Scholastica* and the *Glossa ordinaria*.

Conclusion

It may be no coincidence that this group of manuscripts clusters around the immediate aftermath of the Black Death, which first struck the South-East of England in October 1348, and returned in 1361.[66] Coates notes that Reading's monastic community never reclaimed the numbers of the pre-Plague era (sixty-five monks in 1305), adding that in 1354 Pope Innocent VI received a request to grant the exceptional ordination of thirty twenty-year-old monks to serve there.[67] The return of Plague in 1361 touched the abbey again – it is likely that the abbot was not the only one of its confreres to die.[68] Europe lost many lectors and priests, meaning that the translated Bibles of the 1350s point less to secular fashion than to a need to accelerate the education of newly-priested monks. Ingham, however, has also noted that the 1350s saw a swift move away from the use of French-medium teaching. The Plague killed up to half the teachers and scribes who had used French as a means of acquiring and transmitting Latin. The next generation, deprived of these agents of linguistic transmission, preferred to use English.[69] Arguably, this shift can be seen in its infancy in Royal MS 1 C III both in its use of English loanwords, and in the lack of any later annotations, as if the manuscript had soon ceased to be relevant to the monastic community that owned it.

It is interesting to note that three separate scribal campaigns strove to clarify and to correct an unsatisfactory exemplar. There is evidence in this behaviour of a pragmatic engagement with the difficulties of translation into the vernacular, with fluency in the target language

(French), and where expertise lay both in church Latin and in spoken and written English. All medieval translators of the Vulgate worked from a uniquely stable source for their time, which means that regardless of their theological expertise, anyone paraphrasing or abbreviating this text enjoyed less freedom than they did when vernacularizing other works. I have suggested above that one reason for working to improve the accuracy of this exemplar was the lack of better sources. An alternative possibility is that these scribes did not wish to let go an opportunity to improve a version of sacred text, because it offered a chance to engage creatively with the text of the Latin Vulgate, glossing and expounding on it word for word. Returning to Andrew Taylor's interpretation of Harley MS 978 as a book that was intended to 'fashion an identity' for its readers, what Royal MS 1 C III does half a century later is to help to affirm an identity for its writers. That identity is one that reflects on the relationships between idioms and that seeks alternative and better words in a trilingual strongbox (as it says itself: its '*tresorie horde depositum*'). In Royal MS 1 C III, the use of English is a strength, not a weakness.

Fig. 1, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France MS fr. 1, f. 3r ©
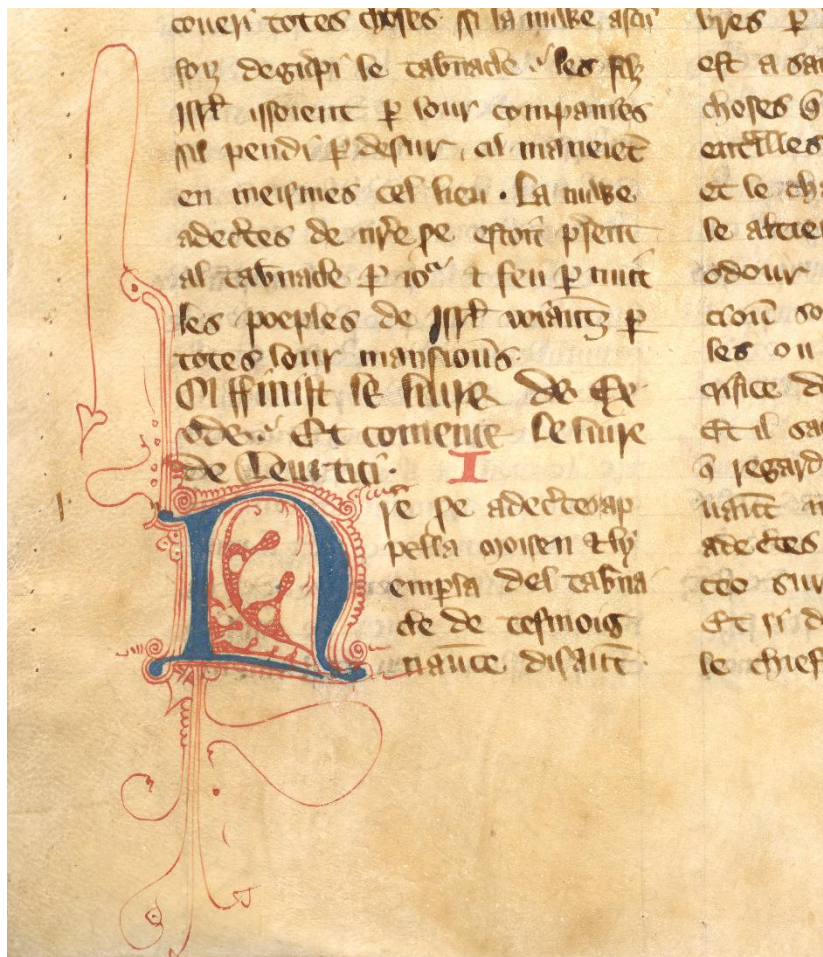Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Fig. 2, London, British Library Royal MS 1 C II f. 65v (detail from column 1), England c. 1350. © The British Library Board.
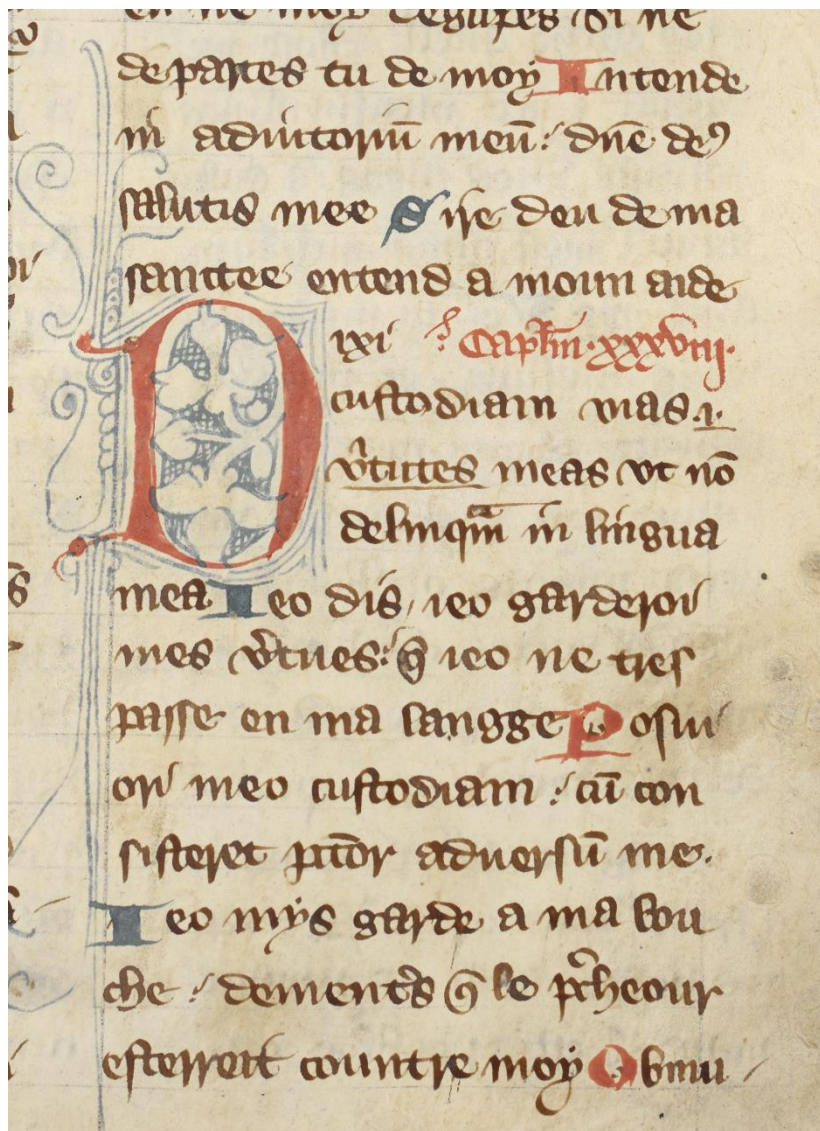
Fig. 3, London, British Library Add. MS 54325 f. 270r (detail from column 2), England c. 1350. © The British Library Board.
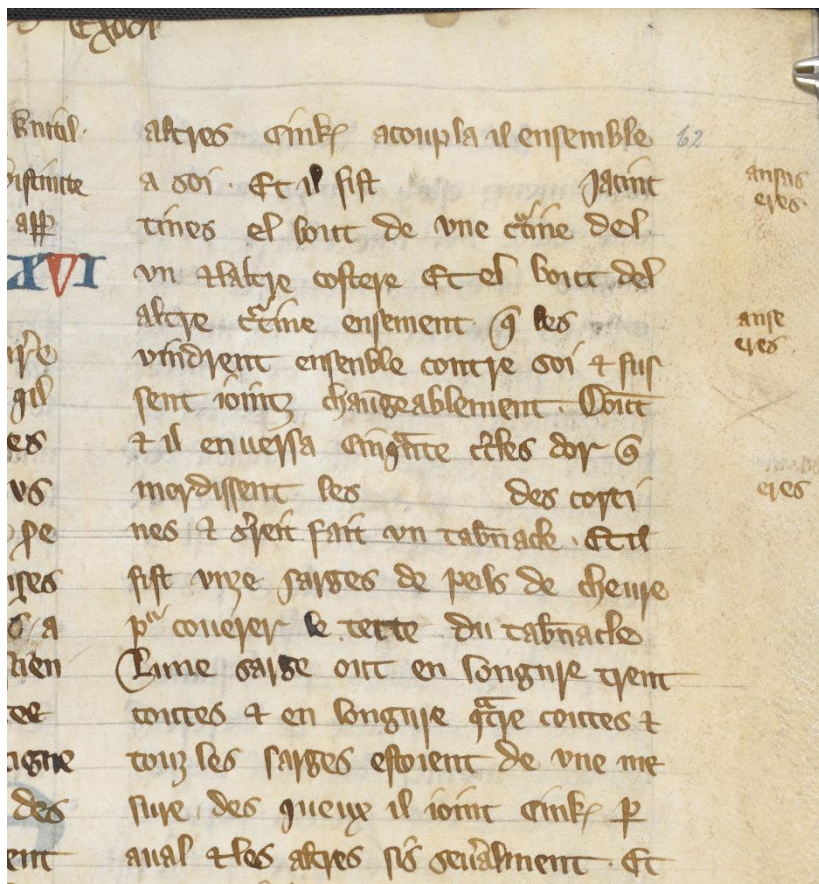
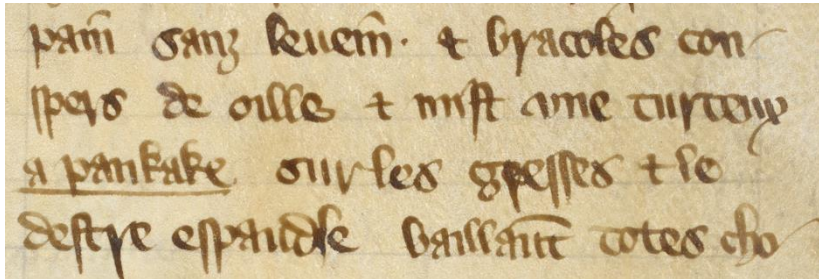Fig. 4, London, British Library Royal MS 1 C III f. 62r (detail from column 2) © The British Library Board.

Fig. 5, London, British Library Royal MS 1 C III f. 40r (detail from column 2) © The British Library Board.

## Notes

1   Alan Coates, *English Medieval Books: The Reading Abbey Collections from Foundation to Dispersal* (Oxford, 1999) (Coates numbers refer to this source); Ruth Dean and Maureen Bolton, *Anglo-Norman Literature, A Guide to Texts and Manuscripts* (London, 1999), no. 469; Samuel Berger, *La Bible française au moyen âge: étude sur les plus anciennes versions de la bible écrites en prose de langue d'oïl* (Paris, 1884), pp. 230-7, 325, 351-2, 386.

2   Coates, *Medieval Books*, p. 164; J. P. Carley ed., *The Libraries of King Henry VIII*, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues, 7 (London, 2000), p. xxxvi, n. 48.

3   Berger, *La Bible française*, pp. 23, 230-7, 351, 386 ; Lydie Lansard, 'Proximité et mise à distance du texte biblique dans la version en moyen français de l'Evangile de Nicodème', *Textes sacrés et culture profane: de la révélation à la création*, ed. Mélanie Adda (Berne, 2010), p. 28, n. 6; Anne Wanono, 'Une Bible anglo-normande à la source d'une Bible française du XIVe siècle ?', *Un espace colonial et ses avatars: Naissance d'identités nationales: Angleterre, France, Irlande (Ve-XVe siècles)*, ed. Florence Connochie Bourgne, Leo Carruthers and Arlette Sancery (Paris, 2008), pp. 203-19.  For digitised copies of microfilms of the manuscripts in the Bibliothèque nationale see http://gallica.bnf.fr/ (accessed 12/08/2016).

4   '3 bougets impal. a lion, tail forked', Anne McGee Morganstern, *Gothic Tombs of Kinship: in France, the Low Countries, and England* (University Park, PA, 2000), p. 188. John of Welles and Maud Ros are the lowest ranking couple in a programme that displays their families' importance at the courts of Edwards II and III.

5   Donald Drew Egbert, 'The So-called 'Greenfield', *La Lumiere as Lais* and Apocalypse, Brit. Mus., Royal MS. 15 D II,' *Speculum*, 11 (1936), 446-52; Michael Camille, 'Visualising in the Vernacular: A New Cycle of Early Fourteenth-Century Bible Illustrations', *The Burlington Magazine*, 130, No. 1019 (1988), 105.

6   Images are available via http://gallica.bnf.fr/ (accessed 12/08/2016); see Berger, *La Bible française*, pp. 238-43, 357-8. Wanono questions the reliability of the dating, 'Une Bible anglo-normande', p. 207; Jenny Stratford, *The Bedford Inventories: The Wordly Goods of John, Duke of Bedford, Regent of France (1389-1435)* (London, 1993), items 197-207 of the inventory.

7   Berger, *La Bible française*, pp. 387-9; François Avril, 'Une Bible Historiale de Charles V', *Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunst Sammlungen*, 15-16 (1970),

45, 49; Carra Ferguson O'Meara, *Monarchy and Consent: The Coronation Book of Charles V of France: British Library MS Tiberius B VIII* (London, 2001), pp. 265-71.  Pierre Nobel, 'La Bible anglo-normande et la Bible d'Acre: Question de source', *L'Histoire littéraire: ses méthodes et ses résultats, mélanges offerts à Madeleine Bertaud*, ed. Luc Fraisse (Geneva, 2001), pp. 429-48.

8   Coates, *Medieval Books*, pp. 65-9. Guyart's text was fused after 1310 with the *Bible du XIIIe siècle/Bible de Paris*, and as such, it constituted the Bible in French until the Reformation. James H. Morey, 'Peter Comestor, Biblical Paraphrase, and the Medieval Popular Bible,' *Speculum*, 68 (1993), 6-35; Pierre Nobel, 'La traduction biblique', *Translations médiévales. Cinq siècles de traductions en français au Moyen Âge (XIe-XVe siècles). Étude et répertoire*, ed. Claudio Galderisi and Vladimir Agrigoroaei, 3 vols (Turnhout, 2011), I, pp. 213-14.

9   Claire Richter Sherman, *Imaging Aristotle: Verbal and Visual Representation in Fourteenth-century France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1995), p. 4 and n. 15.

10  Nobel, 'La Bible anglo-normande', pp. 429-48.

11  For further work on this aspect of medieval translation, see Catherine Léglu, 'A Genealogy of the Kings of England in Papal Avignon: British Library Eg. MS.1500 (c.1323),' *Electronic British Library Journal* (2013), art. 18; Catherine Léglu, '"Just as Fragments are Part of a Vessel": A Translation into Medieval Occitan of the Life of Alexander the Great', *Florilegium*, special issue, 'Medieval Translation', ed. Christa Canitz, Florilegium, 31 (2014), 55-76; Catherine Léglu, 'The *vida* of Queen Fredegund in *Tote listoire de France*: Vernacular translation and genre in thirteenth-century French and Occitan Literature', *Nottingham French Studies* (forthcoming).

12  Coates, *Medieval Books*, pp. 113-21. For example, British Library Royal MS 9 F III (fourteenth century): 'Liber ecclesie s. Marie Radyng per fratrem Henr. de Braye'; Royal MS 3 A XIV (fourteenth century)., given by Fr. John Wokingham; Royal MS 4 C VI (early fifteenth century), given by a monk of Reading named Thomas Besforde and decorated by a donor portrait and the abbey crest; Royal MS 11 C II (early fifteenth century), given by Fr. Thomas Chilmark; Royal MS 11 C XI (late fourteenth century), donated by the abbot, Thomas Erlye.

13  Lansard, 'Proximité et mise à distance', p. 28, n.6.

14  *Le Chant des Chanz*, ed. Tony Hunt (London, 2004), p. 14.

15  Key studies in this respect include Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge, 1991); and Susan Boynton and Diane J. Reilly ed., *The*

*Practice of the Bible in the Middle Ages: Production, Reception, and Performance in Western Christianity* (New York, 2011).

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17  Richard Ingham*, The Transmission of Anglo-Norman: Language history and language acquisition* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 2012), pp. 29-35.

18  Andrew Taylor, *Textual Situations: Three Medieval Manuscripts and Their Readers* (Philadelphia, 2002), p. 5.

19  Helen Deeming, 'An English Monastic Miscellany: The Reading Manuscript of *Sumer is icumen in*', *Manuscripts and Medieval Song: Inscription, Performance, Context*, ed. Helen Deeming and Elizabeth Eva Leach (Cambridge, 2015), p. 139.

20  Higini Anglès, *El còdex musical de Las Huelgas (música a veus dels segles XIII-XIV* (Barcelona, 1931), p. 260; John Stevens, '*Sumer is icumen in*: A neglected context', *Expedition nach dem Wahrheit: poems, essays, and papers in honour of Theo Stemmler*, ed. Stefan Horlacher, Theo Stemmler, Marion Islinger (Heidelberg, 1996), pp. 307-47.

21  Ingham, *The Transmission of Anglo-Norman*, p. 33.

22  Deeming, 'An English Monastic Miscellany', p. 140.

23  *Chronica Johannis de Reading et anonymi Cantuariensis, 1346-1367*, ed. James Tait (Manchester, 1914), pp. 10-11.

24  Nobel, 'La traduction biblique'. For a thorough survey, see Margriet Hoogvliet, 'Encouraging Lay People to Read the Bible in the French Vernaculars: New Groups of Readers and Textual Communities', *Church History and Religious Culture,* 93 (2013), 239-74.

25  *'Li romanz de Dieu et de sa mère' d'Herman de Valenciennes, chanoine et prêtre (XIIe siècle)*, ed. Ina Spiele (Leiden, 1975); *La Bible anonyme du Ms. Paris B.N.f. fr.763*, ed. Julia C. Szirmai (Amsterdam, 1985); *La Bible de Macé de La Charité*, ed. J. R. Smeets, 7 vols (Leiden, 1964-1986); *La Bible de Jehan Malkaraume (Ms. Paris, Bibl. Nat. F. Fr. 903) (XIIIe/XIVe siècle),* ed. J. R. Smeets, 2 vols (Assen, 1978).

26  *Poème anglo-normand sur l'Ancien Testament*, ed. Pierre Nobel, 2 vols (Paris, 1996); *Un fragment de la Genèse en vers: fin XIIIe - début XIVe siècle*, ed. Julia Szirmai (Geneva, 2005).

27  *Les Paroles Salomun*, ed. Tony Hunt (Manchester, 2012), pp. 5-9.

28  *La Bible d'Acre: Genèse et Exode: édition critique*, ed. Pierre Nobel (Université de Franche-Comté, 2006).

29  Margriet Hoogvliet, 'The Medieval Vernacular Bible in French as a Flexible Text: Selective and Discontinuous Reading Practices', *Form and Function in the Late Medieval Bible*, ed. Eyal Poleg and Laura Light (Leiden, 2013), pp. 283-306.

30  David Lawton, 'Englishing the Bible, 1066-1549', *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge, 1999), p. 454.

31  *"La Lumere as lais" by Pierre d'Abernon of Fetcham*, ed. Glynn Hesketh, 3 vols (London, 2000), III, pp. 5-10.

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37  Light, 'The Bible and the Individual', pp. 228, 239.

38  Camille, 'Visualising in the Vernacular', pp. 105-6.

39  *La Bible française du XIIIe siècle: édition critique de la Genèse*, ed. Michel Quereuil (Geneva, 1988).

40  Camille, 'Visualising in the Vernacular', p. 104.

41  Quereuil, *La Bible française*, pp. 38-40; Clive R. Sneddon, '"The Bible du XIIIe Siècle": Its Medieval Public in the Light of its Manuscript Tradition', *The Bible and Medieval Culture*, ed. W. Lourdaux and D. Verhelst (Leuven, 1979), pp. 127-40; Clive Sneddon, 'On the Creation of the Old French Bible', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 46 (2002), 25-44.

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49 I have noted elsewhere a similar problem with the noun *armillas* in a translation of the early fourteenth century, Léglu, 'A Genealogy of the Kings', pp. 13-14.

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52 Nobel, 'Gloses anglaises', p. 428. For *nages* and *engendrures*, see *The Anglo-Norman Dictionary*: http://www.anglo-norman.net (accessed 12/08/2016).

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68 *Chronica Johannis de Reading*, pp. 10-11.

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