

Stephen Langton (?), *Interpretationes hebraicorum nominum* ("Interpretation of Hebrew Names")

In Latin, manuscript on parchment

Northern France (Paris?), c. 1220-45

32 folios on parchment (fairly thin, with some original holes and other imperfections) modern foliation in pencil top outer corner recto (collation, i<sup>10</sup> ii<sup>12</sup> iii<sup>12</sup> [-11 and 12, cancelled with no loss of text]), no catchwords or signatures, ruled in lead or brown crayon with all horizontal rules full across, and with full-length vertical bounding lines, double in the inner and outer margins, and triple between the columns, prickings top and outer margins (justification, 145-143 x 110-105 mm.), written above the top ruled line in two columns in a small gothic noting script, quires one and two, ff. 1-22v, with forty-five to forty-four lines, and quire three, ff. 23-end, with sixty to fifty-nine lines, each entry begins with a small letter copied between the bounding lines in the same ink as the text, blank spaces remain for four- to three-line initials at the beginning of new letters of the alphabet, in very good condition, with slight damage in the lower, inside margin on some folios resulting in slight abrasion of the text, and very small stains, top outer corner on some folios. Bound in a modern binding of wooden boards covered with brown suede-like leather, boards extend beyond the book block on all sides, spine with three raised bands, in excellent condition. Dimensions 165 x 125 mm.

This is an early and very interesting copy of the glossary of Hebrew names in the Bible, known as the "Interpretation of Hebrew Names." This text – attributed in one manuscript to Stephen Langton (d. 1228), Archbishop of Canterbury – is very important to the history of the thirteenth-century Vulgate, since is found in almost all copies of the complete Bible after c. 1230. Now bound independently, this copy is unusual; although it may once have been part of a manuscript including other texts, it was certainly never part of a Bible.

## PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript was copied in Northern France, possibly in Paris, probably sometime between c. 1220-1245, judging by the script. The informality of the script, which is a small gothic noting hand, the layout of the page – the width of the written space is larger in proportion to the height than is usual in Bibles (the ratio of the height to width in Bibles is often around 1.5, with some manuscripts in the range between 1.6-1.4, the ratio in this manuscript is 1.3) – and type of parchment proves this was never part of a Bible, but it could have been part of a longer series of exegetical works or perhaps always circulated independently. The opening and closing leaves are quite clean, suggesting that they have been protected for much of the manuscript's existence.

In general, the overall appearance of this manuscript suggests that it is a copy made by a student or teacher at the University of Paris, perhaps a Dominican or Franciscan, for his personal use in preaching and exegesis. The abrupt change of format in the last quire, where the scribe increases the number of lines from forty-five to sixty, lends support to hypothesis, since it suggests that the scribe was more concerned with squeezing the text into the parchment remaining, rather than with the formality of the copy.

2. Inside front cover, in pencil, "L 635."

## TEXT

ff. 1-32, incipit, "Aaz apprehendens vel apprehensio, Aad testificans uel testimonium [text added above the the top line, probably in error: fortis uel fortitudio], Aadhar deprecatio ... Zuzim consilantes eos uel consiliatores eorum" [Ends mid col. b, f. 32; remainder and f. 32v, blank].

*Interpretationes hebraicorum nominum*, Stegmüller, *Repertorium biblicum*, no. 7709; printed numerous times in the fifteenth century (Nuremberg 1475 and 1476, Venice 1476, Paris, 1476-1477, Basel, 1479, Nuremberg 1479, Basel 1481, Lyon 1482, etc.), and in the seventeenth century, when it was included in *Venerabilis Bedae presbyteri ... opera*, Cologne, 1612, 3:371-480; there is no modern edition, despite the text's great importance for the history of the Bible, exegesis, and preaching in the High Middle Ages.

The text is attributed in one manuscript (Montpellier, Bibl. de la Faculté de Médecine, MS 341) to Stephen Langton (d. 1228), who taught in Paris in the theology school in the later decades of the twelfth century from c. 1206, when he left to become a Cardinal, and then Archbishop of Canterbury in 1207. Langton was famous as a teacher and commentator on the Bible, and his name has also traditionally been linked with the creation of the biblical chapters still used today (recent scholarship suggests he did not create the new chapters, although his use of them may have encouraged their widespread use). Giovanna Murano's study of the text concludes that the evidence is lacking to support the attribution of the "Interpretation of Hebrew Names" to Langton, leaving the question of the author of this text an important one for further research.

The "Interpretation of Hebrew Names," is found at the end of almost all copies of the Vulgate dating after c. 1230, and it therefore survives in many hundreds of copies (Murano, 2010, p. 355 estimates nine hundred copies; Quinto, 1994, p. 34, suggests around five hundred). Copies surviving independently of the Bible, however, are much rarer. Current research into the history of this text has tended to focus on a few examples and on the evidence of catalogue descriptions. Any further study that seeks to clarify its origins and the question of its author will depend on a complete census and study of the surviving manuscripts, focusing on copies that are independent of the Bible, and in particular, early copies.

The widespread circulation of this text, not only in examples of the Paris Bible, but also in Bibles produced throughout Europe after c. 1230, may seem odd from a modern perspective. It consists of interpretations – that is the literal translation of the name, or its allegorical significance – of approximately 5,500 transliterated proper names found in the Bible, and provided users of the Bible with a handy key to unfamiliar names to be used in biblical commentaries and sermons. It is arranged alphabetically, beginning with Aaz (mentioned in Nehemiah 11:13), defined as "taking hold or seizing upon," and concluding with Zuzim.

This text is based on a work by St. Jerome, considerably expanded and reorganized in complete alphabetical order. Jerome's *Liber interpretationem hebraicorum nominum*, written around 390, follows the order of the Bible; he begins with the names found in Genesis, listing those beginning with "A"

first, but keeping these names in the order they are found in Genesis; after all the names in Genesis are listed, he lists the names in Exodus, and so forth. The expanded text found in this manuscript and so commonly in thirteenth-century Bibles, in contrast, includes names from the entire Bible, arranged alphabetically from A to Z. This version was perfectly adapted to the new one-volume Bible, since its organization answered the needs of users who were used to searching through the biblical text as a whole.

## LITERATURE

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

Klaus Reinhardt, "Stephan Langton," in Biographisch- Bibliographisches-Kirchenlexikon  
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