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HUGH OF ST.-CHER, *Concordantie super bibliam* [Verbal Concordance of the Scriptures]

In Latin, manuscript on parchment  
[France, Abbey of Saint-Jacques?, c. 1250]

*440 folios of very fine parchment, complete, bound in 30 gatherings, mostly in octavions (with the exception of quires 4, 7, and 8 of 7 bifolio, 11 of 5 bifolio, 17 of 4 bifolio, and 30 of 6 bifolio with three leaves canceled at the end, two leaves canceled in quire 16, ff. 241-242, between the Old and New Testaments, but no text appears to be missing), written in brown ink in a fine early Gothic, likely Parisian, bookhand, on four columns of 54 lines, very lightly ruled in blackish ink (justification, c 110 x 77 mm.) divisions marked by chapter signs in alternating red and blue ink, parchment endleaves on upper and lower covers, on the upper cover over a pastedown from another (fourteenth-century?) manuscript, in excellent condition. A likely original blind-stamped CONTEMPORARY BINDING, with early (fifteenth-century?) repairs, stamps worn but including one with foliate motifs and another with a crown of laurel?, sewn on 4 thick cords, with endbands of alum tawed leather, the old leather laid down over new leather and boards, a corner on the upper cover repaired, 4 metal brass mounts and L-shaped corners, metal fitting for center clasp visible, clasp missing. Dimensions c. 143 x 99 cm.*

A standard medieval reference tool for the study of the Bible, this manuscript of the First Concordance--the most important of the concordances--has an important early monastic provenance, a partly original binding, and is in clean condition. No copies are recorded in private hands. It was never printed. The present manuscript is unusual when compared with the 22 other extant copies of this text: its portable format and layout approximate the recently discovered working drafts of the earliest version, as well as the Parisian pocket Bible for which it served as a reference.

PROVENANCE

1. On the last flyleaf, a contemporary ex-libris securely establishes the provenance: "Iste liber est monasterii beate marie de amberto ord. Celestinorum 44." The celebrated abbey of Notre-Dame at Ambert (*Ambertus*), enjoyed royal protection from the time of its creation through the fifteenth century. The priory was founded as Victorine in 1134 by King Louis VI ("le Gros"), ceded to the Celestines in 1300 by King Philip the Fair, rebuilt in 1392 by Louis, Duke of Orleans, brother of King Charles V, and finally suppressed in 1774, when its possessions were given to the seminary of Meung, in the

diocese of Orléans. Ambert became the cradle of the Celestine order in France, according to a charter signed at the Abbey of Saint-Denis in 1300. See Cottineau, p. 80, and A. Pommier, "Essai sur le monastère d'Ambert," in *Mém. soc. archéol. hist. Orléanais* 34 (1915), pp. 565-68.

2. Martin Schøyen, Spikkestad, Norway, MS 2029.

#### TEXT

Flyleaf, [running title] Concordancie, [table of contents] Notula pro contentis in hoc volumen  
...

f. 1, Incipit, "A, a, a./ Je. I. c.;"

f. 440v, Explicit, "Zorobabel./ I. Paral. III.b. ... Luc. III. f."

This text is a copy of the earliest existing verbal concordance of the scriptures. Attributed to the direction of Hugh of St.-Cher (born c. 1190; died 1263), working it is said with 500 Dominicans, the first Concordance of the Scriptures, was produced between ca. 1235 and 1249 at the Dominican monastery of St.-Jacques in Paris.

Originating in the milieu of the Dominicans in Paris, the text of the *Concordantie super bibliam* provided a useful tool to the Victorines, whose spirituality focused on the comparative study of the Scriptures. The founder of the order, Hugh of St.-Victor, taught that knowledge was not to be sought for its own sake but to deepen an understanding of Scripture, through with spiritual life and contemplation was nourished (Abelard was a disciple of the Victorines, which had a profound impact on the development of the University of Paris as a center of biblical study).

Three medieval concordances of the Scriptures survive. They have been extensively studied, their manuscripts identified, and their importance clarified by Rouse and Rouse, 1974.

#### First Concordance:

The exceptional importance of the first concordance--the one included in the present manuscript--is confirmed by the Rouses: "Of the numerous technical aids to teaching and preaching produced in the thirteenth century, the verbal concordance to the scriptures is not only one of the earliest but probably the most important .... It was the Latin verbal concordance which served as the model for the first concordances of the Greek Septuagint in 1300 and to the Hebrew Old Testament in 1438-78" (p. 5).

The existence of a concordance was a necessity during the great age of Bible study in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Bible study placed great importance on the meanings of each word, and one way to discern meaning was comparative, that is, through systematic comparison of different passages in the Scriptures that use the same word. Thus, by the early thirteenth century, various types of texts used to compare different passages--all predecessors to the Concordance--came into existence: *distinctiones*, lists of parallel passages, and allegorical concordances. But, the huge task of a complete Concordance required the corporate

cooperation of the Dominican priors and the guiding hand of the famed biblical theologian and teacher, Hugh of St.-Cher.

The textual accomplishments of the first version of the Concordance are twofold and concern the system of reference and the organization of the overall task itself. First, because the Bible was divided only into chapters not into verses, the priors had to invent a system to refer to the verses. This they did by referring to the verses alphabetically, A through G. (They used the pre-existing chapter divisions attributed to Stephen Langton, cf. Smalley, pp. 222-24.) No versions of the concordance postdating the first version use the A through G reference system of versification. Secondly, the discovery of single-sheet versions of the first draft in binding fragments of manuscripts at St.-Jacques shows that the priors worked quire by quire, each responsible for large blocks words within a certain portion of the alphabet. "The operation, for its day or any other, was a masterpiece of organization of manpower" (Rouse and Rouse, p. 12).

There are only 22 recorded manuscripts, plus a handful of fragments of the first concordance. No other manuscripts are known to exist in private hands, and the present copy is unrecorded.

### Second Concordance:

The second concordance, so-called English Concordance, is not a mere revision of the first Concordance, but a complete re-edition. Each word is given a complete context in the Bible, and many entries were added, suppressed, and rearranged. Done after the St.-Jacques Concordance and before the third concordance, the date remains uncertain but is considered to be ca. 1252. The version ascribed to three Englishmen is due to the guidance of prior Richard of Stavensby, who worked at St.-Jacques.

Extant in very few manuscripts (9, of which one is a multi-volume exemplar from St.-Jacques), the second version "was an ambitious failure" (Rouse and Rouse, p. 16).

### Third Concordance:

The third concordance, generally attributed to Conrad of Halberstadt, is completely independent of the first two and exists in at least 80 manuscripts, mostly written at Paris ca. 1280 to 1330. Like the second concordance, the third concordance includes the context for words within the Bible, and it refines the system of versification that appears in the first concordance. After 1286, the third concordance was available in *pecia*. It is the third concordance that is the direct ancestor of the modern Latin concordance. No copies of the third concordance are recorded in private hands either by the Rouses or the CNRS.

## LITERATURE

Rouse, Richard H. and Mary A. Rouse. "The Verbal Concordance to the Scriptures," in *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, 44, 1974, pp. 5-30.

### Online Resources:

The Bible Gateway: diverse biblical resources including the Bible in multiple languages and versions, concordances, audio, commentaries, downloads, and more.

<http://www.biblegateway.com/>